

The Bencke Family in Japan

Volume 34, November 15th, 2011



On September 11th we held a candlelight worship service at Suidōchō for the International Worship Service, where we remembered the 10-year anniversary of the attacks in the U.S. as well as the 6-month anniversary of the earthquake and tsunami here in Japan. We took this opportunity to pray for peace in the countries our congregants represented that night, including Indonesia, the U.S., China, Japan, and Tanzania.

Hannah's 3rd birthday!

We continue to strengthen our relationships with our neighbors. As such, when we celebrated Hannah's birthday, she emphatically requested the presence of a couple of our very good neighborhood friends. Small social and cultural gatherings like birthday parties or Christmas gatherings can provide great opportunities to bear a quiet Christian witness.

Our kids as missionaries

Our nine-year-old, Emilie, came home from school today with quite an amazing story of witness. I would like to share it with you, paraphrasing as accurately as possible what she told me. She said that it started with a conversation about Christmas. She was chatting with a couple of friends and she said, "Well, you KNOW it's not all about presents and Santa Claus, right?" Her friends looked at her with astonishment, and asked in their local dialect, "Eh? No way! Well then, what is it?"

At this point, she invited one other classmate into the conversation – a little boy who (Emilie knew) attends the Catholic church in town. She and this little boy proceeded to tell the story of Jesus' birth and how He was a gift from God, which is why we exchange presents at Christmas time – to remember the greatest gift of love from God. The two of them then went on to tell the kids (I believe there were three other kids 'in' on this conversation) about how, first of all, there aren't various "levels" of hell (I asked about this – apparently, kids believe very fervently that there are various "levels" of hell, perhaps influenced by anime and/or video games?) and also how the gate to heaven is narrow but that all people are invited (yes, these were Emilie's words). Emilie said that she and this other little boy tried to explain that God is so big that He holds the world in His hand and that He loved humans so much even though we do bad things that He sent Jesus to earth to help us, and that Jesus died but he rose from the dead, and that's why we can go to heaven.

I asked her how the kids she was talking to responded, and she said that they were surprised, quiet, and listening hard, since they had never heard of Jesus or the real Christmas story or any of that stuff about getting in to heaven by loving God. Besides the fact that they couldn't get over the fact that there weren't multiple 'depths' or 'levels' of hell, she said they just seemed to take it all in. I asked if it was hard, and she said it wasn't, since all the kids were her age. She said, "If they had been ADULTS, then it would've been WEIRD!" Later, after school, the girl Emilie walks home with apparently asked her a lot of questions about the Christian faith and what Emilie believes. I'm sure that as informative as it was for this other little girl, it was probably a powerful experience for Emilie to be asked to affirm what she believes to a friend. I don't believe I was ever asked such questions when I was her age.

Emilie and this other little boy are the only two Christians in their class. I imagine it was quite something for them to tell these stories to kids who had never even heard the name of Jesus before. It was one of those moments where I thought, "God can get the message out, even if it needs to be through the words of a couple of 4th grade kids." Now I am wondering, as I write this newsletter, if you have any fun or interesting or amazing 'kids testimony' stories to share. I would love to hear them!

Prayer Corner

We give thanks to God for His promise to be always at our side.

We give thanks for friends and neighbors who provide laughter and love to us as we continue to make our home in Kumamoto.

We continue to pray for comfort for the Kan family as they grieve the loss of their daughter, Masami.

We pray for wisdom and guidance for those in leadership positions within the Lutheran institutions we serve. May they listen carefully to the whisper of God and make decisions that reflect Him.

We pray that our upcoming "Southeast Asia" service reflects the joy and fellowship of our Christian brothers and sisters who live out their faith in often difficult circumstances. May the service bring glory to our Lord.

Our current mailing address:

Bencke Family
KUMAMOTO SHI
SHIMIZU MANGOKU 5-17-17
861-8068
JAPAN

Phone from U.S.

011-81-96-344-2642

Email:

jackie@bencke.com

jacquelinebencke@gmail.com

Missionary Sponsorship

For more information on ELCA missionary sponsorship, please contact:

Rev. Twila Schock, Director

Global Mission Support
8765 W. Higgins Road
Chicago IL 60631
(800) 638-3522, ext. 2641

twila.schock@elca.org OR

www.elca.org/missionarysponsorship

ELCA— Global Mission

If you are interested in learning more about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's global mission, please visit:

www.elca.org/globalmission

Christmas is coming!

With Christmas around the corner, I invited you to consider making a special donation to a cause where lives are changed and needs are met. The Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and Japan Evangelical Lutheran Association work together to create opportunities for young Japanese Christians and those who are 'seeking' to participate in a life changing outreach program in Jamkhed, India. If you wish to support these efforts, please send donations to Rev. Twila Schock (address above). **Please make sure to mark donations as "Level 2 funding (JELA): Helping Children in Need."** A gift of \$25 will buy materials for an artificial leg for someone who cannot afford that expense on his/her own. This new leg will allow an individual to return to work in his/her fields, go back to a job, take care of a family, or go to school. The loss of a leg in India is usually due to car accidents, leprosy, or in some areas, land mines.

Losing a student

It happens every so often as a teacher. We get that phone call or have that emergency meeting where we're told that tragedy has struck in our institutions, and that a student or colleague has suddenly and unexpectedly passed away. These are moments that bring home the reality of our fragile lives and our mortality.

This past July, one of my organ students, Masami Kan, died unexpectedly as a result of a (known) heart condition. She was 20 years old, a junior in the Early Childhood Education program, and a delightful young woman. Masami often took care of Hannah when I had some things to do at the college that required a certain level of concentration. She was dearly loved by our family.

Patrick and I attended the funeral ceremony for Masami. A Buddhist funeral ceremony is very different from a Christian ceremony. There is very little time devoted to 'saying goodbye' in a personal way to the person who has died. Instead, there is a lot of time spent listening to the priest singing the chants, lighting incense, and formally greeting of the family members. Often, the body has already been cremated so there is only a small box for one to look at, resting in the midst of flowers beyond one's imagination.

Several days after Masami's funeral, one of Masami's friends – another organist – decided to put together a memorial concert for her colleagues to participate in and 'say goodbye' in their way. So, on October 8th, with Masami's family in attendance, the music groups at Kyushu Lutheran College said farewell with music, readings, a meditation, and a slideshow. The president of the college, Dr. Kiyoshige, provided a wonderful message that spoke of the grace of God and the hope that awaits us beyond our lives on earth. The choir sang the following song (in Japanese) for this concert.

STILL (by Hillsong)

HIDE ME NOW
UNDER YOUR WINGS
COVER ME
WITHIN YOUR MIGHTY HAND

WHEN THE OCEANS RISE AND THUNDERS ROAR
I WILL SOAR WITH YOU ABOVE THE STORM
FATHER, YOU ARE KING OVER THE FLOOD
I WILL BE STILL AND KNOW YOU ARE GOD

FIND REST MY SOUL
IN CHRIST ALONE
KNOW HIS POW'R
IN QUIETNESS AND TRUST

To see and listen to the Kyushu Lutheran College Chapel Choir sing this song for Masami's memorial concert, please follow this link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqHkt1pQ0VE>