



Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC)

Congregations in Kumamoto

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THANK YOU from KUMAMOTO

The January Newsletter reported the number of newly infected cases in Kumamoto as only 3 and 1 in November and December. Unfortunately, during the current sixth “tunnel” (wave of new cases), those numbers have substantially increased, 13,974 in January and over 20,000 in February. This situation affected Kuwamizu kindergarten, where Satoko serves as an assistant, Kyushu-gakuin high school where Hitoshi preaches and teaches, and Jiai-en nursing schools, where Hitoshi serves as a chaplain. Due to the high infection rates among students, many classes were suspended. However, both Hitoshi and Satoko are doing well physically and spiritually. They give thanks for your prayers and thoughts from the US.



FIVE FUNERALS

Unrelated to COVID, four and one members at Kuwamizu and Matsubase congregations passed away in January and February. On Friday, January 21st, two at Kuwamizu passed away at almost the same time. Therefore, Pastors Sumimoto and Adachi collaborated in presiding over two funeral services in addition to four Sunday services in four congregations they serve during that weekend. Hitoshi reflected on how both pastors could manage those schedules. Only the Holy Spirit enables them to deal with important spirit filled services.

JAPAN CHRISTIAN CARE MINISTRY RESUMED

In the September 2019 Newsletter articles, Hitoshi reported the beginning of the Japanese Christian Care Ministry which is a Japanese version of Stephen Ministry. Pastor Sekino at Tokyo Lutheran Church pastor at that time and other leaders started this ministry ecumenically, and Hitoshi happily collaborated with them. However due to the Pandemic, since March 2020, the training for caregivers was suspended. Then upon the completion of vaccinations in Japan, since January 2022, this ministry was resumed.



The training is held on the second and fourth Saturdays every month in Tokyo. Because not all attendees were vaccinated, they offered those trainees to attend via Zoom. Hitoshi served as the first returning lecturer on January 8th collaborating with Pastor Sekino. About a dozen trainees were attending face to



face and 8 students were attending via Zoom. During February, Hitoshi attended the training as a volunteer via Zoom. For skill training, Zoom attendees are able to do the training through the breakout room faction of Zoom. Hitoshi and others felt that this hybrid training is powerful tool to train good caregivers. They hope and pray that this ministry will serve many people feeling isolated in this corona and post-corona era.

JAPAN'S LONGEST STONE STEPS

In Misato-village, Kumamoto, there is "Misaka Promenade" which is famous as Japan's longest stone steps. It has 3,333 steps. Hitoshi and Satoko knew this since they came here, but one of Hitoshi's friends in Kumamoto said, "Don't go there." So, for the last three and half years, they did not go to that location. However, on the national holiday, February 23, Hitoshi and Satoko decided to go there just to see it. They had no intention of climbing all 3,333 steps, but maybe climbing 1,700 steps. They arrived there around 11AM and first met a person who was holding 10.5kg dumbbells in both



hands, totaling 21kg. Surprisingly, he was saying that "This is my third time going up today." Also, they met a skinny senior person coming down, who said "I went up three times already today." Meeting with those individuals motivated Hitoshi and Satoko to try climbing 3,333 steps and they successfully did it. Although this was not easy task, they felt okay while they were climbing up.

However, while coming down they felt pain in their knees. Later in the day, after they came back home, they felt severe soreness in both legs. Hitoshi now understands the meaning of his friend's recommendation.



RESISTING TEMPTATION Reflection by Hitoshi

March 2nd is Ash Wednesday this year. Lent begins this day to April 16th, the day before Easter, for 40 days excluding Sundays. During 40 days before the Lord Jesus began his ministry, he was led by the Spirit and tempted by the devil. During the same number of days of Lent, we would like to re-

sist the temptation of the world by reflecting upon what Jesus said and did.

On March 6, the first Sunday of Lent, the Psalm from the Lectionary given on this Sunday is Psalm 91. The first verse says, "You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty." In the continuation of this year's theme verse for Kuwamizu and Matsubase congregations those saying "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. (Psalm 90:1)", Hitoshi feels that the words of Psalm 91 offers advice to congregations today. If you read Psalm 91 further, the following words will appear in the latter half of the Psalm, the verses 11-12 read, "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." It is encouraging, but there is something to be noted here.

This Psalm is closely related to Jesus' temptation by the devil in the Gospel (Luke 4: 1-11) given on the same Sunday. One of the temptations that Jesus received was when the devil takes Jesus to the roof of the temple and urges the Son of God to jump off the roof. The devil tries to entice Jesus by quoting the words from Psalm 91: 11-12. But Jesus rejected it by saying, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."

Even in modern times, it is a reality that various temptations attack us, and those temptations may be called the devil. Quoting the words of the Bible, especially the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation, arbitrarily interpreting them, and declaring "the end of the world is near" or "affirming military violence even against civilians" to the people in this world experiencing earthquakes, coronas, and even wars. These apocalyptic predictions have been announced for years. However, during times of uncertainty these predictions increase.

Let's focus on the thoroughly non-violent way of life of Jesus and His words that leads us to repentance, and let's confidently walk through this Lenten season and resist the temptations of the world.

O Lord, have mercy on us. Amen!