

Address at Southwark Cathedral
15th. March 2014
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It's now three years since an earthquake of unprecedented magnitude hit eastern Japan, bringing with it the triple disasters of earthquake, tsunami and wide-ranging nuclear contamination. From the very beginning, we were blessed with prayers and support from countries across the world, and especially from across the Anglican Communion. We are particularly grateful for the prayers and support of the Church of England, and of the Japanese community living in UK. And also thank you very much for this invitation to Southwark Cathedral to attend this service and to pray together with you.

Last October, the Archbishop of Canterbury and his wife were kind enough to visit Japan on their way to the World Council of Churches meeting in Korea. They met with victims of the tsunami, which gave us great comfort and encouragement. In the summer of 2012, we were also visited by Bishop Michael Iprgrave, who came to Kamaishi, a small town which had been devastated in the tsunami. The Bishop showed great sympathy for all those suffering.

Through the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown many have lost their homes and their loved ones. Many more are forced to live far away from home, having lost their communities and their jobs. They still have no idea if things will ever return to any normality. Three years on and more people are dying, without hope, often alone, sometimes by suicide and sometimes in the hard struggle for reconstruction. Recently, a newspaper said that the number of victims who have died after the disaster in Fukushima prefecture more than the number of victims at that day, 11th. March 2011.

Many words have been spoken, books written and songs composed since the earthquake and tsunami. One day I happened to hear a cd brought out by the famous Japanese singer, Kuwata Keisuke. Listening to one particular song, I was very moved. These words were clearly about the earthquake and tsunami:

What happened that day had never happened before,
And life changed for each and every one.
A new season dawned,
Brought by a force beyond imagining.
But now, walk on!
Over the rainbow of tears.
Never looking back.

Everyone, come up on stage!
Where you love to be, and where our hearts leap for joy!
Believe, believe in a new dawn!
Now is the time to stand again!

It was a song with the English title, “Let’s Try Again”. The singer performed in the affected areas and showed great sympathy for all the victims. I listened to it over and over again and was moved to tears. But as I listened, there was one line that I couldn’t get out of my mind

Everyone, come up on stage!
Where you love to be, and where our hearts leap for joy!

Who is the “Everyone” that he’s singing about? We feel grief and sorrow for victims of all ages, but it’s the thought of the young people and the children swept away by the tsunami that is particularly hard to bear. At one primary school alone, 74 children and 10 teachers failed to take refuge from the tsunami in time and are still missing.

Listening to this song again and again, however, I could not help but thinking further of those children and young people who lost their lives. Unless we include them in the vision of ‘coming up on the stage where you love to be’, we cannot be healed and restored.

It became too painful for me to listen to this song.

The Japanese religious scholar Tetsuo Yamaori talks, from a Buddhist point of view, about improving and deepening human relationships. He refers not only to the importance of relationships between the living, but also of those between the living and the dead. Is the idea of “communion, or solidarity between the living and the dead, as well as between the living,” really so unrealistic? In fact, this is our own hope, based on faith, and without it we cannot be saved. In chapter 21 of the last book of the New Testament, the Book of Revelation, this final hope is written about in this way:

See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.’

This is a vision of “a new heaven and a new earth”. Our job, as a Church, is not only to put all the efforts we can into recovery and support for the living, but also to continue to remember the dead. We must continue to pray, as we look towards that final hope.

The whole of creation is groaning, just as it was in the New Testament reading this evening. The young, the old, and not only humans, but the whole of nature. In the areas off limits due to nuclear contamination, the cattle and dogs once loved by their owners turned feral, and eventually died of starvation. Our

beautiful countryside, all creation, groans together, waiting and hoping for redemption.

Soon after the earthquake and tsunami, the NSKK (Anglican Church in Japan) set up a project to provide support for victims called the “Let Us Walk Together Project”. It was the first time that all 11 dioceses, from Hokkaido in the north to Okinawa in the south, had joined together to support victims of a natural disaster like this. Many, both clergy and lay people, have worked as volunteers. We have deeply valued not only the support activities in a tangible way, but also we have welcomed visitors from other parts of Japan and worldwide who come to meet and pray together with people affected, a kind of “pilgrimage”.

This is because we believe the most important thing for us and you is to **KEEP PRAYING** and **NOT TO FORGET**.

It is with this in mind that I should like to celebrate this act of worship with you today. May the Peace of Christ be with you all.