

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas  
August 26, 2018

Koinonia of the Suffering  
Philippians 3:10-17

3:10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

3:11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

3:12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

3:13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

3:14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

3:15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

3:16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

3:17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

### **1. Christ's Suffering and Japanese**

Ryunosuke Akutagawa, a Japanese novelist, wrote a piece of short novels titled "Oshino". In Edo period, Shino, a widow of samurai, visited a church which was called "Western Temple." Her fifteen-year-old son became seriously ill and she prayed to various gods. Then she came to seek the power of Christ, perceived as Western

Buddha.

The priest listened to her and said. “Be careful about Kannon, Buddha Hachiman, Tenjin. You worship wood or stone idols. There is only one God of truth and the one Lord of truth. It is the will of Deus to help or kill your child. Idols do not have the power to do so. If your child is important, stop praying to idols.”

And he said, “Believe in the God of truth. The one true God is Jesus Christ who was born in the village of Judea, the country of Bethlehem. There are no other gods, but there is a devil. It is the disguise of the fallen angel. In order to save us, Jesus even put himself on the cross. Look at Him.” Then, he pointed to Christ of the cross painted on the stained glass.

And he said, “Jesus was born to purify our sins and save our soul. And he went through the life of hardship and pain and tribulation!” After he talked about His birth, he came to talk about what Jesus spoke on the cross. He said. “Think about this. Jesus took two thieves with Him on the cross. Then the grief, the agony of it — we cannot help feeling that our flesh is trembling now. The most grateful is the last word of the Jesus which became a cry from the top of the cross. ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”

However, when she heard it, she changed her look and said, “Is that all about the one true God, Christ? My husband never showed his back before the enemy. ... It is very pathetic that the one true God cried out loud when He was put on the cross. What good religion that you worship the coward? Since you’re with the coward, I cannot show my son’s sickness. If I knew something like this, I will never bother to

come here. I regret about this wasteful trip.” Then, she left.

Akutagawa tried to describe the dilemma that the suffering of Christ is the most central message of the gospel, but it does not reach the heart of the Japanese. It seems that he spoke for the thought of the intellectual at that time who had committed suicide without finally believing in Christ while they were drawn to Christ by reading the Bible.

In hymn of “Gloria,” Jesus Christ is perceived as “You only are holy, the Lord, the Most High.” But the Japanese culture does not have a concept of the highest being or absolute righteous and holy person. Many gods are very human and selfish and violent. It is said that many of the Japanese festivals were held to appease such “gods of roughness.” There is even a custom of damaging the gods and Buddha so that they force them to hear their wishes. Nevertheless, they have never accepted the fact that God was born as a man, took a position of sinners, and died on the behalf of them.

## **2. Christ’s Suffering and Repentance**

Why is it difficult for Japanese people to accept the suffering of Christ? It is because Christ was suffered from our human being’s sin, and we have to face them when we see Christ’s suffering. Christ went on to the cross by himself; however, the sins of every single person were the true reason that the Holy son of God needed to be hang on the cross. We also screamed “Crucify him!” with the crowd, and brought Jesus to the cross with Roman Governor Pilate, and whipped and drove the crown of thorns and nails to Christ’s head, hands, and legs with Roman soldiers. It is well told in a poem of Genzo Mizuno.

People who requested  
Jesus of Nazareth  
Hang on the cross  
People who accepted the request  
People who executed  
In those people  
You can find me

On the day of Pentecost, Peter said to Jewish people, “This Jesus, .... you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.” (Acts 2:23) He could not say this before he received the Holy Spirit. When he was asked about Jesus by the priests, he was afraid of people so that he said “I don’t know him” and protected himself. However, he received the Holy Spirit so that talked as the Holy Spirit wants and accused the people’s sin. Then, those Jewish people admitted their sins and repented.

When the Gospel is told and the cross of Jesus Christ is shown, there is a salvation if you admit your sins and ask forgiveness of your sins, that is repentance. This will happen no matter who you are, Japanese or Jewish. “Shino” in Akutagawa’s novel did not receive her salvation because she did not understand her “sin.” She believed that hiding from the enemy and withdrawing from the battle are her “shame.” In Japanese culture, we dislike “shame” over “sin.” “Sin” is something that God does not want or something against God’s will. Therefore, you can find the solution by repent and be forgiven. However, “shame” is based on our common sense in our belief and society’s expectation. Therefore, our only solution for this shame is hiding it from other’s eyes. In Japan, the people’s eyes are more important and respected than God’s eyes. If your “shame” is obvious

to the people's eyes, you are hopeless.

However, the Gospel has a hope. It will accuse our sins; however, it is not the end. The Gospel will declare "forgiveness" to people who repent. Where does the "forgiveness" come from? It comes from Jesus Christ who experienced the suffering in front of crowd and felt "shame" for us. "Shame" the people hate the most. The cross of Jesus Christ, which is the worst "shame," but we take it our best "pride." "Forgiveness" will remove our "shame" too.

### **3. Christ's Suffering and Koinonia**

Well, the word, "koinonia" is found as a "koinonia of Christ's suffering" in today's verses. Paul says, "I'm seeking the "koinonia" of Christ's suffering. Christians, seek it in the same way as I do."

What is the "koinonia of Christ's suffering?" First, it is found in the "forgiveness of sin." Neither our efforts nor goodness can bring the forgiveness of sin. There is "forgiveness" in Christ's suffering; he suffered and received punishment instead of our sin. We will receive the "forgiveness of sin" through repentance and faith. The "koinonia of Christ's suffering" starts by the "forgiveness of sin."

There is Billy Graham Library in North Carolina, It's entrance is in a shape of cross. No one can go inside unless going through the cross. Likewise, without the "koinonia" (involvement) with Christ's suffering, we cannot enter the world of salvation based on "forgiveness of sin."

Secondly, we keep the "koinonia of Christ's suffering" in our "sanctification." You suffered from your sins and believed in Jesus Christ to become free from sins. You are forgiven. If so, do you want

to remain in the same sins? No, you hope to leave there and wish never return to the same sins again. But despite the desire, we are still under the power of the flesh and the world, we sometimes repeat the same sins that should have been forgiven. In such a case, the Holy Spirit grieves with our spirit, and lead us to the Passion of Christ. The Holy Spirit tells us that the blood of the cross has been swept not only for forgiveness but also for cleansing. We receive the power of that blood in the “koinonia of Christ’s suffering”

Both “forgiveness” and “holiness” come from Christ’s suffering. You may think that we are forgiven by faith, but we should obtain holiness by our own efforts. It is not true. Both of forgiveness and holiness are given by faith, and that faith must be truth, serious, which is manifested in repentance and efforts. The Holy Spirit will cleanse us through our struggles and fights against sins. He leads us the experience of the “koinonia of Christ’s suffering.”

Thirdly, the “koinonia of Christ’s suffering” is in sharing sufferings accompanying missions and ministries. In the second half of the first century, during just one generation, the gospel of Christ was accepted by many people and spread to the Roman Empire in a brief moment. But there was a conflict such as the true God and the Roman gods, Jesus Christ and Roman emperor, a holy life and a selfish way of life, the God’s truth and human wisdom. In such circumstances, they could not avoid the sufferings in the ministries of proclaiming the gospel and building the church.

Paul called the suffering in missions and ministries to build the church “koinonia of Christ’s suffering.” Colossians 1:24 says, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up

what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church." What does "lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body" mean? Is there anything insufficient for the suffering of Christ's cross? No, it is enough to save everyone. The "suffering" is not the suffering of the cross, but suffering of missions and ministries. When Paul was still named "Saul," he was persecuting the Church. Christ appeared Saul and said "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). The Lord did not said "persecuting church" but "me". Because the church is "the body of Christ." And, the persecution against the church is the persecution against Christ himself. Christ has been suffering the suffering of the church as himself. When we suffer in order that the church will be built according the will of Christ, and the gospel will be proclaimed rightly through the church, we have "koinonia of Christ's suffering."

Paul wrote to Timothy, "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God." (2 Timothy 1:8) "Share in suffering for the gospel." I believe that this is a wish not only Paul's but also Christ's for us. There is the "koinonia: with Christ; where we receive the forgiveness of sins, seeking for the "holiness, " and suffering for Christ and his "body," that is "church." "Suffering," is not pleasing to anyone, but it brings intimate "koinonia" with Christ. Don't avoid "suffering," and stay in the "koinonia" with Christ until we will taste the joy that "koinonia of Christ's suffering" will give.

### **(Prayer)**

Our Father God, tell us that our "koinonia" represents your love, and

is based on the grace of Christ, and was created by the Holy Spirit.  
And, please, lead us to the “unity” for which the Lord Jesus prayed.  
We pray in the name of Christ.