

2010 Global Mission Lenten Series

Reflection for the First Week in Lent

The Rev. Nathan and Sharonette Bowman
Kumamoto, Japan

Psalm 17
Job 1:1-22
Luke 21:34-22:6

And when the feast days had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This is what Job always did. - Job 1:5

"I wish that I could worship in my Father's House just one more time"

Fumi Otaguro, April, 2009

It is an honor to introduce our friend Fumi. Fumi is the wife of a bank auditor, and the mother of two young boys. Fumi found herself coming and going like most mothers do: PTA meetings, community meetings, teacher's meetings, sporting events, and prep school. Fumi found herself among the busiest of the busy. In January, she stopped by to say that she was taking some time off to regain her strength.

In February, when visiting Fumi in the hospital with her husband at her side, she revealed that she was given a maximum of six weeks to live. Fumi asked us to come daily and minister to her. After transferring her to a hospice ward, Fumi's doctor saw her wooden cross beside a Bible and a hymnal. The doctor immediately shared his faith with Fumi and assured her that he would be there to hold her hands and pray with her. When it was time to pray, it did not matter who was in the single room: everyone joined hands and prayed.

Years earlier, Fumi's son had gone to a Kuwamizu Lutheran Church affiliated Kindergarten, where Fumi had joined the Kindergarten's alumni Women's Choir. During one of our regular visits, Fumi announced that she would like to worship in the house of God just one more time. She also wanted to sing with her choir again. Borrowing a bed from Jiai-En Nursing home, Fumi and her family, doctor, choir, friends and neighbors worshipped at the church.

One by one, as Fumi courageously shared her condition with family and friends, she ministered to them in their grief and comforted them. While getting her house in order, she interceded for loved ones, clung to the words of Jesus and announced to her family that she wanted Handel's Halleluiah Chorus sung at her funeral. She explained that though she would be sad to leave loved ones here, she looked forward to great joy in heaven as the angels would come to welcome her into the eternal loving presence of her Heavenly Father. "I pray that everyone could know that joy," she said, deeply touching all who surrounded her.

As her condition deteriorated, she proclaimed “I want to be baptized next Sunday, at church!” Her doctor protested saying, “It must be earlier.” We settled on Wednesday, a time when her attending physician, nurses and family could gather. At the hospital, Fumi’s husband and Pastor Nathan dipped their hands in the baptismal water, and they baptized Fumi. Her children read the scriptures, her sister was the organist and her mother and in-laws along with the hospital staff were witnesses. The next day, as we worshipped in her room, the angels came for Fumi, and the Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ, was once again proclaimed. The Halleluiah Chorus was sung at her funeral.

In today’s Old Testament lesson, we see that Job lived a life of dedicated intercession, a confession of his faith in the grace of God. When we faithfully intercede for those around us, this practice becomes our regular custom, increasing and deepening our capacity for love. For Jesus, intercession was not only a prayer, but also a life discipline that he modeled for each of us, all the way to the Cross:

“Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Luke 23:34