

Good morning! I want to thank you for allowing me be here with you today. But first of all, please forgive my strange Japanese! For the past 3 years, both my wife and I have been trying hard to learn this language, but our tongues do want not cooperate with us most of the time. I hope I don't give you a headache from trying to listen to me this morning!

As many of you know, my wife and I have been in Yokohama now for almost 3 years now. During that time, we've had the chance to get to know many of you. We have come to realize that the JBU is kind of like a close family. So many of you have helped us in so many ways—it would be hard to name all of you. Some of you have helped us meet our kids' education needs, some of you have helped us minister at Soshin Church and at Tokyo Peace Church, some of you have helped us serve on the Kanto Gakuin campus, and others have helped us with our legal and financial matters—and of course, you have allowed us to become your friends, which is the most important thing of all.

But of course, this is what family members do—family members help each other. So we are very glad to be part of this family. We consider it an honor and a privilege to serve God here in Japan together with you.

Today, I want to briefly look at the two Bible passages we read, one recorded by Matthew; the other written by Paul. I just used a *metaphor* to talk about the church, didn't I—the metaphor of family. But this morning, I'd like us to think about another important metaphor—the metaphor of the church *as a body*. Paul says, “You are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”

All of you know this passage well. We all know that Paul often compares the church to a human body. In I Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, he writes that each member plays a special role—some people are like hands, others are like ears, others like eyes, etc. In Colossians and Ephesians, (assuming these books were written by Paul), he uses the metaphor again. In these books, he emphasizes that Jesus is the *head* of the body—the “command center” of the body.

This morning, let's think about this metaphor—that the church is the *body* of Jesus Christ. Even though Jesus ascended into heaven after his resurrection, the church—his symbolic *body*—was supposed to remain here on earth, alive and working in the world.

With this in mind, it's interesting that before Jesus died, he ate a meal with his disciples and *talked about his body*. Matthew records it this way: “As they were gathered at the table, Jesus took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, ‘Take and eat. This is my body.’”

Isn't this strange? Why would he compare his body to bread? Why would he *tear* it and give it to his disciples? It's even more interesting to me that Paul writes extensively about the Lord's Supper in I Corinthians chapter 11, then, *in the very next chapter*—chapter 12, he write about the church being Christ's body. Have you noticed that before?

The first time I noticed this, it made me hear Christ's words—"Take and eat. This is my body" in a very different way.

When Jesus said, "This is my body," and broke the bread, we of course remember that Christ was unjustly crucified for our wrongs. He was broken for us. He was broken so that we could be healed. This is, of course, the most important meaning of the last supper. But we should also not forget what Paul says—that *we, too*, are "the body of Christ." We are the body of Christ in the world *here and now*.

So it should not surprise us that *we, too*, must be *broken*, before we can be truly become Jesus' disciples. Jesus took this bread, and consecrated it, and broke it, and gave it. This is a beautiful symbol of Jesus' own life; but it's also a beautiful symbol of the church.

God takes *us*, and consecrates *us*, and breaks *us*, and gives *us* to others for their healing.

I have to admit that I don't like that thought very much. Frankly speaking, I'd rather not be broken bread. I'd rather be a nice, firm, sturdy loaf of bread. I'd rather be safe. I'd rather not be troubled.. I'd rather not have something tearing into me and ripping me apart. How about you?

But what we must remember is that, very often, our *brokenness* is what God uses to heal those around us.

I'm not very old—only 35—and I've not had as many experiences as many of you have had, but even in my short life, this truth has become very clear to me.

About 9 years ago, I was working as a chaplain at a rehabilitation hospital in New Jersey. In this hospital, there were all sorts of people—a few patients had very serious health problems, but most people had problems which were not very serious. Most of the patients were recovering from minor operations—by far the most common were knee replacements. Usually about 40% of all the hospital's patients were recovering from knee replacement surgery.

One day, I got a notice that two new patients had been admitted to my floors. When I looked at their personal information, I saw that one of them was a 45 year old lady who had just had a knee replacement—the doctor had noted that she was recovering well. When I looked at the other woman's information, I noticed that she was an 80 year old woman who had fallen in her bath tub at home. The fall had broken her back and had left her paralyzed from the waist down.

My first thought was, “Oh no! What a terrible injury! It's going to be really hard to counsel and pray with this 80 year old woman!” So I thought, “Well, I'll go make the easy visit first—first, I'll go visit the woman with the knee replacement.”

Well, I walked into the 45 year old woman's room—the woman who had had the knee replacement—and she was crying. I introduced myself and tried to comfort her for a few minutes, but she was very upset. She said she was mad at God. She had been planning to go on an overseas vacation with her husband, but the knee surgery had made her trip impossible. She was mad at her kids for not coming to visit her everyday. She was upset that it would take a month to recover from the surgery. She was worried that her cat would loose weight because her husband had to feed it while she was in the hospital. In other words, she was worried about almost everything.

Have you ever had the experience of being with a person who is so worried that they make YOU feel worried? That was the way I felt. I tried to pray with her. But by the time I left her room, I had listened to her complain for about a half and hour, and finally, I, too, had become tired and depressed.

I walked very slowly over to the 80 year old woman's room, imagining that this would be an even more depressing experience. But surprisingly, that was not true at all—actually it was quite the opposite!

After I introduced myself as the chaplain, this lady smiled and clapped her hands and called me over to her bed. She gave me a big hug around my neck, and said she wanted to pray with me right away. I was shocked. Usually the chaplain has to ask this, right!? But this woman was obviously a strong Christian.

She started praying—she thanked God for allowing her wake up that day. She thanked God for her family. She praised the Lord for being in a hospital where she could be taken care of. She praised God for her doctors. She praised God that I had come into her room that morning!

After the prayer, she started to tell me about her fall. After she fell, she had laid in her bathtub for *six hours* before her daughter came home from work and found her. But she didn't complain about this!

Actually, she said that she was thankful for her daughter coming home and calling the ambulance, but she knew she was ready to die, so if God wanted to take her to heaven that would have been okay with her, too. She told me that, during that six hours she laid in the bathtub, she spent her time sang hymns. She said she felt that even then, God was right there with her, giving her strength.

We talked for about an hour, and, of course, I got the chance to talk to her many times afterwards. This woman stayed in the hospital for about six weeks. After that, she went back to her home, still paralyzed from the waist down.

But this hadn't discouraged her. She knew God would be with her, and she spent the six weeks she was in the hospital sharing her faith and her joy with all the doctors and nurses there. On the day she left the hospital, all of us were so sad to see her go, the cafeteria workers made a special cake for her. We had a small party for her in her room before she left, and she asked that we all sing together some of her favorite hymns...

Not just me—everyone who worked with her was sad to see her leave the hospital.

Of course you know why. Because her joy and faith were contagious!

But remember this—the first day this woman came into the hospital, the woman with the knee surgery had arrived, also! This woman—the 45-year-old, with the not-very-serious knee surgery—effected no one at all. Actually, the nurses and doctors were glad to see her leave. She complained the entire time she was in the hospital.

Strangely enough, the 80-year-old, with the terrible injury—the woman who had reason to be truly depressed—*she* was the one who had blessed and encouraged us. The reason was that, even though she was suffering, something she had inside of her allowed her to overflow with faith and joy.

This is an experience which I have never forgotten.

If you're like me, sometimes, we try to run away from problems. We try to avoid being broken. We try to avoid being in pain.

Or, if we become broken, we sometimes try to hide this fact from others. Maybe we think that if they see us broken, they will think less of us.

But the truth is that, if we are Christians, we must realize that we are *made to be broken*. Not just broken—we are made to be *consecrated, broken, and given*. This is what God wanted to do with his Son, Jesus—to consecrate him, to break him, and to give him to the world for the world's healing.

If we are Christians, surely God wants to do the same thing with us—to *consecrate us, to break us, and through our brokenness, to heal a broken world*.

The truth is that people who are not Christians don't know how to react to brokenness. They see it as simple tragedy. Like the woman with the knee operation who I mentioned earlier—these people can only see brokenness as a *bad* thing; as something to be *avoided*. But we who are Christians—we know that God is in control of this whole crazy world—we know that God *uses* human brokenness to *heal* broken hearts.

This is an empowering thought!

What about you? Have you been broken lately? This is not necessarily a bad thing. It's not necessarily something to be avoided. As a matter of fact, it may be God trying to use you to heal people around you. Don't run away! Our *brokenness* is not the most important thing—the *way God is using our brokenness* is the most important thing.

In my thinking, the church has no greater job than to simply BE the body of Christ. Let's not be afraid to be broken and given. God consecrated us for a reason—and this is the reason: it's for the healing of the world. If we can do that, we'll find true power for living. And if we can do that, the church can keep on giving that power to others.

Let us pray,

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your church. Truly we are a different kind of people. Help us to remember to look for your purposes in the middle of our suffering. Give us the strength, not just to persevere in difficult times, but also to be infectious with joy—and infectious with faith! Help us to heal others even when we are in pain. Help us to be your church—your body.

So we ask for your strength, your power, and your blessing in Jesus' name, Amen.