



A Publication of the San Lorenzo Japanese Christian Church
"Growing together and reaching out in the love of Christ"

Firmly Rooted

"Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him." Col. 2:6a

Vol. 19, no. 4

April 2009

The Hope of Easter

We speak of "Good Friday," but it was anything but good for the disciples of Jesus. On Saturday, as Jesus lay in the tomb, it was a very black day for His followers. What a sad, dreary day it must have been. A day of broken dreams, of dashed hopes. They had expected so much. And now the future seemed so grim.

We know how they felt. We too have been there. Tragedy and disappointments have not bypassed us. Coping with disappointments is not easy, especially when you have prayed about something, and the very opposite happens. You may pray for healing and there is no healing. You pray the Lord will get you a certain job but nothing happens. You pray that the relationship you have with that special person will develop into something serious, but instead it is shattered. We have had our share of the disappointments of life. Some have left the faith, because it was too much to bear. We have a pretty good idea how the disciples must have felt that black Saturday.

Many years ago, after receiving my MBA from Cal Berkeley, my thoughts were on going back home to Hawaii to find a good job in the financial area and live there the rest of my life. I had written to some firms and they said they wanted to see me. My hopes were very high. I was so happy to be going back home. On the day of the Triumphant Entry, the disciples must have felt so good. Everything seemed to be going well. In Hawaii, I went to one interview after another, and the story was the same. They could not use me. Hope and joy turned into disappointment and gloom. After seven months, I decided to leave and go to Los Angeles.

Mary Magdalene had gone to the tomb. How she felt was the way all the disciples felt. (John 20:11,14-15) ...Mary stood outside the tomb crying.... She turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. "Woman," he said, "why are you crying?"

In that question is a gentle rebuke. Instead of crying, it was a time for rejoicing in the resurrection power and trustworthiness of Christ. The tomb was empty. He had risen from the dead. Mary is like us. As we experience disappointments, we are prone to despair. We forget the promises of God. All we can think about is our disappointment. We are masters of feeling sorry for ourselves. Mary, like the others, had forgotten that Jesus had said that He would die and rise again on the third day.

My plan was to work and live in Hawaii the rest of my life, but the Lord had another, better plan for me. I worked in Los Angeles for over a year and then the Lord led me to return to Cal Berkeley to get a PhD and be a professor. If I had known that when I left Hawaii, I would have been rejoicing, instead of being sad and disappointed. Most of the time, we do not know what the Lord has in store for us, and that is where faith comes in. I should have had faith that the Lord was guiding me and that all things work together for good. How fortunate we are that the Lord understands our frailty and will guide us despite our lack of faith.

Easter reminds us of the hope we have in Jesus Christ. The cross has transformed from a symbol of death and despair into a symbol of life and love.

-- Vernon Kam

A Long Journey Home

By: Dorothy Chen

Although I am ethnically Chinese, I was born in Kobe, Japan. I was raised speaking Japanese with our o-ne-chan (our Japanese housekeeper), Chinese with my parents, and English at an Anglican private school I attended. My mother was a university professor in Kobe, and my father was the Director of a Chinese anti-communist league.

My mother became a devout Christian through attending a Chinese Presbyterian church sponsored and overseen by American missionaries. To this day, she has remained faithful to God and is now an active member of her church in Tiburon. The American Missionary baptized me and gave me the English name Dorothy. As a child, I was spellbound by the Biblical stories I learned at church and school. The stories about Noah and the Ark, Joseph and his brothers, Moses and his life, the birth of Christ, etc. fascinated me and are forever etched in my memory. I loved the Christian hymns I was taught, particularly the Christmas songs.

When I turned 12, my mother was offered a part-time teaching position at San Francisco State University, a once in a lifetime opportunity. She brought the three of us children with her to the United States, as she wanted a better future for us. During those first several years, we had an extremely difficult time acclimating to living in this country. Everything was so foreign; we were very homesick and unhappy. My father stayed behind in Japan where he passed away a few years later. My mother really struggled to raise the three of us as a single parent. She took various part-time jobs to make ends meet. My younger brother took a newspaper route job to help supplement her meager part-time instructor's salary.

We began to attend a Presbyterian church in San Francisco as soon as we arrived. As the only Asian family, the congregation was cordial but I never felt accepted or welcomed. Every Sunday we would attend the service and leave without interacting or speaking to other church members. One day, we were all shocked to learn that the pastor of this church had committed suicide on the church property. Needless to say, my mother found another church for us. The reception we received at the new church was no different from the first one. Over the years, I began to lose interest in attending church. I went to services just to appease my mother. Eventually, Sunday service became a tedious and meaningless routine. As soon as I entered college, I walked away from God and church: I had lost my faith.

In the ensuing years, I was determined to achieve in life through relentlessly pushing myself to excel. I graduated with a B.A. and two Masters' Degrees that opened many doors for me, professionally speaking. My motivation to excel was not tied to financial gain;

Dorothy visited our church in 2007 and began attending each Sunday. She was baptized on Jan. 11, 2009.



instead, I wanted badly to succeed to repay my mother for all the sacrifices and hardship she had endured for us. I went through four major career changes beginning as a community college instructor progressing to a small business owner, then a director of a non-profit agency, and now working for the county as a Division Director. With every career change and success, I began searching for something. Something was clearly missing in my life but I could not determine what it was. I could not understand why I was not completely happy or satisfied.

During the fall of 2006, I began to see a Chinese acupuncturist for a stress induced stomach ailment. One day I asked for his professional advice on whether I should start counseling to deal with stress and my feelings of dissatisfaction. He was silent for sometime and finally said simply, "No, you should pray." His response jolted me as it was totally unexpected. Afterwards, I thought about what he said over and over - it definitely left an imprint. During subsequent treatments, he shared his testimony on becoming a Christ follower. I was so moved by his faith that I vowed I would begin to seek God again after decades of turning away from Him. Shortly after, my ailment inexplicably subsided.

One Sunday in January 2007, I attended my first worship at San Lorenzo J.C.C. without knowing anyone. I chose SanLo because I wanted to attend an Asian American church, and I had noticed the Japanese writing on the church walls whenever I would drive by on Lewelling Blvd. I studied the Church's website prior to my visit. Pastor Rod and several of the members welcomed and greeted me after the service. I felt genuinely welcomed and comfortable among the sea of friendly faces. I also liked the sermon being presented in a power point format as it reinforced the teachings both visually and audibly. I knew then that I wanted to come to know Christ again, this time as an adult and at this church.

Two years have passed since that first service. Every sermon by the pastors and Dr. Kam helps me develop a better understanding of being a Christ follower. I realize now and clearly see that all this time, God has always been there with me. He had watched over me for decades, and has waited

-- Continued on inside back page

(A Long Journey Home, continued)

patiently for me to understand that true happiness lies in accepting and acknowledging Him as my Lord and Savior. He has blessed me in so many ways despite my years of turning away from Him. Through this, I know that God is truly compassionate and forgiving of our sins.

In October of 2007, I faced a serious life threatening illness. Throughout my illness and recovery, SanLo church members prayed for me and sent me cards of hope filled with God's messages. His words sustained and comforted me, and I am now in remission. I was baptized recently and have joined San Lorenzo J.C.C. as a member. I know that Christ brought me here, as there is a clear connection between the mission focus of our church and my upbringing. If it were not for the American missionaries coming to Japan, I would most likely not have known Christ. God truly works in wondrous ways. I still have so much more to learn about Him. Through the weekly teachings and with the support from SanLo members, I will get there. Thank you everyone for helping me come home.

Alleluia!
HE IS ALIVE!

Please come and celebrate our Risen Lord and Savior in April!

Bring the whole family to the All-Church Picnic and Easter Egg Hunt on Sat., April 4, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Washington Manor Park, 24900 Zelma St., San Leandro. Please bring your own drinks, a dish to share, chairs, blankets and baskets to gather eggs.

Our Annual All-Church Photo will be taken on Palm Sunday, April 5, after service. Please plan on staying.

The Japanese-speaking congregation will have a Good Friday service on April 10, 7 p.m. led by Pastor Sunao Shimada.

Easter Sunday is April 12. We will begin the morning with an Easter Celebration at 9:30 a.m. Watch for Red and Stripes, our famous puppets to return. Pastor Rod will bring us the morning message during our worship service at 10:45 a.m. We will have an Easter reception to follow, so please bring a favorite dish to share.

Praise God for the 20 Year Anniversary of Women in Prayer!

The Women in Prayer group have faithfully met each Saturday morning at 7:30 a.m. for the last 20 years. They have seen and experienced God's answers to prayer as they have uplifted countless needs and poured out their hearts before the Lord.

There is also a Men in Prayer Group, a dedicated few, who pray for various needs and meet at the same time. Praise God for His faithfulness through the years and may He continue to grow all of us in our prayer lives. You are invited to come to prayer on a Saturday morning and join either of these groups. If you have a prayer request or would like to join the women, contact Judy Yamashita -- for the men, contact Gary Yamashita.

Dear Heavenly Father,

How grateful are the Women in Prayer to you for leading us and being with us these past 20 years. You have called us into this ministry and You have guided us and have watched over us and blessed us. Father God, You fill our hearts with grace each Saturday morning as we come to praise You, to love You and thank You for all Your works and blessings. We are also able to lay requests before You.

You brought different women with different styles in praying, but like a finely tuned instrument, we pray as one voice. Father, You cover us with Your love and we acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is with us, for we can breathe Him in and He moves us into prayer - many times with passion and many times with tears. We feel Your presence and we give thanks.

Our prayer concerns have always been for the church body, for the children, for the lost, for the missionaries that the church supports, for our pastors and staff and we do not forget ourselves - to pray and support and encourage one another. We know the enemy is ready to prevent us from doing what we are called to do - what every believer is called to do and that is to pray in Jesus' name.

We praise You and give thanks for Your faithfulness to Women in Prayer. We ask that Your will, will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We know You are with us always. And we can all say, "From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another." John 1:16

With love and devotion, we pray in Jesus name ...

The Women in Prayer

February 1989 to present