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“To Invite Sinners”

Matthew 9:10-13

by Rev. Kazuhiro Takeda

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’”

[An 18-year-old boy's frustration and encounter with the Bible]

I know it, but I can't stop. I think it's good, but I don't have the strength to do it. How miserable I am! When I was a high school student, I spent all my time training, dreaming of becoming an Olympic marathoner. Every morning I ran as fast as I could, deliver newspapers, and ran 7.7 kilometers to school and ran in club activities. If I worked harder than anyone else, I could win first prize. Being recognized, praised, and admired by everyone was my purpose in life and my purpose for living. The only way to feel secure and satisfied was to keep winning in a competitive society.

[You don't need confidence. God will do it], I was said so and I jumped into it. On the way home from church at night after welcoming Jesus into my heart, the sky is full of stars blessing me. I am no longer alone from now on. Whether I can or not, it doesn't matter anymore. I am loved just the way I am.

【I want to be a counselor for young people like myself who are struggling to be themselves】 I want to provide a safe place for the heart while ranching.

I went on to study animal husbandry at the College of Agricultural Practice and worked in the livestock industry, and at the age of 29, I was trained at the Extended Mission Academy and started Makiba Gospel Chapel.

Focusing on children's evangelism, I opened a children's playground, "Mini 4WD Land," free of charge, while working. Many children came and hustled with him every day. Money didn't last. I had only pennies on hand for a payment of 230,000 yen due in two weeks. When I learned that the pastor who took me to the U.S. for training was coming to Sendai, I went to see him for the first time in five years. Mr. Takeda. What is your problem? My problem is lack of money. If only I had money, I could continue. The pastor said, "What you are doing now, Mr. Takeda, is something that is desperately needed for the children. You should not give up just because of money. For what is necessary for people to live, heaven will help then, even if no one else helps. So let's pray." He took my hand and prayed with all his heart. The next morning, as I was walking and praying at my usual prayer place after three sections of newspaper delivery, I murmured to God. "The pastor said I shouldn't give up just because of money, but I was exhausted. God, what can I do?" At that moment, God spoke to my heart.

"I know all about your hard work. I know all your hardships. I was willing to bear all your sins and iniquities and lay down my life on the cross. You should lay down your life for the needs of the children in front of you." That's how it came to my mind. What? Am I willing to lay down my life? I had worked so hard for the needs of the children, but I could not bear it. And when I wondered how hard it must have been for Jesus, who redeemed all my burdens, I realized that the hardness of that cross was the magnitude of his love. The agape love that I had understood in my head came to my heart as a real feeling, and God's love rained down on me, making me snort, cry, and shout in

the middle of the rice paddies. If He needs even the life of someone like me, I will gladly lay down my life.”

That was 28 years ago. Since then, I have been risking my life. The God who feeds us in the wilderness, who does not reject anyone who comes to Him, has come to invite sinners and to save them.