

Rev. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

7/5/09 "Jesus Called God Abba" Matthew 6: 25-34

Jesus called God "Abba." No body else had called God Abba before Jesus. What did Abba mean? Abba was equivalent to Dad or Papa. It was the most endearing term a child used for father. For Jesus, God was much more than a stern judge of human sin; he was the forgiver of human sin. God was Abba who embraced those who could not claim their righteousness before him.

Without Jesus, God may be an abstract concept or look like a stern, unapproachable judge. But with Jesus we know that God is an intimate existence, totally approachable, down to earth, gentle and loving. God is Abba.

Jesus is saying to us: God is your Abba. So even though you are often afraid, anxious, and perplexed, do not despair. God loves the birds in the air, lilies in the field. You are much more important than they. Do not worry what you will eat, what you will wear. Abba knows that you need those things. Be of good courage and put your ultimate trust only in your Abba. Do not worry about tomorrow. Live today fully, joyfully, lovingly. Abba will take care of the rest.

I understood the meaning of Abba almost 40 years ago. I was a young pastor just appointed to a church in Seattle, Washington. A Japanese-American pastors' conference was held at my church soon after my appointment. On the last day, the Japanese-speaking pastors and English-speaking pastors came together for the final worship.

The presider was an elderly Japanese-speaking pastor. He asked a friend of mine, a Nisei pastor, to pray in Japanese. I felt sorry for my friend, because he had never spoken Japanese, saying that his Japanese was baby Japanese. He was embarrassed about it. As a matter of fact, I had never heard him speak Japanese to anyone.

But he said yes to the request and stood up. His first word was "Tochan." Tochan is the most endearing but also most babyish word for father in Japanese.

He said, "Tochan, thank you for these people. Thank you for everyday. Thank you for everything. Tochan, thank you. Thank you. Amen."

After the service, the presiding pastor bowed deeply to my friend and said, "It was such a wonderful prayer."

So God is Abba. This was the faith that sustained the post Easter disciples. This was what sustained Paul. This was what sustained the early Christians facing religious persecution. This was what sustained those brothers and sisters of Japanese-American United Church who are now in God's glory. This is what sustains you and me for the living of these days.

Thanks be to God.