



***“Together, the Body of Christ;
Individually, Its Parts” I Corinthians 12:27***

JAUC is a Christian community seeking to reach out, especially to Japanese and those who are interested in Japan in the greater New York City area, with the purpose of sharing faith in Christ and growing together in Christian discipleship through worship, fellowship, study, evangelism and mission.

◆Pastor Takahashi’s Message◆

“Why Me?” John 9:1-17 (18-41)

One of the most common faith questions is “Why do bad things happen to good people?”

There is no shortage of tragedies and disasters in this world, which make us wonder, why? Those victims seem innocent or sound like good people, but disasters hit them hard, even to the point of death sometimes. God is almighty, and knows all. God is good. Despite those, why did God not protect those good people from harm? Why did the Lord allow the disaster to happen?

Some might say, “It was a devil’s act.” and start thinking and worrying about the deeds of Satan. We must remind ourselves that Satan is not the one whom we worship, but God is. We shall focus to think, to get to know, to love God our Lord, or worship God, and not waste time worrying about the evil spirit. Then, others ask, “Why God couldn’t stop the evil deed?” John 1:3-5 declares “*What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*” The darkness never overcame the light. But why do bad things happen to good people? Recently we passed the 6th anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami as known as the 3/11 earthquake. 15,894 lives lost, and more than 2,500 are still missing. Over 300,000 became refugees. An uncountable number of people’s lives were changed forever. Just imagining the pain and suffering that all the victims had been experiencing makes our hearts sink. “Why them?” “Why me?” Why is God not saving us from this pain and suffering? “My God, my God,

why have you forsaken me?” Even Jesus asked this question when he was in excruciating pain on the cross.

We ask this question sometimes in our lives. Some of you may be in the midst of your struggles and are wrestling with this question. I continue to pray for the end of your pain and for your peace.

As we seek the reason for the “why me?” question, some take this question further,

“The sin that I committed may be the reason. God is angry with me for the sin, and God is punishing me. Or maybe it was my parents who did something wrong.” as the disciples questioned. His disciples asked Jesus, “*Rabbi, who sinned? This man who was born blind? Or his parents?*” Jesus answered, “*Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.*” Jesus prioritizes healing the man who was born blind and simply dismisses a theological argument that sin causes blindness. “God is love.” God’s amazing Grace is far deeper than the deepest ocean.

“Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see.” Amazing Grace, arguably the most popular hymn of all time is written by the English poet, a slave trading ship sailor, and later-turned-to-be clergyman John Newton. Though he had grown up in a devoted Christian family, he had never taken his faith seriously until a violent storm nearly sank the slave trading ship that he was serving. During the storm when the bottom of the ship was heavily damaged, he asked for God’s help and mercy in a way he never prayed before. Miraculously, a loose piece of cargo patched the hole and the ship survived. After this conversion moment, he began his theological study, and a few years later he turned to be a clergyman. He wrote many hymns including “Amazing Grace” whose first stanza was inspired by John 9:25 and his conversion experience.

“*As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*” Jesus declared in John 9:5.

John's Gospel focuses on the image of the Light and the Darkness. Here, I hear Jesus asking us, "Why don't you see it?" He uses his paradoxical depiction here again. The blind can see, while those with sight cannot see. The Pharisees failed to see the suffering of the blind man due to their rigid understanding of Law on the Sabbath. They did not even appreciate Jesus' healing miracle work by saying "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath."

The parents of the blind man were afraid to speak against the Pharisees, the authorities, and failed to see the amazing grace of God. Both the Pharisees and the parents were spiritually blind, unable to see God's compassion, and God's amazing grace.

"(F)or the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

As we live our lives trying to approach God, we are called to make our best efforts to be as compassionate and gracious as God is. Our Christian faith does not guarantee a pain-free, tragedy-free, or disaster-free life, but it promises us a perfect eternity. Getting to know God gives us a strong awareness of the divine presence in our life. When disasters hit our lives, we are more likely to "see" God's merciful and gracious hands to pull us up from the darkness. God's compassion and grace reveals and guides us when we fall into the darkness. When we realize we have stepped into the darkness, let us listen to what Jesus must be telling us. "Don't be afraid. I am with you always."

"For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true," as Ephesians 5 says.

Yes, certainly, we are embraced by the light.

Sunday Service Scripture Verse The Scripture verses for April Sunday service are: Apr. 2 -John 14:1-14; Apr. 9 -John 15:1-8; Apr. 16 -John 20:1-18; Apr. 23 -John 20:19-31; Apr. 30 -Luke 24:13-35. Pastor Takahashi includes the lectionary verses from the Old Testament, Psalms, and the Epistles. To read these verses, see the website www.lectionarypage.net.

Young Adult Fellowship This last Saturday (3/18) we met for a very fun Gyoza (dumpling party) for the latest young adult evening gathering. The young adult group aims to meet once every four weeks for a nice evening gathering of fun, good conversation and sharing in a nice meal, usually something with a Japanese theme. At first we were not sure what food to prepare and a few days before, we came up with the idea to do a Gyoza Party. It turned out to be the perfect idea! We worked together to prepare the Gyoza and the result was an abundance of Gyoza everywhere and some tasty side dishes. We had a very nice little group. It was an evening filled with good food, beautiful fellowship, good laughs, support and group prayer. The fun will continue again in 4 weeks when we hold our next gathering of fun and delicious Japanese cuisine. YUM. (Brian. G)

P-Forum Parent support group, P-Forum, started last fall. Pastor Takahashi reached out to parents who are raising children, and we gather every third Sunday at 1:30 pm for an hour at the Sunday school classroom on 4th floor. Things that are spoken in the forum stay in the room so that everybody feels comfortable to talk about their private issues. We have a theme at every forum, and Pastor Takahashi gives us a message from the bible. We talk about the theme of the day on how we feel, about on-going personal problems and concerns, about insecure feelings toward future, about happenings to thank god, etc. Through exchanging our thought, we get to know each other better and naturally support each other. The insecure feelings shrink by listening to parents with older children for peeking a grip of future. Our heart lightens up by just knowing there is somebody else who has same problems or concerns. I have been in the US for a long period of

time, yet the language I can express my heart most precisely remains Japanese. This forum is precious for a parent like me here in New York. As I go through parenting, I learned that when the problem right in front of me calms down, the next one comes up. The issue for the moment keeps changing, yet it never disappears. I have moments to wish for more patience and regret what I did, however I keep repeating the same mistakes. I get support from other parents through the forum, and I hope to be a support for others. I thank pastor Takashi for reaching out to us and thank god for leading us to P-Forum (Tomo Kimura).

◆ Building Maintenance ◆

The Board of Directors is moving ahead on necessary repairs and improvements to the church building. The two glass entrance doors will be replaced with heavy-duty doors with secure locks at the cost of \$17,000. In order to comply with fire department regulations, the lighting fixtures for the third and fourth floor hallways will be replaced with motion sensitive LED lighting. This will cost \$ 6343. Work on the sidewalk in front of JAUC costing \$95,000 will begin soon. The Board spent \$800 to have two men remove the ceiling panels in the apartment to discover the cause of buckling tiles. Damage from extensive slow leakage indicates that major roof renovations costing around \$100,000 will be required. The Board gratefully accepts donations from church members and friends to help cover these extraordinary costs. Checks to the Japanese American United Church may be designated for "Building and Maintenance;" or on line donations are accepted at www.jauc.org. (G. Yoshida)

◆ Church Members & Friends ◆

Moving to Japan: Our brother Dr. Ken Kurihara will start teaching at Miyagi Gakuin WomensøUniversity in Sendai, Japan, as an assistant professor from this April. He will take charge of òChristianity Basicsö and other courses. Please pray that God will guide his work. Dr. Kurihara is planning to visit NY again this summer.

◆ Local Church Network ◆

Leonia Japanese Service The SMJ (Special Ministry to Japanese; Coordinator: Ms. Imado) is holding a Japanese worship service at the Presbyterian Church in Leonia, NJ (181 Fort Lee Road, Leonia) every 1st and 3rd Sunday, 3pm. If you have any Japanese friends living in Fort Lee area, please recommend the service to them!

◆ Prayer Requests ◆

In your daily prayers, please pray for those who are experiencing the hardship of this capricious weather; the compassion of political leaders; the end of all discrimination involving race, gender, age, class, disability, and religion; solidarity in love, peace, hope, and justice; peace in the Middle East; safe journeys for refugees; courage for those who fear terrorism; reconciliation between minority communities and the police; the end of gun violence; our challenging building maintenance issues. Pray for our sisters, brothers, and friends with health issues: Junko Clarke, Mike Deerkop, Dennis Gurski, Michiko Gorman, Arlene Gottfried, Darryl Holliday, Grace Huber, Yosh Igarashi, Teruo Inoue, Eiko Ishii, Paul & Hisae Isihara, Joe & Yoshiko Kasuga, Kerry Kubo, Hiroshi & Yoshiko Kurihara, the Mitsumori family, Kayra Teneoglu, Jessica & Gunay and the Motai family,

George Mukai, Nanako Oguri, Rev. Masahiko & Susan Sagara, Fujio Saito, the Shimojima family, Kiyotoshi Takahashi, Yuriko Tomita, John & Lucienne Yoshinaga.

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