

# 11.12.2023 Sermon

## It's Going to Be Ok | Isaiah 41:10

### SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, feel, message, prayer, god, Isaiah, cornerstone, comfort, give, words, happening, Israelites, today, fear, write, Tracy, heart, king, minute, bible

### SPEAKERS

Rev. Sophia A. Foutres

Good morning, everyone. As Janice mentioned, I'm Reverend Sophia Foutres. I want to begin with something I haven't discussed with anyone. But first, are there any veterans here? Military folks, could you please stand for a moment, if you wish? You don't have to, but I just want to say, thank you so much for your service. Yesterday was Veteran's Day, and we want to express our deep gratitude. I'm not a veteran myself, but in honor of your service, I chose to wear red, white, and blue today instead of black. So, thank you.

In other news, I have a bit of business before we dive into the sermon. How many of you are following Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce? Well, according to TikTok this morning, they're doing well, and their first recorded kiss happened. You can find it out there. "Hi, I'm the problem. It's me."

So, the other item of business is about a song that means a lot to me. For those present, whether you've been on the journey with Cornerstone or not, you're here for a reason, and we're glad for that. There's a place at the table for me, which makes me think of God's big table, where we all belong. This includes various organizations and communities where we either belong or seek to belong. I want to take a moment to thank Cornerstone, Pastor Tracy, and the elders for making a place at the table for me and people like me. As a queer LGBTQ individual, having the right and privilege to serve in full leadership capacity here is something I'm profoundly grateful for. I see many of you now feeling that same privilege, and for that, I am thankful. Thank you, Cornerstone, for creating a space for all of us, regardless of, and including, who we are and everything we embody. Amen.

I might be jumping ahead, but I want to share something on my heart. This past Tuesday, I attended the Tuesday night prayer. If you've never been, I invite you to come. It's a monthly

event, every first Tuesday. It was a special night, full of beautiful ministry, inspiring this sermon.

So, today, if you want to turn to Isaiah 41 in your Bibles, or however you access scripture, we'll look at verses 9 to 10. "I brought you from the ends of the earth and called you from its farthest corners. I said, 'You are my servant; I have chosen you and not rejected you. Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, help you, and uphold you with my righteous right hand.'" To provide context for this passage, I'm not the best historian, more of a themes person. So, if my facts are off, please see Pastor Tracy later.

The general overview here is that Isaiah, the Prophet, had a special connection with God. He was tasked with giving encouraging words or warnings to people, helping them through different life seasons. At this point in history, the Israelites were in captivity for about 70 years. This was during King Nebuchadnezzar's reign, who was upset because they stopped giving him his dues.

Biblically, they were also exiled for negative actions, like idol-making and prostitution. Historically and biblically, there are different angles to consider. I believe in the Bible but also understand it's an interpretation of events. At that time, the message to the Israelites was clear: they messed up, and as punishment, they were exiled from their homeland. Isaiah appeared towards the end of this captivity period. Imagine, after 70 years of displacement, having lost your resources, religious practices, and everything familiar, you'd feel lost and abandoned. It's a feeling many people worldwide can relate to. Have you ever felt like everything you knew and hoped for was gone, leaving you in a land that's no longer your own?

Did God forget us? What is happening to us? What's going to happen? And so, this message comes at the end of that period, where Isaiah comes on the scene. He's sent to encourage them and give them a message of dignity and hope to help get them through and tell them this isn't going to last forever. Sometimes, that's all we need to hear, like, this, whatever is going on right now, it's not going to last forever. And that helps me say, "You know what, I can do this for three more months. I can do this for one more year." It's temporary. It's not going to last forever. So, I'm just going to read you those verses.

Again, imagine you're in your worst situation, you're crying out. You feel lost and so disconnected, wondering where God is, what's happening in the world. Even right now, the world is on fire. There are so many things happening, and it's painful to watch. It's easy to say, "God, where are you? What are you doing? Where are you at? Are you going to show up soon? Are you just going to let us all burn?" And are we just going to watch and not know what to do? For me, I know personally, when something is going on, I feel helpless. Like I watched the news right now, and I feel so helpless.

I wonder about the Israelites because they got separated. The king didn't make everybody go to Babylon. He strategically took the richer class, the people that would benefit his land the most. He separated them from the lower class, or the people who are more field workers, things like that. So, he separated and basically disgraced their society. He took what would benefit him for Babylon, leaving certain people behind. So, you have separations happening everywhere. So, you know, I've just been thinking about this: What do you do when you're in that situation? What were those people doing at the time? They didn't know what was going on. How did they help each other? How did they get through it? Their rituals, their culture, they were in a totally different land. And it makes me wonder, what do we do when we're helpless, stuck, and don't know what to do?

I'm going to reread this verse again to us, just imagining those scenarios. Isaiah says to them, "I brought you, this is my message from God to you. I brought you from the ends of the earth and called you from its furthest corners. I said, 'You are my servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you.'" So, let's just pause right there. I feel like what he's bringing in this message is he's counteracting every loud lie they may be feeling since they got ousted from their community. "I've chosen you, not rejected you." They're in a land they don't know. "You've been rejected." And God comes on the scene and says, "I've chosen you, not rejected you." Then he says, "Do not fear, do not be afraid." And this word is one of the words in there, "do not be dismayed." For I am your God. That dismay means to gaze and to turn your gaze and look at each other in panic. And then he says, "Here's what I'm going to do to help you. I will be with you, I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my right hand of righteousness."

So, if you notice in the Bible, it says "Do not fear, I am with you" 365 times, one for every single day of the year, give or take the translator. Right. So, do not fear, I am with you. Usually, the message of comfort that we get, and like the message of comfort that we get here, is not a message saying, "Do not fear, like it's going to be fine, and you're gonna get to go back home, and everything's gonna be like you left it, and you're gonna be fine." But the message actually of comfort is "I am with you." And for me, that is gold. Because if God was like, "Do not fear, you're gonna be rich tomorrow," I'll be like, "Cool." And I'll spend it on the poor the next day. Right? I mean, that's just me, because I have bad habits with money, but I'm working on it. This is a safe place.

So, you know what I mean? So, like, I had a friend say to me the other day, "My friend is really sick. And, you know, the war and all these things. And I don't know what to do. My friend, he's really sick. He's in another state. What do you think I should do for him? How do I help him?" I was like, "I don't know, just go be with him. So, you can't fix it. Maybe if he's got cancer or whatever, you can't really fix it. But maybe just go be with him." He was like, "Oh, I don't know."

And then, you know, the next day, I got a text and he said, "I'm driving out there, I'm gonna go see him." And sometimes, just being with is the best gift that we can give to each other. So often, what I noticed about God in the Bible and the writings of how God is represented, is not "Hey, like, I'm going to fix this. And you're going to have an easy life." But it's, "Hey, I'm going to give you myself. And I'm going to help you through it by strengthening you, by giving you tools, by surrounding you with people. But most of all, I'm going to give you my presence." Because one realization moment of God's presence can change everything. It's as if you're going down the road thinking, "I'm alone, rejected, I don't belong at the table." And one moment you have at this altar here. And somebody says to you, "You belong, and you always have, since you were a little girl."

And that moment, it locks you in. It shifts you and changes you, not because of what the person said, but because of that knowing, that connection, that encounter with something true. This helps you. Isaiah, whom I've always loved, is sent on the scene. I'm sure he brings a lot of tough messages as well, but primarily, he's there to comfort people who've lost everything.

Quite frankly, these are people who would continue to cycle through loss. He delivers a message: "I'm with you. God's with you, God didn't forget about you. You're still chosen, you're still loved, you're going to get help. I'll help you through it, right? I will be with you through it." Honestly, I don't want to say much more. I really don't. Because I want us to do an exercise. I want us to try and experience this together. Let's be Isaias to each other. Let's receive Isaiah's words from each other.

Pastor Tracy often says, "We're not just doing church or religious exercises. If what happens here doesn't change us and help us for today, and then give us strength to help others, then we're just religious folk who listen to people talk and sing cool songs." The world needs us to be hope dealers. I consider myself one. You don't have to be a millionaire or smooth with your words. Sometimes, you just look at someone and say, "What you're going through isn't okay. But there will be okayness again. It comes to you. You're not alone."

Right now, more than anything, I feel that while I can't affect what's happening in Palestine, Israel, and Sudan, I can influence my corner of the world. The way I treat people has a ripple effect. Yes, I can donate to organizations that help on the ground – that's important. And I can pray. But at the end of the day, we each have a specific role. We are to be Isaiah to a world of people who are misplaced, displaced. When you look around, when you look in people's eyes, when you look in your own mirror, ask yourself: "Do I need this message?"

So today, let's practice. Let's take some time to listen. I'm going to pass out some things, or someone will help me. If you could cue that liquid mind for me, just real quiet in the background. A couple of people, if you want to take a piece of paper, you can. If you prefer to

write on your phone or your own journal, that's fine. If you don't want to write at all, that's fine too. Just look at me right in the face. I'll stare you down.

Thank you to those passing this out. As they're doing so, here's my question to you, and I asked this on social media this week. The first part of this is introspective. I want us to go inward, think, and have a moment with God ourselves. Then we'll connect as a community. If you still need a paper, raise your hand. We got this row here, this group. Keep your hands raised. Thank you.

Am I wrong, or was there anybody else who needed paper? Thank you, Brittany and Ally. Here's what I want you to do. We're just going to take about three minutes. Write this down: Imagine if Isaiah were to come to you with a message from God. What would you need to hear to help you through your current season? What message would encourage you? If you can't think of something, you can borrow Isaiah's words and let that be your message. Just give us a few minutes.

Just a couple more seconds. If you're ready, I invite you to read those words. If you didn't write them down, that's okay. If you just thought about them, take a minute to read them over yourself. Think about them, let them nourish you for a minute.

Now, take a minute and think about a person or situation weighing on you. Maybe you're the Isaiah to that situation or person. What message would you want to give them? Think about that. You can write it down. Just take another couple of minutes and offer a word of comfort, a prayer to the person or situation. We'll stick around a few seconds and then come back together.

I want to invite us to have a community encouragement and prayer time. However, you feel comfortable, if you want to share or read and make a prayer out of a card you wrote, you're welcome. You don't have to be specific if it's personal. I firmly believe that one thing that encourages and comforts us can bring comfort and the right word to someone else. So, for the next few minutes, I invite you to share if you feel comfortable. Make it a prayer of whatever you wrote on your card, either side. Once it gets awkward and quiet, I'll pray and shift us out again.

Okay, so just take a minute, because you never know who your comforting words might give exactly what they needed to hear, and vice versa.

So, I'll start. "Oh, people of Cornerstone everything will be okay. Whatever we're going through right now will not last forever. There will be enough, and more than enough, to carry us through. Do not fear, for I'm with you."

Just pray out, we don't need the mic. Just pray out from your heart.

:: A time of the congregation sharing what they heard from God for themselves and others ::

Thank you. So, I'm gonna give us just like maybe one or two more minutes in case anybody else has anything, but let's just intentionally like we started the service of open and receiving.

Was there something that you heard today from the voices that was just the right thing you needed to hear? For me, I kept tearing up, saying yes, I'll take that one, I'll take this one. I'll just put that in my soul for later, so just take a minute, just kind of breathe it in. Just sometimes, it helps me to say, I received this comfort, I received this encouragement.

I receive it, I open my heart to it, I believe it, and if there's anybody else who wants to share what they sensed, please share. Yes. Yes. God, I just thank you so much for these words of life. Thank you that from Isaiah's words many, many years ago, we were able to also be Isaias in this room, to us, to the people of Cornerstone. So, as we close, I have a song that's just been on my mind, and I asked him to play it from a recording so that all the worship team could just soak it into.

And it's called "You're Going to Be Ok" by Jenn Johnson, so let's just listen to this, and I'll close this out with a prayer.

:: Song is played ::

Sophia resumes speaking:

In the non-okayness of life, of the world, there is an okayness to be found with God. So, my challenge and my prayer for all of us, as we go out this week, is that we would be Isaias to one another, that you would find the person in your life or find the person in the mirror, looking back at you, and offer those words of care, of kindness, of encouragement, of support. Because you and me, we have the power of love to influence our little corners, and imagine what if we could get this message to each person in front of us? So, thank you all so much for sharing your hearts so honestly, and taking the journey with me today. May you feel comforted by that witness of God and the witness of this community as you go throughout your week. Amen.