

“For we walk not by sight, but by faith”

As I have written in the pastoral report in the Annual Meeting Report, we sent quite a few brothers and sisters to heaven in past one year. There were also many who were in hospital, received surgery, had checkups and treatment every month.

We face many issues outside of our physical health. We may have many peaceful days but we also run into issues related with our marriage, parenting, our jobs, financial problems, etc...We are facing these challenges day and night. Not only adults, but even children and teenagers also face daily struggles. And from a greater scope, when we look around the world, we see and hear about the tensions among the nations.

We are afflicted by struggles every day, but we as believers have been given the privilege to not take what we see as everything, but live as if we see things that cannot be seen, in full trust and faith to God.

So our church motto of this year is “For we walk not by sight, but by faith”. We want to focus on this motto and establish our foundation on it.

In the times of the Bible, there are no challenges like environmental pollution or cyber-attacks, but they had the same problem of mind and body, and about human relationships, which we also face today. The people in Bible times were also shaken and made anxious by the things that passed before their eyes.

We see many things as we live everyday. We feel joy when we see the abundance of tomatoes in our garden, but feel disappointment next day when we find that the tomatoes are eaten by animals.

When we read emails we have different emotions. Sometimes we feel joy, other times we feel deep sorrow. Some email may even cause anxiousness.

When we visit a family or friend at a hospital, we are relieved to see recovery, but sometimes we come home with concern because we cannot see progress.

God gives us two eyes. Our emotions are lifted up and brought down by what we see through these eyes. We are repeatedly shaken by what we see throughout our life.

We will continue to see many things in our life. We will see things that make us down but if faith arises in our heart, I believe we can overcome any challenge. If we are given the heavenly strength to see invisible things, we will learn about the depth of our life.

Some of you might think, "Still, what we see is everything." Did you know that our world is not made only by visible things? There are countless invisible things in our world. Scientists say that we are only seeing about 20% of our world, but we still only believe in what we can see.

An email is words typed on a screen. The words encourage us and discourage us, but we do not see the invisible things behind the words. We only see the words itself and the information.

One night the tomatoes in our yard were eaten by a family of opossums. They do not know about our labor. They just follow their instinct and eat the tomatoes to live just like us. We did not see that, but if we imagine that, we understand that they are also creatures who have to eat as we do.

When we sit beside a person who is in their deathbed, the person cannot communicate anymore and has closed eyes. In that moment, there is a difference between being overwhelmed with despair or trusting/praying for Jesus’s presence.

The book of Hebrew mentions about the life of more than ten people. Their names are well known in the Bible and we know about their life. They left their footprints in the Bible but they are not perfect, they failed many times, but they kept a certain thing and walked their life. The book of Hebrew said;

¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left; they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

They are people who lived their life like us. They had struggles, joys, victories and losses. They faced what we are also facing today. They were challenged by seemingly hopeless problems, and grew in faith through this. Yes, our faith is to see the invisible and have hope with it. They saw with faith and lived every day in it. Their eyes were always set on heaven.

Our motto of 2017 is coming from the Bible verses, 2 Corinthians 4:8,¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

When we think about the value of things, we consider how long it lasts, and how long that thing remains for the next generation. The temporal

things are cheap, but we admit the value of long lasting things. All things we see will pass by. The things that bother us, the things we desire deeply for will also disappear. All visible things are temporary.

What we are seeing is temporary. A brand new house and a thousand year old tree is temporary. Even when we face difficult people and we struggle, it is only temporary. The Bible changes the direction of our eyes to eternal, lasting things.

I will talk about SHUKATU at Shuyokai. SHUKATU is the preparation for the end of our life. When I am writing the speech about SHUKATU, I realize the preparation for the end of life is to focus our eyes on the invisible things.

When we are young, we judge by what we see, but when we get older, we realize that our world is not made by only visible things. We need eyes to see the invisible world and not be influenced only by visible circumstance. If the invisible things last forever, don't you think that is something of great value we should be focused on.

The well-known atheist, Heartland Russell was asked "if you died and find that what you believed in was wrong at the gate of heaven, what would you say?" He responded with loud voice. "Well I will say, God you did not give me enough evidence".

When he responded, he must have thought he had a perfect answer! But we think about his words and think, "you did not even try to see the countless invisible evidence which surrounded you.

God is invisible. We learned two weeks ago about how the Holy Spirit is also invisible, and the spirit is like a wind. Wind is colorless, so we cannot see it, but when the wind becomes a tornado, we can see it because the tornado leaves behind moved objects. The shaking leaves are the

evidence of the wind. The Holy Spirit is the same. We cannot see it, but we can see the work of the Holy Spirit.

My wife and I started physical training recently. We wish to stay in good condition to continue our ministry, but sudden training will injure our body. We also cannot see the result of our training the next day. Likewise we cannot see the invisible things suddenly. We live between faith and doubt, and we will admit what the Bible is saying, realize the limitations of our understanding, seek things we cannot see, and we will learn day by day.

The author of the book of Hebrew always wrote about our faith, he said;³⁹ But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

According to my observation, we are now standing in faith and are shifting towards living by things we cannot see. I am looking forward to nurturing our faith together. Let us pray.

Translated by Makoto & Kou Okura