

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

6/21/09 "Jesus Calming the Storm"

Matthew 8: 23-28

Death comes to everyone. All of us will have to die someday. Death is the end of life. Death devours our hopes, our joys, and our courage to live.

The story of Jesus calming the storm has to do with this existential human situation.

The story itself is a simple one. Jesus and his disciples are in the boat possibly on the Sea of Galilee. Suddenly a storm attacks the sea, and the boat is thrown to and fro by the high waves and strong winds. But Jesus is asleep. The frightened disciples wake him up, saying, "Lord, save us. We are perishing!" Jesus tells them to be quiet. Then he rebukes the sea and the winds. At this, calmness returns to the sea.

This episode has a deep symbolic meaning. It symbolizes Jesus empowering us to face death.

Our sister in Christ, Kiyoko Murakami, died last Saturday evening after a long illness. As many of you know, she was pastor of a small church in a village just outside Tokyo. She was past 60 when she came to America.

For her, JAUC was her life. She participated enthusiastically in Sunday morning prayer meeting, praise time, worship service, Bible study, and even the seekers' group.

Several times she was hospitalized and later moved to a nursing home, and finally to a hospice. She appreciated our visitation immensely. When she saw my wife and me, she bowed deeply, smiled, and asked about the church and its people. Once I found her praying kneeling on the bed.

In her last few days, Murakami-san declined surgery to lengthen her physical life. She told the health care people that she was not afraid of death, because God was her keeper. I was told that her doctor was moved to tears by her serenity and courage.

In short, Murakami-san was a true believer. She was true to her faith till the very end. She lived alone. But she was not lonely. No doubt she experienced many a storm in her life, but her end was calm like the Sea of Galilee that Jesus stilled. Even death could not separate her from the love of Jesus Christ.

Now the meaning of the episode of Jesus calming the storm is clear. The boat is our life. The storm is death. The fear-struck disciples are you and I. The point of the episode is simply this: we do not have to fear death, because Jesus is with us. He transforms an angry sea to calm waters.

A few hours before Murakami-san passed away, some of us stood around her and sang hymns, talked to her, and prayed for her. Often she murmured, "Aah!" I think she was saying, "Amen!" The storm was stilled. The boat was made steady.

So rest assured: Jesus calms the storm. He is our redeemer. He is our rock. He is our savior, indeed.

Thanks be to God.