The 50th-Year Jubilee

Christian workers in Japan heave a sigh when it comes to the task of reaching the other 99%. Many challenges and few results test the faith of even the most patient missionaries. But then God makes it grow...

Fukushima is hardly a place to celebrate. It’s ground zero for the 311 nuclear disaster. Radiation fears sparked a mass evacuation. Ghost towns abound. But on September 14th, the city became a festive place once again. The body of Christ gathered here for a special reason: our association of Baptist churches turned 50 years old, now with over 3800 members in 54 churches from Tohoku to Tokyo. It’s our year of jubilee!

As part of this 50th Anniversary Celebration, we broke the norms. Instead of the usual slate of speakers, we enjoyed a talent show from our member churches that included gospel music, karate, hula and handbells. All this was set in a Japanese quiz show format in which the audience was invited (with colored paper) to test their knowledge of our churches’ history. Our own church plant was featured and one of our members even won top prize!

It was humbling to learn that many of our churches trace their roots back to American missionaries who came and planted seeds. Setbacks, language bloopers and cultural missteps? Yes! Plenty! “But God made it grow” (1 Cor 3:6). This group of 500 believers gathered in Fukushima are a testimony to God’s harvest work!

Additional support: $216 needed monthly. See our website to give online.
Yoyogi Park in Tokyo is a place of bad news. In August, some 70 people who visited the massive park fell ill with dengue fever. The culprit? Mosquitoes. The park was shut down and fumigated.

Yoyogi Park is also a place of good news. The gospel is preached. Our church has gotten involved there in a homeless ministry. Every Saturday morning, 30~40 homeless men gather at the park entrance. An outdoor service is held. Food and clothing is distributed. The outbreak of fever has made the park area a dangerous place to be. But hungry people are waiting. So we put on insect repellent and long-sleeved shirts, and go as near to the park as possible.

The men come out of their makeshift shelters built from shopping carts, cardboard boxes and blue tarps, and gather at the new location. After the service, during our coffee break time, I walk over to chat with Mr. K.

Looking at Mr. K, you wouldn’t think he’s lived on the street for 17 years. He’s dressed neatly, polite and well spoken. Today he even pulls out a digital camera to show me shots of the many snakes crawling about the park. “Who wants to sleep outside with things like that?” he asks me. Who indeed? The mosquitoes were enough to worry about!

Mr. K shares a bit of his story with me while sipping on coffee. He came from a good family, graduated from a respected college, and started to earn a decent living. So what’s he doing on the streets of Tokyo? Mr. K says he prefers “outdoor life” but admits the real problem: “I just couldn’t fit into company structure. I felt left out. Even my family gave up on me.”

Such is the case for many in Tokyo. Many are simply displaced by the tight social structure and find it hard to “fit into the system” which some have termed the “Asian caste.” The church is one of the places they turn for grace.

Our church plant sees many come that, while not technically homeless, share a common story of being displaced in Japanese society. For each, we try to be a loving group to easily fit into, and a faith family that never gives up on them.

I offer to pray for Mr K. He’s not ready for prayer, but eager to talk more. He says I’m the only person who’s really spoken with him in weeks.

I wonder how Mr. K’s story, or how Japan’s story, will yet be redeemed. I know the gospel is big enough and look expectantly to God’s work in the many “displaced” lives around us.

Would you pray for Yoyogi Park men? Some place faith in Christ, but there are new risks in that decision. In July, a newly-baptized Yoyogi Park homeless man was killed by another out of envy.