

③ “A Journey with the Holy Spirit”

Happy Birthday to your church! I'm happy to join this church's birthday celebration today. About two thousand years ago, our church was born by receiving the Holy Spirit, and also now the Holy Spirit comes to us in the same way here. This day's name is Pentecost. We waited for 50 days after Jesus rising for this day.

What were the disciples doing from Easter until Pentecost day? Luke said in Acts Chapter 1 verse 3, “After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God,” and “they waited for the promise of the Father.” It means “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” After saying these words, Jesus was lifted up, and ten days later, the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. How did the disciples wait for 10 days without Jesus? They were waiting, waiting for some mystery of God to give them the power of God's promise. When the day of Pentecost came, they received the God power. On that day, “they were all together in one place.” They had worship together with their prayers like us.

Did you get the chance to look through today's 'Moment for Reflection' already? UCC Worship Reflection provides this passage. When I read it, these words became strongly impressed on my memory.

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Hu....m, I think about this question myself.

I came to Saskatoon alone three years ago after one week from my second wedding. Then I studied my favorite subject, theology. I have enjoyed Canadian life for three years. My family is all living in Japan, so I must be free.

I love freedom, and also you must like freedom. But, have you thought about freedom in earnest?

I love birds in the sky. They have no border of nations. However, we know they enjoy freely flying in the air, which is created by the earth's atmosphere. In other words, they are protected by the earth's atmosphere. I like swimming. I feel free to swim in a pool. There, it is clean, a suitable temperature and no predator like a shark. It is a small space, but I feel free. In the Bible, Adam and Eve was free in the Garden of Eden. But Eve made a mistake, and they were no longer free. Anyway, I must be free, but sometimes I don't feel free, why?

How about the next question, "If you don't feel free, what binds you?"

I don't like to be tied by something, and also you maybe don't like to be tied by something or somebody. Thinking about it, one old song came to me in a flash. The song's name is "Just the way you are." Do you know this song? I really like the chorus of this song, "I want you just the way you are." Besides, the climax this song is a beautiful sax solo. I could cry. This is Billy Joel's song from 1977, not Bruno Mars 2010. So it is 42 years old. Anyway if you don't know this song, I recommend listening to it. He sang this song as "I want you just the way you are". I wanted somebody to say this to me, but even if they do, it would be hard to keep this phrase for long in our lives.

When I was young, I was a little bit cuter then now, so one cool guy said these

sweet words to me. We got married, but unfortunately he didn't keep these words. Only three days after our wedding, he started to use domestic violence. I was a Christian already, and he was not. However, God graced us, so we had three children. We lived together for only seven years under severe conditions, but after those years, we lived separately under the same roof. Can you guess? I envy you. A Japanese house is not big like a Canadian house. I hoped he would change for the better, but we couldn't make up the gap that had formed between us, so we ended up in a divorce. It was hard to raise three children for me because I was a full-time housewife at that time. I don't want to remember that time, but if I'd describe it in one word, I only spent myself. However, my hard story led me to become a minister. I worked very hard, and after parenting, at last, I gave up thinking only about the work of my life. Then, I got feeling free to live. Before that, I was not free. From what did I need to be freed?

My responsibility as a parent? Or the habit of common woman's living? You know? We have a lot of social silent pressure in Japan. It means they tend to think the same as others. I don't want to be the same as others, so it is hard for me to live in Japan. There is an unspoken agreement in Japanese society. On the other hand, this unspoken agreement has made very strong social service systems in Japan, which are good. Japanese workers provide very good service for clients. I am proud of it, but I feel a little bit scared to go back to Japan after staying in Canada for over three years. Anyway, even in the oppressive society of Japan, I really could live free after giving up my former way of life. The point is one thing. It wasn't my thought to be free, only to be bound by the Holy Spirit. To my surprise, many good experiences then occurred. I could get a time to study theology, and became an ordained minister. I worked in Hokkaido first as a minister. Hokkaido is beautiful and cold area in Japan. That being said, it's

not like Saskatoon cold winter: minus 30 degrees or minus 40 degrees. And then, I came to Saskatoon. I made a lot of Canadian friends. I had my convocation at St. Andrew's College, and also I am standing here today.

I noticed the Spirit led me here through my many good and bad experiences. The Power of God has led me here. And I know the power of God has done the same for you. The Holy Spirit has fallen on all people in this church. Now you have God's words. Paul said in Romans Chapter 8,

“If Christ is in you, the Spirit is your life.”

If so, we must not forget the important point is that we are gathered in one place with our prayers. The Spirit has come not for one individual person, but for all of us. Pentecost is God's event for the Church.

“If Christ is in your church, the Spirit is the life of your church.”

And the Holy Spirit gives you the power for your Journey.

Let us pray,

Holy Spirit,

Breathe into our lives the breath of heaven.

May sweet things be nourished and matured!

Holy spirit,

Quicken our memory.

May we remember your mercies and be thankful!

May remember our failures and be humble!

May we remember your grace and be hopeful!

Lift up our hearts high!

In Jesus' name, Amen