

Testimony by Rie Neufeld

March 21, 2021

I'd like to begin with thanksgiving for everyone who prayed with me for caring for my father's illness. I felt supported, safe and not alone with your prayers. My father might live or die, but knowing that God is listening to our prayers, I'll let it be in God's hands. At least I'm learning to do so. These days I've heard my father has started to receive rehab so that's very good news, but still problems remain. I might be able to see him again, so I'm thankful to think about that. Thank-you so much for your amazing support. It's very difficult these days to visit family in Japan, or even here, in a facility. So I'm very much thinking about my father everyday so I doubt this Akashi is going to be a good one but I know you understand me. I'd like to start with prayer.

My father has been a troublemaker in our family. Even as a child I remember thinking that he is such a selfish person not having a good sense of how others might be feeling. Not like my mother and younger sisters being quiet, I was standing strong against my father and worked so hard to convince him that he is wrong. So, we had many fights. When I got very upset, I couldn't eat meals and wanted to be alone. Now as I became an adult I understand that I was very similar to my father. Especially in the negative areas. Too bad!

I met Jesus during the time that I failed the university exam, even twice, and lost hope and purpose in my life. Why do we live? Where am I going? I had lots of questions, and was thinking deeply about life. Jesus approached me first. I went to church with curiosity and doubt knowing that I shouldn't go too far with religious things... but I wanted to hear, I wanted to know things I don't know, like the meaning of life. So, I started attending prayer meetings and bible study regularly where I experienced God's presence. I was surprised many times. The words became alive and touched my deep thoughts and pain. God was talking to me. It was like these words in the Bible... 'Leave your troubles with the Lord, and he will defend you.' also, 'Make certain you do not perform your religious duties in public so that people will see what you do. If you do these things publicly, you will not have any reward from your Father in heaven.' ' Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. How much more, then, will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.' So, I was just awed to hear those words directly coming to me. And, with this word I surrendered before God. 'You did not chose me; I chose you.' (John 15:16) I was 21 when I've received baptism.

The passage of the Bible we read today also has a promise of Jesus to give us the Holy Spirit. I strongly believe in the work of the Holy Spirit. I feel that I cannot understand how great the work of the Holy Spirit is and what kind of grace I receive. I often like to feel the size and depth of God in nature and be impressed. I'm not saying that I am spiritual. I just want to know more about how wonderful the work of the Holy Spirit is. As I said in the past, a movie was taken by an astronomical telescope made by NASA called Hubble that went to space. I saw it when I went to Science World with my family. It was shown in the planetarium above our heads, so it was so real that the kids were scared. I felt as if I was taking a walk between the stars. When I saw the scenes of pink, white, emerald green stars, and gas, I felt that God was there and I was moved to tears. It was really beautiful. It doesn't look real in the photo, but it looks like this.

And, although it is written in the Bible that God made everything good, I was amazed and impressed that I was made good in this way. The Bible says, "We are the work of God." Reading the Bible can sometimes give you the feeling of seeing from God's point of view. I became a Christian and changed my view of my father. Observing my father made me feel merciful. My father as the second son in his family, worked in the fields, and took care of the pigs. Compared to his older brother, he didn't get as much respect, from a strict grandfather. He later found out that he was lonely, especially feeling he wasn't seen. My father also became a Christian through his illness and was not a very serious Christian, but we forgave each other and became friends. It's really amazing. However, my parents have divorced and my sisters are still unable to reconcile with him. It's sad. But, I understand their feelings. I think they're wondering when they see me doing well with my father, Didn't you fight with him the most? I know that our positive relationship is only through the work of the Holy Spirit. I sincerely hope that my sisters will reconcile with my father someday.

It's been 13 years, this spring, since I was led to Canada. When I decided to leave Japan and come to Canada, my biggest concern was my father, who was divorced and lived alone. I was very worried whether it would be okay to leave or if I would leave my father lonely. However, as soon as I decided to go to Canada, I discovered that my father had been remarried, and I thanked God with surprise and joy. My father seemed embarrassed about the remarriage and hadn't been able to tell us right away. But I never dreamed that someone would marry that difficult father who was over 60 at the time, so I thought she was an angel. So, I moved to Canada with peace of mind, and now my father lives in the countryside of Kagoshima, in the hometown of his new wife. At this time, I was deeply moved by the fact that God was working.

That's why I've always wanted to take good care of my mother-in-law who became the wife of this difficult father.

My father had had three strokes, which made life difficult, but when he became critically ill this time, I thought it would be unavoidable for him to die at this time. However, my mother-in-law suffered and was tired from taking care of him, and it was very painful for me to hear of my father who was struggling terribly in hospital. I wanted to go be with them, I wanted to help with something. But, it's a difficult time to go, and I was told if I come in the middle of the pandemic it would be more trouble for them than help. I understand that too. My sisters told me not to come now. I have no choice but to pray. God, be merciful. I pray for the work of the Holy Spirit so that I can meet again and give some support, if it's God's will.

I am grateful that it's possible for me to feel and live with the Holy Spirit who is with me when I am really in pain and when I am happy. It is also a great grace to have God's family here to pray for me and my father even when I am weak. Let's pray.