



*"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◆

"For Fear of the Unknown" John 20:19-29

For fear of the Jews, the disciples locked the door of the house where they were meeting tightly. Crucify him! Crucify him! the crowd shout to urge the execution of Jesus frightened the disciples, who thought, They might do the same to us. Then, mysteriously, Jesus appeared among them saying, Peace be with you. It was like a password among the followers of Jesus's way to identify their brothers and sisters in times of persecution. Jesus showed them his hands and his side, which wore the scars of the crucifixion. The disciples burst with joy after the emotional roller coaster of the past week. All the hope and excitement of marching with Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday that had turned dark by Friday when he was persecuted and executed. All their hope for salvation evaporated like morning dew on a green meadow. But now they saw Jesus resurrected, alive and well, standing among them saying their password: Peace be with you. Then, he breathed on them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus reminded the disciples of the power of the Holy Spirit: to love one another, neighbors, strangers, and even enemies. *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.* (20:23) It parallels the Lord's Prayer, Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Jesus soothes the disciples' rage, fear, and animosity against the persecutors. Forgive them in order to be forgiven. We are emotional beings. We get emotional: anger, fear, sadness, and joy. God has given us these colorful emotions, but God wants us to make sure not to act upon exceptionally negative emotions like anger and fear.

This scripture features Doubting Thomas, also known as Missing Thomas. For some reasons, he misses the opportunities to experience it first hand. He

was not there to witness at first. It is true for us, if we are not there to witness and experience what happens, we wouldn't know what happened, we would become unsure, uncertain, and even doubtful. You've got to come and see God's amazing work. Jesus invited Thomas to touch his wound, while Jesus told Mary Magdalene on the Day of Resurrection, Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. (John 20:17) The Jewish Law of purity and impurity prohibited people to come into physical contact with a dead body. Therefore, Jesus stopped Mary from touching him before he ascended to heaven. But just a week later, Jesus invited Thomas to put his finger there, in his side, which was pierced by a soldier when he died on the cross. What difference did a week make? Some might think, Jesus must have ascended to the Father during the previous week and quickly came back.

No, he didn't. According to Acts 1, Jesus ascended to the Father after 40 days. So, why did Jesus give different responses to Thomas and Mary Magdalene? Why was Thomas allowed to touch Jesus, but not Mary?

The two disciples had two different kinds of fear. Mary Magdalene feared that she might lose Lord Jesus again. Once she thought that the Lord was gone after the brutal crucifixion she witnessed. And then, he was resurrected and came back. She feared to let him go again. Jesus was saying, Mary, have faith in me. Let me go. I will be back. Thomas had a different fear: he did not like to be deceived, fooled by figment. He had a serious trust issue. Jesus overruled the Jewish purity law and said to Thomas, Don't be afraid. Just put your finger right here. Do not doubt, but believe. Thomas was then totally convinced, saying, My Lord and my God! Jesus challenged and overruled the conventional norms in those days such as the Sabbath, fasting, the Impurity Law, stoning punishments, or contacting the untouchables. When our human suffering and needs were great, Jesus prioritized our needs to ease and comfort our pain, to save us from our struggles and suffering. After all, all the rules, norms, and laws were supposed to make human realities more livable, less harsh, or more humane and just. However, the rules and norms have been living their own lives. They have been interpreted as whoever in power wishes to perceive it as, or whatever is at their convenience. The Pharisees neglected the sufferings of

the sick, blind, and dying people on the Sabbath day. However, Jesus came to straighten up human priorities.

When our fundamental needs are not satisfied, fear kicks in. When our sense of belonging is shaken, we feel isolated, sad, and even angry. When our self-esteem is at risk, when we are losing control in life, or when we cannot find our own meaningful existence in life, our lives go into a wild spinning mode. We don't know how to handle the unknown. Our fear often drives us to aggression, hatred, or even violence. Our faith requires us to turn away from harm, hatred, evil, and face straight into the light, the righteousness of God. Darkness never wins against Light. Our faith requires us to remain trusting of God's absolute ability for the victory against the darkness that tries to swallow us and put us in despair and the valley of death. Victory for Christians is not to defeat our enemy, or to control others, but to stand for divine righteousness, justice for the powerless, and reconciliation with enemies. The legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., non-violent resistance, is based on this Christian tradition. When we resist submitting to fear for the unknown, God will be pleased. When we resist helplessness caused by the humongous challenges, or when we resist the temptation to act upon our negative emotions triggered by the actions of our enemies, when we resist all these things, God will be pleased. That is our salvation. In the moment, we see the Lord. In this season of Easter, let us rejoice to see and touch the Lord for our salvation.

◇ Church Activities & Schedules ◇

Sunday Service Scripture Verse The Scripture verses for May Sunday service are: May 7 ó 1Peter 2: 19-25; May 14 ó 1Peter 2:2-10; May 21 ó John 14:15-21; May 28 ó John 17:1-11; Pastor Takahashi includes the lectionary verses from the Old Testament, Psalms, and the Epistles. To read these verses, see the website www.lectionarypage.net.

J-Forum The Japanese study group takes place during Sunday's lunchtime at a table in the middle of the social hall. Starting from novice level conversation, we are currently studying Chinese characters frequently used in Christian worship, and bilingual prayers lifted up in our services: The Lord's Prayer, The Prayer of Confession, The Prayer of Thanksgiving, and so on. We welcome all who would like to learn Japanese language and culture despite differences of

experience as the Lord graciously invites everyone to his table.

P-Forum The Parenting support group meets on the third Sunday of the month at 1:30pm ó 2:30pm on the 4th floor. The Youth Fellowship takes care of young children during the meeting. Raising God's children takes a whole church community. We share questions, challenges, concerns, and joy with this covenant group who pledges the confidentiality of conversation, pray to support one another.

Health Seminar This periodical seminar provides great opportunities to learn how to take care of our temples, our bodies that God has given us to store the Spirit. Dr. Satoko Kanahara M.D. Associate Medical Director of Bronx Health Center, Community Healthcare Network and Ms. Mihoko Tanabe, a Med student from Philadelphia led the seminar entitled "Questions on Medication" on April 9th, which provided us valuable information on how to choose and go along with your physicians. The next seminar is TBA.

◇ Building Maintenance ◇



The two glass entrance doors have been replaced with heavy-duty doors with secure locks at the cost of \$17,000. The lighting fixtures for the third and fourth floor hallways to comply with fire department regulations also have been replaced with motion sensitive LED lighting. (\$ 6,343) Work on the sidewalk in front of JAUC costing \$95,000 will begin soon. 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)

◇Discovery Camp◇

Discovery Camp 2017 will take place from July 23rd to August 4th on Shelter Island, LI. The theme is "Establishing Friendship thru Global Bonds". The 3rd to 10th graders are welcome to apply by June 9th. The cost is \$1,400 (the sibling discounted rate available). Several Japanese students from Tohoku, northeast Japan, where the 2011 earthquake and tsunami hit. On April 21st in NY and 22nd in NJ, Mr. Yoshinobu Iwanaga, guitarist, performed at JAUC in order to fundraise for the camp and raised \$1,000. Please consider supporting the camp to send the next generation to their faith journeys. Please make out checks to: Japanese American United Church, Memo: Camp.



◇Church Members & Friends◇

We are happy to receive Roberto Zepeda and Kazunari Yamamoto as our new associate members. Please welcome both and provide them your loving care as family in Christ.

Sora Enomoto, our ministerial intern and his wife Momoko are leaving as the internship term ends. After visiting Japan this summer they will move to the University of North Carolina where Sora enters their PhD program. Sora gave us a wonderful Easter message on April 30th, and Momoko left the message below to this newsletter. "In the summer of 2015, a few weeks after our arrival in NY, we came to JAUC for the first time to worship and enjoyed a scrumptious lunch as well. At the time, I had no idea about what was going to happen, but the next thing I noticed was that we became the residents of the church apartment. It was a mysterious divine lead. During these weeks, I have witnessed God's unshakable grace when some members came to serve quietly at the church, which was an admirable and beautiful scene to my eyes. Sunday worship seems to be a large warm family gathering, which is both lively and calm simultaneously. It is a day of relief in our busy New York life. We are grateful the encounter with loving people of JAUC who have received us without

hesitation and provided us loving support. I look forward to seeing you all again.ö

◇Local Church Network◇

JCFN/VIP monthly meeting On Monday May 8th at 7:15pm in the JAUC social hall. Rev. Yasuhiro Miyauchi of New York Japanese Church in Tuckahoe will give us a talk. He is returning to Japan in June.

■**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 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 and the Korean Peninsula; 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.



Newsletter Team:

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