

## Osaka International Church

Date: October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2008

Daniel Ellrick

Title: Workers for the Harvest

Scripture: 1 Peter 5:1-4

Key Verse: Luke 10:2

OIC 34<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

First Pastoral Assistant Installation

### I. Introduction

Happy Anniversary! Today we are celebrating our 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the establishment of OIC and we are giving thanks for all that the Lord has done in and through His church. God is good! And, God has been good to us! It is a joy and a privilege to be part of His work here in Osaka.

The Scripture teaches us that God is eternal and omnipresent; God is present not only in every place and time, but also beyond time and space. As Creator, God transcends the time and space of the universe that He created. When we consider this we realize that God is really big! The whole universe is not big enough to contain God! To God a huge galaxy like the Sombrero Galaxy shown in this photo from the Hubble Space Telescope is like a tiny speck of dust.



God knows the name of every star, and He also knows tiny things, like the microscopic world inside specks of dust. In modern laboratories we use electron microscopes to look at these tiny worlds (photo: salmonella bacterium).. But God sees all of this all the time; He sees and knows everything. God knows the big things, the medium things, and the tiny things.



God not only knows all and sees all; God also cares. The Scripture tells us that God is love; it is His very nature to love. And He especially loves each and every person. God knows and cares about everything in your life; He knows about the big stuff, and He knows about the little stuff. God knows you and He loves you. He knows us, and He knows us.



God is always present in every time and place, but He has also promised to be present in a very special way in times and places where people call upon His name. For the last 34 years OIC has been such a place. People have come to OIC as individuals loved by God, but as we have called on the Name of the Lord together, God has revealed Himself and His love to us in many special ways. Now, in order to share this experience of God's love more effectively and with more and more people, we need to prepare OIC to grow in love and in ministry.

A few weeks ago, Dave Taylor shared about the new Pastoral Assistant (PA) program that we have been working on in the Church Council. I think that Dave expressed the idea very well when he talked about connected relationships and about the role of PAs in helping people to get and stay connected. The Lord knows each and every person and He has an intimate and personal relationship with every person who has believed in Him. But I am much more limited. Although I would like to know every person who comes to OIC, I am not able to have a close relationship with everyone.

The Lord brings many people to OIC, and many of them make friends, get connected, and continue to worship with us joyfully. However, some people are too shy to easily make friends and they do not manage to get connected to our church family. And, after a while, they give up and stop coming. On the other hand, some people who have been solidly connected to the OIC family gradually drift away for one reason or another. Sometimes it is because the Lord is leading them to another church for some purpose. If so, that is okay; we each need to go where the Lord leads us. But other people drift away because they have questions

or struggles that they don't know how to find help with. They need to talk with someone, but they just aren't sure who they should go to.

The Pastoral Assistant program is intended to make sure that all of us have a, "go to," person for those times when we need to talk with someone or when we need to ask a question. The PAs will pray for the people in their groups, communicate with them to encourage them and to build relationships, and they will be available to you when you have a need. If you feel that you need to bring something directly to me or to the Church Council, that is okay. But having a PA gives you another option, a person that you know who is easy to, "go to," and get your question answered. The idea of having PAs may seem new, but it is actually very solidly based on Scripture.

Throughout the Bible, when leaders needed more help, they called new leaders. In Exodus, Moses was exhausted, so he got some advice and appointed other leaders. **Exodus 18:24-25, "Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens."** In 2 Chronicles 17, when King Jehoshaphat wanted to bring revival to the land, he selected people to share the task and sent them out. **2 Chronicles 17:9, "They taught throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the Lord; they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people."**

Our Lord Jesus also appointed others to share in the work. First, Jesus selected 12 apostles to go out in His Name. Later, in Luke 10, Jesus sent out 72 new workers. **Luke 10:1-2, "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."**

And throughout church history, in the New Testament and ever since, whenever the work has grown in a particular time and place, new leaders have been called to assist in the task. Today, as we celebrate our 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we can truly say that here at OIC, **"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few."** And we have been praying that the Lord would send new workers, and He has done so. This past summer, after praying about and discussing these things, I and the Church Council sent out letters inviting 44 members of OIC to pray about becoming Pastoral Assistants (PAs). With joy, I am happy to report that 11 people have volunteered to accept this ministry challenge. In a few minutes, we will install these volunteers as our first OIC Pastoral Assistants.



In many ways, the role that we are giving to the new PAs is similar to the role of elders in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul often speaks of elders and deacons in his letters, and other New Testament writers also teach about this role. The Bible speaks of the Lord as the Great Shepherd and of all of us as sheep of the Lord's flock. Pastors, elders, deacons, and Pastoral Assistants are leaders under the Lord, and may be thought of as under-shepherds. Lesser shepherds who work under the leading of the Great Shepherd to help in caring for the sheep. Of course, it is one of the interesting aspects of Scripture that just as the Lord Jesus is both the Great Shepherd and the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, so also these under-shepherds are also the Lord's sheep.



In 1 Peter 5, Peter gives instructions for under-shepherds, or elders. Let's read 1 Peter 5:1-4.

## II. Scripture: 1 Peter 5:1-4 (NIV)

[1] To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: [2] Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; [3] not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. [4] And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown

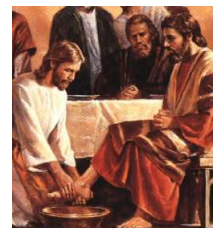
of glory that will never fade away.

### III. Exposition

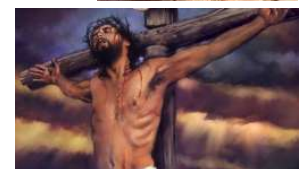
Peter speaks of the, “**elders among you.**” I think this hints at an important truth. Wherever God has called people together for worship, I believe that the Bible shows that God has also given spiritual gifts of all kinds for ministry, including gifts of leadership. We want to recognize those that the Lord has called and gifted and release them into ministry. In this way the church is blessed by their ministry, and they are also blessed in being able to minister in the Name of Jesus and in sharing in the heavenly rewards of ministry, spoken of here as a crown of glory.

The Lord cares for each and every one, and those who serve as under-shepherds need to learn the same attitude of love and humility, caring for the sheep with willing hearts, being eager to serve. Shepherds must not be greedy, and they must not be arrogant or proud. Rather, they are to be good examples of Christ’s own humility and love, caring for all, and serving for all.

When Jesus wanted to teach His disciples about serving others, Jesus knelt down to wash the feet of the disciples. All who would serve as leaders in the church especially need to learn from the Lord’s example. But we cannot serve this way out of our own strength or wisdom. We need the Lord’s grace and His strength and wisdom.



So we give thanks that His love has been proven and His grace has been poured out at the cross. The cross of Jesus must always remain central to all ministry, for it is the place where God’s grace has been poured out. We also need to continue always to seek the filling of the Holy Spirit and the gifts and fruit of the Spirit for ministry. Only in the Spirit of God can we find the strength and wisdom that we need for the awesome task of sharing Jesus’ love.



Finally, I want to encourage our new Pastoral Assistants and all of us to look upon people with eyes of faith. Sometimes we look at our brother or sister and we see only the problems and sins that plague that person. But if we have eyes of faith, we can begin to see beyond the problems, and perhaps we can get a glimpse of how beautiful that person will be when Jesus completes the work He has begun in their life. I think that when we see people coming to church or seeking out Christians with their questions, we can trust that the Lord has already begun a work in that person’s heart, and that the Lord will finish His work. Paul wrote to the church in Philippi about this saying, in **Philippians 1:6**, “**being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**” We want to remember this verse, and see people not just as they are now, but as they will be when the Lord finished His work in their life.

### IV. Conclusion

I think it is a wonderful blessing to be able to install our new PAs today as we celebrate our 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a church congregation. Through the grace of the Lord, I pray that we will continue to see the Lord fulfilling His Word and doing His work here at OIC until He returns in glory on the final day. May many, many more people be added to our family of faith, and may we see the words of Ephesians 2:19-20 fulfilled more and more in our hearts and in our fellowship. **Ephesians 2:19-20**, “**Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.**”

### V. Closing Prayer