



KONKO MISSION BULLETIN

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The Heart of Joy and Gratitude

Rev. Michie Kimura
Konko Church of Sako



The Konko Missions in Hawaii invited the Rev. Michie Kimura, resident associate minister of Konko Church of Sako in Tokushima deliver sermons at three churches in Oahu at their annual Grand Service for Tenchi Kane No Kami, held in April. She made presentations in English at the services held at Honolulu Mission and Wahiawa Mission. She made a powerful and moving presentation in her native tongue, Japanese, at the Waipahu Mission. The following is an English translation of her Japanese speech script she introduced at the service held on April 17, 2016 at the Konko Mission of Waipahu. The Rev. Yasuhiro Yano made the English translation for your reference.

Hello everyone! I feel so grateful to be here and see you all in this manner. I just arrived from Tokushima, in Shikoku, Japan. My name is Michie Kimura, resident associate minister of Konko Church of Sako. Last year, a group of pilgrims from Hawaii came to visit Tokushima and also extended their leg of journey to make a visit to my church at Sako. Because I had an opportunity to meet Konko believers from Hawaii, I was given an honor to be invited to Hawaii for sharing my thoughts in this manner. I feel truly grateful for this given opportunity.

Let me get to the main subject of my presentation. I want to ask each of you, "What is your core element of your engagement in the practice of faith?"

The Founder and many other Konko ministers have elaborated about the core essential elements of the Konko faith in such manners: We should develop the heart of indebtedness toward our parents and show due respect of filial piety; Practicing faith is to show the heart of gratitude. These thoughts could represent appropriate answers. What does "Shinjin" mean for you? What is the meaning of your getting engaged in the practice of faith?

For me, to practice faith means to express joy and gratitude. The heart of joy and gratitude is the core element of my engagement in the practice of faith.

I was born and raised as the second daughter of the resident minister's family at the Konko Church of Sako. Throughout my entire life, I have been blessed with many caring and supportive family members and others around me. I was blessed to live in a great environment for my sound growth. I was blessed with a healthy body and have enjoyed a very fulfilling life thus far. Because of my fulfilling life, there is no reason why I shouldn't get involved in the practice of faith even when I grew up. It is because I grew up in this church environment, I am able to appreciate the work of Kami-Sama to some extent; I can understand the important nature of the church because the many people in the faith community take good care of the church. But I still have not come up with a solid reason why I should practice faith.

My elder sister, whom I thought would take over the responsibility of the church after my parents, got married and left the family. I became the only one who would be able to take care of the church, following my parents.

Because of the given circumstance, I made up my mind to become a Konko minister and take care of the church with my parents. As I have mentioned previously, I have appreciated the important nature of the church, and so had no hesitation to become a Konko minister. But I had a big concern for becoming a Konko minister. I had little confidence for my practicing of faith. I thought that a minister who could not identify the core essential element of getting engaged in practice of faith is of no use.

While I was enrolling at the Konkokyo Gakuin Seminary, I prayed to Kami-Sama intently, "Kami-Sama, please show me the core essential element of practicing faith."

How grateful I felt when I got a response from Kami-Sama for my extended prayer. Kami-Sama showed me that "The heart of joy and gratitude is to practice faith" through my encounter with one of the fellow female seminarians who happened to enroll at the Gakuin Seminary in the same year as I.

She was a woman around sixty-year old, who joined Gakuin to learn and train with us in a special intensive learning course called, "Tokusetsu-ka" program, designed for students with special criteria. She completed the program in one-month and was ordained a Konko minister before we graduated from the regular program. She got engaged in the practicing faith as a lay believer for a long time. I was so impressed with her bright personality. She was always cheerful and full of smiles. She was assigned to our group. As a group, we did daily cleaning of the facility; dined together and studied together. Two days after we started to work as a group, she and I were assigned to clean up the bathroom. We enjoyed talking together. While we were cleaning, she revealed, "I am at the terminal stage of cancer. The doctor made a prognosis that I will live only half a year at the most." Initially, I could not comprehend what she was talking about. I wondered, "Who is she talking about?" I didn't have the slightest idea that the woman in front of me was the very person who was at the terminal stage of cancer. Who could ever believe that such a

healthy looking, cheerful and happy looking person would be sentenced of her limited time to live? She continued to talk, “I became so shocked and depressed when I was informed of my prognosis. But I felt grateful that I got the illness; not my husband or my children. I believe somewhere along the way, I had developed self-conceit that I should be regarded for my dedication to the practice of faith in the faith community. I have made daily church visits; I have gotten helped in many church functions devotedly and tried to join various regional faith community functions involving other Konko churches. I felt a bit proud of my dedication as a Konko believer. But Kami-Sama seemed to have given me an admonishment for my wrong perception about my way of faith practice. I feel more than grateful to Kami-Sama for providing me an opportunity to get awakened to elements that needed to be corrected. I feel grateful that Kami-Sama got rid of my self-conceit that I had built up unknowingly. In answering to Kami-Sama’s extended message for me, I made a resolution to become a Konko minister and offer myself to serve Kami-Sama in gratitude.”

How would you respond if you were that person? I would be instantly defeated in despair and become totally disoriented. I would curse Kami-Sama and say, “How could you be so cruel in sentencing me to terminal cancer?”

I just couldn’t believe how she could ever say with a smile, “Even though I have the terminal stage of cancer, I feel so grateful to Kami-Sama. I want to offer myself to serve Kami-Sama more than ever!” Reflectively I thought, “What can I do for this person who has limited time to live?”

In corresponding to the urgent circumstance, I went to see Konko-Sama at the Toritsugi-Mediation Desk and asked, “Konko-Sama, one of our group members is at the terminal stage of cancer. Please instruct me what I can do for this person.”

What would you expect to hear from Konko-Sama in such a circumstance? Keeping his usual demeanor, Konko-Sama simply stated, “Discuss this matter with your fellow classmates.” I was a bit confused by the forwarded message from Konko-Sama. I had imagined many scenarios of what Konko-Sama would say, through learning what others have said about when they received mediation from Konko-Sama. Personally, I had few occasions of making direct communication with Konko-Sama in the past. I had a prediction that Konko-Sama would say something like, “The heart of giving thanks is the foundation of all things.” But the message, “Discuss the matter amongst your fellow classmates,” was totally unexpected. I was overwhelmed with these two episodes in two days.

Although I was a bit confused, I followed the instruction from Konko-Sama and discussed the matter with my fellow group members. What I learned from our discussion was that I could do little to help her. I am not a medical doctor, so I cannot provide any treatments for her. What I could do was to extend my prayers for her at the most. I tried to accept this situation as divine intent. There could be some divinely intended message that I was given an opportunity to meet this particular individual in that given circumstance at the Gakuin Seminary. I became determined to identify Kami’s message forwarded to me through this woman.

One month passed since we worked together at the Gakuin Seminary. During that limited time span, we lived and learned together. I witnessed she had always emitted strong rays of positive energy around her. She always looked normal, without showing any noticeable signs of discomfort. She completed the special course of learning and was ordained a Konko minister. Three months later, I learned of her passing.

While we lived and learned together at the Gakuin Seminary, I never witnessed any negativity in her way of living. She always showed a warm smiling face; she always expressed her gratitude and appreciation for any foods she enjoyed by saying, “This food is delicious!” She was always attentive to other people. She responded by saying, “The stories you share with me are very interesting!” Occasionally after we sit through long and monotonous lectures in the classroom, she remarked with a smile, “The lecture was a bit difficult to digest. I almost fell asleep.”

The only occasions I witnessed her physical struggle was when we made a daily visit to the Ohiromae (Main Worship Hall). On the way from Gakuin Seminary to the Main Worship Hall, we had to walk a steep slope on *geta* wooden clogs. Even young people like me experienced some shortness of breath. When she reached that slope, she walked slowly. When I approached and extended my support for her, I heard her repeatedly saying “Konko-Sama, Konko-Sama” as she tried to move forward. At that instance, I identified that the core essential element of practicing faith is to keep the heart of joy and gratitude as had been demonstrated by this person.

Soon after I became ordained Konko minister, I entered the Konko Church of Nanba in Osaka for spiritual training. The Rev. Fujimori Kondo is the founding minister of the church. In the Konkokyo faith community, the Rev. Kondo was a legendary figure. They say, “The Founder Konko Daijin actualized the presence of Tenchi Kane No Kami in the world, while the Rev. Fujimori Kondo presented the Founder Konko Daijin as a great religious figure in Japan.” In this manner, the Rev. Kondo admired the Founder so much and contributed for the wide spread of the Konkokyo operations in Japan. The Rev. Fujimori Kondo showed his signature message in a speech script titled, “喜び信心” or “Practice faith with the heart of joy and gratitude.” He stated, “Practicing faith is to saturate our hearts with joy and gratitude that comes from the bottom of our hearts in sincere acknowledgment (of blessings received).”

The message reminded me of the person whom I lived and learned together at the Gakuin Seminary. The way she lived represented the actualization of the message from the Rev. Fujimori Kondo. Even while she had to deal with her terminal stage of cancer, she expressed her joy and gratefulness for her engagement in the practice of Konko faith; she relied on Kami-Sama unconditionally; she appreciated things in the heart of Kami in dealing with her illness; she appreciated divine blessings received and tried to live with faith in joy and gratitude. Kami-Sama showed me the core vital element of practicing faith is to keep the heart of joy and gratitude at all times.

I don’t think the Rev. Fujimori Kondo imposed us to have the heart of joy and gratitude even under very trying circumstances. In my understanding, the practicing of faith in exercise of the heart of joy and gratitude advocated by the Rev. Fujimori Kondo refers

to the unconditional state of the heart which is saturated with joy and gratitude naturally yielded through appreciation of the heart of Kami.

The Rev. Fujimori Kondo also stated, “Those who practice faith should have the ears to hear joy and gratitude. They should have a mouth that speaks joy and gratitude and an attitude that shows joy and gratitude in everything we do.” Kami-Sama gave us the eyes to be able to identify joy and gratitude; Kami-Sama gave us the ears to listen to joy and gratitude; Kami-Sama gave us the mouth to speak of joy and gratitude. Now, put one of your hands over the heart. We understand Kami-Sama gave us this heart that can identify the elements of joy and gratitude.

Have we mindfully tried to use our eyes, ears, mouths and hearts in identification of elements of joy and gratitude in our faith life? In this manner, I have tried to live in exercise of the heart of joy and gratitude in my daily living.

We encounter many ups and downs in life; we have to deal with hatred, anger and any other negative thoughts we develop in our hearts from time to time. Occasionally, I pity myself by complaining, “Why am I so unhappy?” In the course of pursuing the Konko faith, we are to be able to identify the divine heart directed to us. Kami-Sama wishes us to enjoy happiness and live a fulfilling life.

In pursuit of faith, it is also important to have the heart of appreciation as well as the heart of extending due response in appreciation for the indebtedness we owe to Kami-Sama.

I have been trying to identify and appreciate Kami-Sama’s heart directed toward me and try to keep the heart of joy and gratitude. I want to see the actualization of the heart of joy and gratitude which can be shared with other people as well as Kami-Sama. I believe this is the path Kami-Sama wants us to pursue.

(English translation by Yasuhiro Yano, edited by Edna Yano)

Konko-Sama Says . . .

People exist because of Kami, and Kami exists because of people. Therefore, you should pray to Kami about everything, including sickness and problems, whether it is an emergency or not. Practicing faith is to have a heart like Kami in your everyday life. Praying to Kami by putting your hands together is not the only way to practice faith. A single heart means one heart. So be sure you do not go astray by having a double heart. Depending only on Tenchi Kane No Kami is having a single heart. You should be single-hearted and receive divine blessings fully. (III Jinkyu Kyogoroku 19, 81, 2)

Konko Daijin said, “Everybody asks me to come to their homes, but since I cannot be absent from Kami’s Hiromae, I do not go. However, I have never failed to help save a person who asked me for help with a single heart.” (Jinkyukyogoroku 55)

Bulletin Board

Main Services for May 2016

- 1 Sun -Monthly Service for Tenchi Kane No Kami (9 am)
-Wailuku Church Grand Service (11 am)
- 8 Sun -Monthly Service for Ikigami Konko Daijin (9 am)
-Hilo Church Grand Service (11 am)
- 15 Sun -Sunday Service (9 am)
-3rd Memorial Service for the late Rev. Masahiko Yoshino at Honolulu Church (11 am)
- 22 Sun -Monthly Memorial Service (9 am)
- 29 Sun -Sunday Service (9 am)

June 2016

- 1 Wed -Monthly Service for Tenchi Kane No Kami (7:30 pm)

Kumamoto Earthquake Disaster Fund-raising

We have started accepting monetary donations for the Kumamoto Earthquake disasters that has occurred on April 14, 2016 Japan time and caused great damages to the areas. Some Konko churches in those areas have also sustained considerable damages to the buildings. The money collected will be sent to Konkoko Headquarters via the Konko Missions in Hawaii. The program will end on May 31. Your thoughts and prayers will be greatly appreciated.

90th Anniversary Celebration of Konko Missions in Hawaii

We will be commemorating the 90th Anniversary Celebration of the Konko Missions in Hawaii on Sunday, September 4, 2016 at the Konko Mission of Honolulu at 9:30 a.m. The registration forms are available at the church.

Hawaii Conference of Religions for Peace

The regular meeting will be held on Monday, April 16, 2016 at Gedatsu Church of Hawaii at 1:30 p.m.

Volunteer Activity

The regular monthly visit to the Long-Term Care Facility at Wahiawa General Hospital will be made on Friday, May 20, 2016 at 10:00 a.m.

Konko Mission of Wahiawa 6th Summer Ohana Camp

We will hold the annual 6th Summer Ohana Camp organized by the Konko Mission of Wahiawa from June 18 to June 19 at Camp Erdman, Mokuleia. The theme for this year’s gathering is “The Power of Prayer.” The Rev. Dr. Todd Zenji Takahashi will make a presentation. Attending day-time activities including the lecture alone will be recommended if you hesitate to stay overnight. This time, we will enjoy stargazing and looking into the sky with a telescope we got! We will also make smores over the camp fire and go crab hunting. For more information please contact Edna Yano via email: ednakazuko@hotmail.com or call (808) 223-3448.



Honoring the Mitama Spirits

May

Toshiko Yogo	5/2/2010
Kiyoka Takahashi	5/5/1999
Rev. Masahiko Yoshino	5/9/2013
Helen Yoshie Eguchi	5/9/2006
Saichi Eguchi	5/9/1997
Rev. Hidejiro Hosaka	5/16/1972
Fernie Furusho	5/26/2001
Hideo Fujimoto	5/26/2005
Hiroshi Katsura	5/26/1959

Insight into the teachings in “Tenchi wa Kataru” or “Voice of the Universe”

The following are excerpts of series of an English translation of “Tenchi wa Kataru—Kanwa-shu” or “Compilation of Insight into the teachings in the Voice of the Universe” which contains 400 selected teachings from the original “Konkokyo Kyoten” or the “Konkokyo Scriptures.” Three authors, namely, the Revs. Mikio Seto, Yasushi Hata and Matsutarō Kōsaka contributed the insightful articles. The translation is provided by Yasuhiro Yano. (Reference pages 149 and 150)

No. 149: Though Konko Daijin often tells you not to come to worship so often, you won’t receive divine blessings if you don’t come at all. Konko Daijin tells you not to come because if you come and don’t receive divine blessings, it will only make your legs tired and deplete your precious money. You will be troubled. (*I Ichimura Mitsugoro 2-31-1, 2, 3 Kyoten page 228*)

Invalid pilgrimage

“Sanpai” or church visit is one of the vital elements in the practice of Konko faith. Therefore, the Founder tried to convey the rightful meanings of church attendance in various manners. He tried to provide individualized messages in corresponding to the personalities of the visitors and their living circumstances.

The Founder stated, “Though Konko Daijin often tells you not to come to worship so often, you won’t receive divine blessings if you don’t come at all.” The person who received this message was Mitsugoro Ichimura, who was initiated into the practice of faith in 1882, just one year prior to the passing of the Founder. His admiration of the Founder was so deep and frequented to see him. He treasured the messages he received from the Founder and preserved them in writing that could be used for references by the followers later on.

The Founder seemed to respond to Mitsugoro Ichimura who showed deep admiration and receptiveness for the messages forwarded. Konko Daijin clearly stated that if the believers wanted to get blessed through their engagement in the practice of faith, church visitation is one of the vital elements. But the reason why the Founder had to say, “You don’t have to come to worship” to some people was in reflection of their expressed thoughts about their church visit. Some of them expressed complaints in such manners as, “I feel tired and wasted money for the pilgrimage.”

Konko Daijin pitied those people who could not get blessed because of their improper thoughts they held for their pilgrimage.

In the original of the quoted message, there is a line that reads, “When you receive divine blessings, you won’t receive more unless you come to worship.” The message sounds somewhat puzzling. In my understanding, the message may imply that once we get blessed for our extended prayers, we have to respond to the circumstance by strengthen our engagement in practicing of faith, otherwise we may fail to get blessed further when we encounter greater issues we have to deal with.

No. 150: When I went to the Hiromae alone, Konko-Sama said, “You really come to worship often, don’t you? The divine blessings you receive will be as much as how often you come.” When I went to the Hiromae with many people, we did things such as stealing rides on the ferry or catching skylarks on the way. Then he said, “You need not come from afar to worship. You can stay home and pray even to a wall.”

(II Tomita Tomi 1-1, 2, 3 Kyoten page 641)

Stay home and pray even to a wall

The teaching shows the warmth of the way how the Founder responded to Tomi Tomita. The message gives some comfort for the readers. There are many instances the Founder responded in this casual manner in the Konkokyo Kyoten Scriptures. It is one of my enjoyments of reading the book in finding episodes that show the warmth of the Founder.

Tomi Tomita seemed to live in Okayama, but no further details of her have been found. The quoted message is the only one she preserved. She might hold a lasting impression about the message.

In reference to the message, such as “We did things such as stealing rides on the ferry or catching skylarks on the way,” it can be assumed that she was in her late teens when she made frequent visit to see Konko-Sama. The erratic behaviors shown in the message would be typical acts of teenagers.

As a teenager, Tomi Tomita might be surprised when the Founder vividly described what she and her friends did during the course of their visit.

The message directed to Tomi Tomita, “You need not come from afar to worship. You can stay at home and pray even to a wall” might give her a moment of remorse for the erratic behaviors committed by her and her friends.

This message was not directed only to a young Tomi Tomita, but we should all be aware when we make a pilgrimage tour in a group. When people travel as a group, they could be influenced by a group-dynamic psychological effect that they feel overly joyous and feel less guilty even if they misbehave. The message is a warning that we should keep sincerity and modesty at all times.