

(This English translation was generated by a machine translation tool. Due to time constraints, it has not been reviewed or edited by a human.)

May 3, 2026 Morning Service

"Bears all things, believes all things"

by Rev. Takao Ichihashi

1 Corinthians 13:1-8

I have spent time since 1976 in countries located in the Rift Valley, also called the tear of the earth, in East Africa, and I have come close to the reality of misery, and even smelled it. Since independence in the 1960s, while struggling for development, at the same time, people who live accompanied by misery, as if a shadow accompanies a person. People massacred by civil wars, purges, and terrorism; enormous numbers of refugees; kidnapping; human trafficking; poverty; famine; infectious diseases—amid these, people whose hearts ache, whose souls are crushed, who lament and groan that hope has been lost. Ezekiel called such people "dry bones." However, Ezekiel spoke of the hope that the dry bones left behind in that reality of despair and death would come back to life, be restored as human beings, and a new community would be formed. That miracle happens because God breathes the Spirit of life (which is the power of the life of the resurrection of Christ that is to come) into the dried bones. Boast of that and proclaim it—that is Ezekiel's mission, and the mission of Christians; that is what it means to "live the answer" in this world filled with misery, contradiction, irrationality, cruelty, and ugliness. And so, we began the church. It was 1997.

A ten-minute walk from the church, there was a slum spreading in a valley called Kibagare. From there, children came to the church. Their lives could also be called miserable. Makeshift shacks of corrugated iron with holes; when it rains, with only the clothes on their backs, they lie down on the wet dirt floor; lacking even food for that day; enduring silently; going out to beg; children who turn to stealing; malnutrition; even if they fall ill, there is no means to buy medicine; no water supply or sewage; an unsanitary environment with garbage and filth scattered; chronic poverty; violence; crime; sexual violence; child neglect; domestic violence; drugs; prostitution... they must survive in such circumstances. Whether they like it or not, they expose cunning and evil. To protect themselves, they lie, skillfully make excuses that turn others into villains. They display charm they do not feel. Calculated appeals for sympathy, small threats, all kinds of shrewdness; a toughness as if they know life far more than well-meaning adults; and also a certain admirable earnestness.

Even if they are told at church, "Each one of you is precious, an irreplaceable person, you were born to be loved," the reality leaves them no choice but to say, "That's a lie." They have never been told "I love you," never been treated that way, never even thought that they are

loved. Their self-evaluation is low. One is made to feel how hard it is to live. There is running water, there is electricity, there is no day without food, they do not have to walk barefoot, their safety is at least somewhat protected—for them, such a life is like having already succeeded more than halfway in life.

It is said that children are the hope of the future, but when one looks at them, it feels as if one is already seeing a future that is wounded and gasping. Yet before long, we must hand over our place to them. What kind of hope remains? (What does it mean to “live the answer” in the midst of this?)

As a clue to finding hope, we were shown to engage in education. Through Christian educational activities, just as dry bones come back to life, that the power of the life of Christ would be breathed into them; that they would stand on their own feet, and build a community in which they share life with others and live together—that was the beginning of the Koinonia Education Center.

In January 2003, education began by receiving sixteen four-year-old children. Gradually, results appeared, and in the slum the children began to shine in academic ability and in life attitude, and strong requests arose for continuation into elementary and secondary education. In order to secure the facilities necessary for sustainable educational activities, in 2011 we moved to a rented facility in the suburbs of Nairobi, and in 2016 we finally obtained 10 acres of land in Mai Mahiu, 70 kilometers from Nairobi, began construction of school buildings, and started classes in 2020. Currently, one-third of the master plan has been completed, but the project is ongoing.

Just as Christ said, “The poor you will always have with you,” we began to accept children from poor households scattered in the area to which we relocated. At present, there are 155 students enrolled; students receiving tuition support from sponsors (95); students whose guardians pay tuition (16). Students with different tribes and life backgrounds, within one educational environment, acknowledging each other’s differences and respecting one another while learning and living together—we desire that they grow as people who can contribute to a diverse world.

The school’s motto is “Nevertheless, let us say yes to life.” As free human beings intended by God, not becoming slaves to any power or circumstance of this world, finding the fulcrum of one’s irreplaceable life, growing into the likeness of Christ, and becoming those who find joy in living to serve others—such a desire is put into it.

This is a long-cherished wish. It will not be fulfilled lightly; it cannot be achieved so easily; beyond the present reality, one does not know when it will be accomplished, yet it is a wish that must never be abandoned. It is an effort that does not fit the current tendency to

measure results in the short term. Yet we have the word of promise that supports us and pushes us forward: the words of Paul, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."

"Bears all things" is, in Greek, the word *stegō*, meaning "to cover, to envelop." It is to accept and wrap up entirely physical and mental weakness, personalities and attitudes that anger others and produce friction, and even wrongdoing—exactly the way Christ deals with us. "Believes all things" is to be convinced of what is hoped for and to confirm as though seeing facts not yet seen. There is not a single piece of junk. People can change. Unless one is convinced and believes that they will grow into the free human beings intended by God, one is seized by anxiety and fear. Calculations of economic activity that demand quicker and better results produce education that cannot wait, child-rearing that cannot wait. To believe, not give up, remain involved, and to discover the different shining of growth in each individual who has been brought out—that is joy and gratitude. "Hopes all things"—Erich Fromm said, "To hope is like a crouching tiger, always ready for what has not yet been born, what has not yet appeared." In the Old Testament, the word "to wait in hope" derives from a verb that expresses the state of a rope or cord being tightly intertwined. We prepare for what will eventually emerge from the children, entwine ourselves with it, and remain involved. And "endures all things"—to support from below with both hands so as not to give up, so as not to collapse. Just as Aaron and Hur supported Moses' hands, we are grasped by the Spirit of Christ, and, being poured with the Spirit of Christ's love, we continue to be involved with the children.

As we continue that labor of love, one day the children realize: "I am not forgotten. I have not been given up. I have not been abandoned. I am thought of as precious. I am delighted in. I am appreciated." The confidence that such a self is loved makes them strong and changes them. A miracle happens.

At the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake, a child handed me five yen, given by his mother to buy fried bread for breakfast, saying, "Pastor, please use this as an offering." Carrying water in a 20-kilogram poly tank for a neighboring house, helping gather firewood for cooking, the 20 yen received, the 50 yen earned from collecting scrap iron, the 20 yen earned from selling bananas—they collected a total of 60,000 yen. Children who had thought that they were poor and it was natural to receive were changed into those who give. We learned that there is no person so poor that they have nothing to give. They know the answer of what should be done. Even in severe circumstances, they are being changed to live the answer. Not asking "why" and nothing happening, but even if it is small, even if it is little, they live the answer, "this is it." I believe that is the way of being of a person who walks saying, "Nevertheless, let us say yes to life." I believe it is the fruit of Koinonia's education.