

Neither Jews nor Greeks

Megumi Church Founding Anniversary Service April 13, 2025

Prelude : Since today is the Passion Week Service, let us meditate on the Passion of the Lord Jesus.

Opening Hymn: Seika No. 450 “Why, My God”

Prayer : Moderator

Sermon Introduction

This morning is the Passion Week Service as well as the Anniversary Service. The anniversary was established to commemorate the day when the first Sunday service of Megumi Church started. On this day, Tsuchiura Megumi Church remembers that this church was started by American missionaries. Let us rejoice. It is like a proof that the gospel is a universal power that saves anyone and everyone.

Last October, I went to Indonesia, where I once spent 10 years. I worshipped with everyone from the Dukuh church, where 11 of the 21 people baptized in 1979 had already fulfilled their faith and gone to heaven. They all shared with us the wonder of the gospel of Jesus Christ by the way they lived. Through their faith and the way they lived, God taught us two things.

No matter what country or culture one lived in, what gave anyone forgiveness of sins and new and eternal life was 'the universal power of the gospel of Christ'. And therefore, what the Church, the body of saints, has is the “Universal Power of Jesus Christ, and Internationality of the Church”. This is the truth of my experience and my joyful confession during my 10 years as a missionary. This is the blessing I experienced when I believed in the God of the Bible. And it is a blessing so profound that it cannot be fully appreciated. The mission field was my place of learning.

These two blessings became one of the principles of Megumi Church.

A global church (holistic and international)

The gospel of Christ is the power of God to save those who believe, no matter what their race, culture, or nationality. Therefore, the Church, the flock of saints, is by nature omnipresent and by nature global. What the Church has is “the universal power of the gospel of Christ” and “the worldliness of His Church”.

There are words of Scripture that confess this truth.

Gal. 26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The principle goes further.

Therefore, we plan so that this worldliness in Christ can be experienced within Tsuchiura Megumi Church, and we take care that the young people can eventually contribute in the international community.

We want to experience this internationality in Christ in this church. It is sad that churches have not experienced this internationality and blessing that churches should experience. I mean “internationality” (beyond race, ethnicity, nationality, and social stratification). We want to be a flock that can enjoy this internationality more and more abundantly.

Actually, Megumi Church is a very international church. Even in the 29 years that I have been the head pastor, I have worshipped with many Christians of other nationalities. India, Indonesia, Korea, China, Laos, Nepal, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, Singapore. And the United States, Canada, Germany, France, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Iran, Kenya. We have had church life together with so many other nationalities.

We would like to deepen our fellowship with the foreigners who are present in Megumi Church. These people are witnesses to the universal power of the Gospel to save anyone.

Furthermore, many of our foreign friends are foreign students or trainees in Japan, but they love Japanese people. And when they return to their home countries, they work in important positions. It is such a waste and a shame that we worship together every week and never exchange a word.

We have many friends who have lived in foreign countries. I cannot count the number of people who have studied and learned in foreign countries. There are also many who have served in other countries through participation in JICA and various international cooperation organizations. Mr. Okada, Mr. Ishigami. And Mr. Furumoto is still working as UN staff in Pakistan, assisting refugees.

Many of them have visited foreign countries for short periods of time. In the past, there are young men and women who have served as mission volunteers in Bangkok, where Japanese missionaries are working. Many of them have had close contact with Christians there.

Are you experiencing the worldliness of the church, the internationality of the church, and this blessing within Megumi Church? Are the young people awakening to this truth? We want the youth of the church to experience the power of God working in other peoples. Koinonia is the best scene and the best opportunity to do so.

To date, we have had exchange with Daebang Church in Seoul, Korea, and the number of reciprocal visits has reached 900 people. In 2025, middle and high school students from Daebang Church will visit us for a camp. In 2026, we plan to go there from here. Parents with middle and high school students, please take advantage of these opportunities. Christian couples who do not send them to Koinonia are like locking their own children in a sitting room.

Mr. and Mrs. Lee Yeong-Seong and Che Yonsu are currently writing the doctoral dissertation on the blessings of Koinonia.

The Principle continues: TMC's World Mission

And we confess that the mission of world missions has been entrusted to the Church. We pray for, send people to, and support world missions, and strive to be faithful to the Lord's missionary command through various means. We also seek to be a church that always produces and nurtures dedicated people for world missions.

It is also important to share the Gospel with people of other cultures because of the 'universal power of the Gospel of Christ'. Foreign missions are not done because of the needs in that country, in other words, there are many people in a country who have not yet heard the gospel. If that were the case, Japan would be the country most in need of missionaries.

In 1975, exactly 50 years ago, I went to the United States for the first time. I went to a church in Philadelphia and testified that I was going to Indonesia as a missionary. Then, a woman came up to me and said, "Do the Indonesian people understand Japanese?" I said, "No, I will serve in Indonesia after I learn Indonesian." Then she said in a strong tone, "Then you should not go there. You should preach to the Japanese in Japanese. She continued, "We are sending many missionaries from the U.S. to Japan, and you should not leave Japan." It was a frank and natural thing to say. I was perplexed and responded to the person the next day.

"The Lord Jesus commanded the disciples, not the Jewish nation, to do world missions. The world missions was given to the Church, not to the nation. It is true that Japan receives American missionaries, but it does not receive them from the U.S., but from the churches in the U.S. In the U.S., only the large churches but also small rural churches have a world map and support missionaries. The churches in Japan also want to be faithful to this mission of world missions, even if they are small. That is why they send me."

Mission orders are orders given to churches, not to nations or peoples.

It is not a large nation that sends missionaries to small nation. It is not a nation with a large Christian population that sends missionaries to a nation with a small Christian population. We do not send missionaries to developing countries because we are a large economic power. The Christian church's world missions are not motivated by a sense of superpower, ethnic superiority, or economic power.

The Church shares the gospel with those who do not yet know because it is the universal good news that saves everyone. It does world missions because the gospel of Christ it seeks to proclaim is essentially universal in its power to save anyone in any culture.

So, is this church fulfilling the mission of world missions entrusted to it? So far, Megumi Church has sent missionaries to foreign countries. Mr. and Mrs. Suzuki were sent to Brazil to share the gospel with Japanese-Brazilians. Rev. Katsura Kawamura was sent to Thailand. She is now serving in Gifu prefecture as a pastor's wife. We sent Rev. Aki Arai and Rev. Yosia Osaka to Seronam Church in Korea to support their Japanese language meeting for several years.

In addition, Megumi Church accepted and supported international students from TCU as intern seminary students and trained them for teaching.

Tsuchiura Megumi Church has also supported local seminary students.

Fifty years ago, Megumi Church supported our family who went to Indonesia. At that time, 5,000 yen per month was needed for tuition and living expenses for one seminary student. This Megumi Church raised Sudomo seminary students during Rev. Asaoka's time. From my time to today, Sudomo has been used by God and Dukuh Church has grown greatly. The church exists as a family and relative of Megumi Church; Sudomo, who was 18 years old, is already 63 years old. Dukuh Church needs a successor. Please pray for a second Sudomo.

The internationality of the church is both the foundation and the goal.

The internationality of the Church, based on the universality of the Gospel, is the foundation and ideal of the Church. It is a goal that has not yet been fully realized. We must ask ourselves, "Do we have good friends around the world, regardless of race, ethnicity, or nationality? Do we have an international perspective, mutual respect with various peoples, and rejoice with them in their pain together? Are we fellowship with people from all over the world as members of the crew of Spaceship Earth?" These are the issues for prayer.

Finally, to savor this worldliness richly in the international church, and to support and promote cross-cultural missions, will ultimately be our own growth.

For example, it is a departure from prejudice and discrimination against other countries or other ethnicity. It is nearly impossible and difficult to recognize discrimination against other peoples within ourselves. In fact, everyone thinks that they do not discriminate, that they do not have a discriminatory mindset. This is because they are unaware of the discrimination they take for granted.

The best way to recognize this buried sense of discrimination is not to learn about it, but to have a foreign friend. It is important to have a friend who is different and alien to you. And to be pointed out, "I felt discrimination from you." is the first and best chance to overcome the sense of discrimination that is nestled deep within you.

In order to break free from the distorted nationalism that one's own country and culture are superior to those of other countries, one must experience other cultures. The way to become aware of and overcome the sense of superiority, discrimination, and barriers of separation that come from this ignorance is to become the best friend of a foreigner who is different from you. When we all have a foreigner best friend, we will no longer have contempt, meanness, resentment, or hostility toward foreigners, and we will become true cosmopolitan cosmopolitans, free of ethnic, racial, national boundaries, or nationality. At that time, we will be peacemakers in this world. Then there will be no more wars in the world and God's will will be done on earth.

Responsorial Hymn: Sanbika No. 234 A "In the Days of yore the Lord Jesus did scatter.

Celebration Galatians 3:26: There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.