

I. Introduction

Happy Anniversary! On October 13th of 1974, Pastor Jack Marshall led the first OIC worship service. Since that time, the Lord has continued to bless OIC with new Christian workers coming into the church and also being sent out to other parts of Japan and around the world. We rejoice in the ministry that the Lord has done in and through OIC.

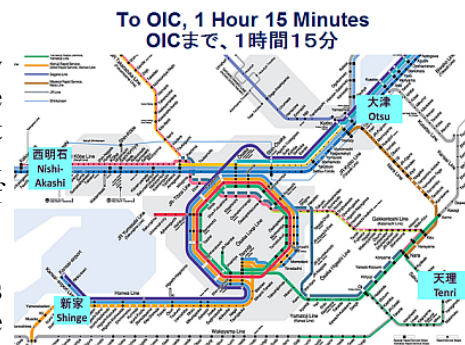


Eleven years ago, the Lord led Karen and me to OIC. More recently, God has brought others, including Joseph, Adam, Brian, and Sampo and their families to join OIC as workers for the harvest. We give thanks to the Lord for these missionary workers. But if we think only of missionaries and pastors when we think of gospel workers, we are missing something very important.

Take a look at this photo. Here is a large field, with only a few workers. The field is wide and the workers are few. Now, take a look at the next photo. We can see only a small portion of the field, but there are a dozen workers cooperating in the harvest. The work is easier and goes more quickly if there are many workers serving in unity.



The Lord has given OIC a very large field. Our church family includes people from Kyoto, Kobe, Nara, and beyond. Of course, we share this field with other churches. But, even so, it is clear that pastors and missionaries cannot and should not be the main gospel workers of the church. The harvest cannot be brought in unless all of us work together.



Let's look at what Paul says in **Ephesians 4:11-12**. For this verse, I like the New Living Translation (NLT), **"Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ."** The spiritual leaders of the church are responsible to equip God's people to do the work. But the work of the ministry is everyone's responsibility. If every brother and sister in the church joins in the work, the task will be much easier and the work will go faster.

Let's take a look also at what Jesus said to the disciples about these things in Matthew 9:35-38.

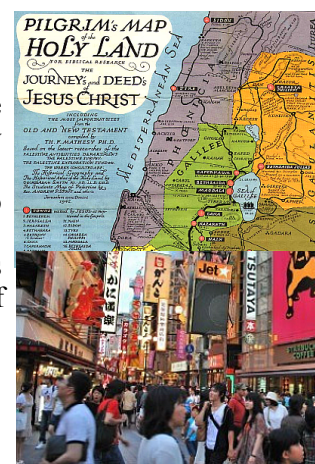
II. Scripture Reading (Matthew 9:35-38, NIV 1984)

35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

III. Teaching

Jesus preached the Good News and ministered to the people in all of the towns and villages. But there were many places to go and many people at every stop. So, shortly after this, Jesus appointed the twelve apostles to go in His Name. And then, in Luke 10, He appointed 72 disciples (70 in some translations), to go ahead of Him to every town and place.

The twelve apostles received a very special calling. But the 72 disciples can be seen as symbolically representing the whole church. Like the crowds of



Israel, the crowds of our field are like sheep without a shepherd, because they do not know Jesus, the Great Shepherd. A bountiful harvest can be brought in, but more workers are needed.

We are blessed at OIC to have many members who are working hard for the glory of the Lord. We have people serving as ushers, on the worship team, as interpreters, and as Sunday School teachers and helpers. We have people teaching English and Japanese outreach classes, people leading small group Bible studies at the church and in home groups and we have a team of people leading the Alpha Course. We have people doing all of these things and more.

We also have church planters. Next Sunday, Pastor Joseph and Amy will start Sunday worship services at the youth hostel in Nagai Park. Some of you may feel that the Lord is calling you to join in this work. If so, praise the Lord! They will need some core members to help the new church get started and it is a blessing and privilege for OIC to partner in this work.

The Abide Calvary Chapel church plant at Nagai is a new thing, but it is not the first church plant that OIC has been involved in. In fact, there are a lot of churches that have roots in OIC, especially through the work of Deaf Ministries International, which started right here. New church plants are often more effective at reaching people than established churches, so we should rejoice when we hear of new churches starting.

It is natural to feel some hesitancy about new things. Most of us are a bit uncomfortable with change. Society tries to tell us that the well-known path is safest. But Jesus never taught the disciples to take the safe path. Look at what Jesus said to the 72 in **Luke 10:3-4**. **“Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.”** These radical instructions were the opposite of how society tells us to do things. Jesus definitely did not tell the disciples to play it safe. Instead, Jesus commanded bold, faith-filled living and ministry. The disciples did not carry food and they did not take money to buy food or to pay for lodging.

That was, however, a special occasion; I don't think we should literally go out with empty pockets in Osaka. But we can learn to trust in God for all things like they did. The safest and best place to be is in the middle of God's will. The love and the providence of God are more certain than any bank account or job. The Lord provided for them as they ministered in His name and preached the Good News of the Kingdom of God. The Lord will do the same for us.

Where did the food and lodging come from? God could have fed them with manna from heaven like He did for Israel in the wilderness. But instead, God chose to work through people. As the disciples ministered to the people, the people invited them in and fed them. The resources that sustained the ministry came from the people the disciples ministered to. This principle is expressed in a common missionary quote, *“The resources are in the harvest.”* The work of evangelism and discipleship produces the resources needed to continue and expand the work.

Here at OIC, our Alpha Course is an example of how, *“The resources are in the harvest.”* From almost every course there are new people getting baptized and volunteering to help with the next course. The people to run Alpha come from Alpha. Most of these people don't have a special calling as teachers or evangelists. They are just Christians, often new Christians, who are serving the Lord as best they can.

In modern times, many farmers buy their seed every year. But in the old days it was not so. The seed for next year's planting came from this year's harvest. In a similar way, the resources for the future of the church come from reaching new people. If we don't plant the gospel seed and pray for a harvest of souls, the church will not continue. This is the work of the whole church.



IV. Conclusion

In **Mark 16:15**, Jesus gave a clear command to share His love. **“He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”** The command is for all of us. And, where there is a clear command, there is no need to wait for a special calling. Some people may feel that they do not know how to share the gospel with others. But God gives what we need to obey, sometimes in surprising ways.

When the Lord spoke to Moses from the burning bush, Moses was unprepared and full of doubts. I think Moses was sure that he didn’t have what was needed to lead Israel to freedom. But take a look at **Exodus 4:2**. **“Then the LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” “A staff,” he replied.”** And, then the Lord showed Moses how to use that staff to free Israel. God doesn’t ask us to use what we don’t have. He asks us to be willing to use what we do have. What is in your hand? God can use it.



The parable of the talents teaches us to invest the things God has entrusted to us. The talents are money, but they represent all the things that God has placed in our hands for His work. The master gave the talents to his servants and then went on a long journey. When he returned, he asked each servant to give an account. For today, we will look at what happened with just one servant. **Matthew 25:20-21**, **“The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ ‘His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’”** When we work for the glory of God by sharing the love of Jesus in word and deed, we share in the joy of the Lord.

Jesus gave His life on the cross as payment for the sins of the world. On the third day, He rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples on many occasions for forty days. Then He returned to heaven. For us, it is like our Lord has gone on a long journey and left us to care for the fields. But He will return. When He does, we will each have to give an account for how we have ministered in His name and how we have used the things that He entrusted into our hands.



Therefore, I pray that we will be diligent, individually and as a church, to work the field God has given us and to preach the Good News to all. Do not focus on the obstacles and issues that come up. We overcome those by keeping our eyes on the Lord. Let’s close with **Hebrews 12:2**, **“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”**

V. Prayer