

## **“Your Faith Have Made You Well”**

Text: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

The Rev. Susumu Ando - July 16, 2017

This morning I would like to share my faith journey for the past 18 months with you. During that period, I have experienced to stand on mountaintop, and also walk through the valley of the shadow of death. My memories are still vivid and raw. If I become emotional, I would apologize you in advance. I hope you understand it.

In January 2016, my primary doctor was impressed by the results of my blood test and joked, “Susumu, are you going to be a centenarian?” I was proud of myself. My whole food, plant-based lifestyle for the previous four years, you may call it vegan, had made me the good physical condition. Besides that, I jogged, did strength training, and yoga 2-3 times a week, and have my daily devotion and Centering Prayer which is Christian meditation. All my efforts were paid off. I stood on mountaintop physically, mentally, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. I thought I might live until being the age of 90. At that time, I was not aware that mold had slowly caused scars and inflammation in my lungs. I had no symptoms, except the shortness of breath after jogging. I thought it was normal.

In April the same year, I went to Japan to attend my mother in law’s funeral service, and then the next day after coming back to the United States, I went to Snowmass, CO to participate in a 10-day Centering Prayer retreat which was a silent retreat. The place is located on high altitude and it was cold in the beginning of May. My immune system went down because of my physical exhaustion, and not enough warm clothing with me. I caught a cold, and sometimes could not stop coughing. I started slowly losing my weight, the average 2 lbs per month.

This coughing continued to July. My primary doctor finally ordered me to have a CAT scan and sent me a pulmonary doctor. My pulmonologist had bronchoscope in September. That caused my right lung crushed. I was hospitalized for four days. A hospital doctor prescribed the steroid drug, prednisone. I had a bad side effect from it. I could not sleep more than 3-4 hours a day. My health quickly started plummeting.

One night, I gave up to sleep at 4 a.m., and checked Facebook. One of my colleagues in the NY Annual Conference who attended an Asian mission trip posted this video (show video). What a coincidence! Rev. Grace Choi of our UM missionary couple who Bellport UM Church has supported was leading Philippine students to sing the praise song, “He Raised Me Up.” It was the first time for me to hear that praise song. The lyrics had been penetrating my soul, and my eyes filled with tears. I felt God’s presence and then heard a small voice in the back of my head, “This sickness won’t take your life.” Also, Mark 10:27 came to my mind, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.” What an assurance I had received! My faith was sustained by it.

My pulmonologist told me that he could not diagnosed my lung disease and referred me to see a doctor in the Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in Manhattan, NY. My new pulmonologist had had many tests, and then I had a surgical biopsy in the middle of December, 2016 there. My left lung artificially was crushed and took mass tissues from it.

A week late, four days before Christmas my wife and I met the pulmonologist. She told me that it was likely that for a decade I had been exposed to black mold in my former church basement where sometimes flooded water came from the windows, and the walls and carpets were wet. As a pastor, I often had gone downstairs, and unknowingly inhaled it. My final diagnosis was chronic hypersensitivity pneumonitis. She told me that my disease is incurable

and progressive. If the scars and inflammation continue like the past five months, I may live from six months and a year. There were two options: first, a medical trial which was a fifty/fifty chance because one group would get placebo; second, lung transplant.

In 2015 the trustees and I finally called a company to remove it after we tried to fix flooding in the basement several times. We found black mold inside the walls of the hallway and of two class rooms and of the boiler room, and of the ceiling panels. We were shocked by how bad the contamination of mold was.

My wife and I shed a lot of tears from our eyes, and fervently prayed to God. I complained to God, "Is it my reward after ministering my former church members, the needy in a local community, the residents in jail, and the voiceless in Haiti with my best gifts and talents for seventeen years? I did know this complaint was irrelevant in advance. But, I could not stop tossing my anger and frustration to God who has a big heart. You understand my feelings if you are cancer survivors, or you lost your loved ones, or relational crises, don't you?"

This photo was taken in January this year. I had lost 19 lbs from the lowest of the healthy BMI (Body Mass Index) for the past eight months. I was just skins and bones and needed oxygen. It took more than a minute to go upstairs with it. My unstoppable coughing were more frequent. I walked literally through the valley of the shadow of death. I suddenly realized I cannot live with my wife who is my partner and my friend in this world forever. It was the most difficult time in my life.

God reminded me of this scripture at that time: "He [Job] said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.'" (Job 1:21 NRSV) When I checked this scripture in the Bible, I felt a powerful feeling in the last sentence: "Blessed be the name of the LORD." My life is not mine, but God's. So, whether I live or die, I want to bless the name of the LORD. God also strengthened my faith with the hymn, "Just a Closer Walk with Thee." I often sung it with tears when I was down.

In the beginning of January, God sent a messenger to me: Dr. Mamiko Matsuda who I met in Vegetarian Summerfest in Pittsburgh, PA four years ago. She who earned a PhD of natural health and healing, has written several books about nutrition and health, and has lectures twice in Japan to educate medical professionals and people there. I emailed my health condition. She immediately responded to me. Let me quote some with her permission: "Pastor Ando, you still can do many things. . . [Green] Juicing is a very effective method to pour high dense nutrients into damaged cells to be restored in a short period. . . There are many evidences for even stage 4 cancer patients to be able to overcome by eating 80-85% of raw green foods such as colorful vegetables and fruit. . . God might tell you through this great trial, saying, 'Tell many sick people who have suffered from their diseases around the world the good news of a healthy lifestyle which is 'If one gives proper [plant-based] nutrients to his or her body, the body itself would restore those cells, and he or she will be healed.' I support you, and pray for your dramatic recovery." I was encouraged by her email and saw hope. I started green juicing and a raw green diet on Jan. 11<sup>th</sup> this year. Within three weeks I did not need oxygen. In six week, my coughing was much less.

Again God spoke to me through this scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:6 "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth." It fit my situation. Dr. Matsuda gave me the important information about nutrition and health. I poured high dense nutrients into my body, and also my extended family like you poured the power of prayers. God has been restoring my wounded lungs. This was what I imagined: God is the divine composer of a healing symphony, and

conducts it with nutrient orchestra members. The beautiful sounds are very powerful because of my people's prayers.

Last month I passed the first mile stone, and the next one will be Christmas: one day at a time, and one moment at a time. I have good days and bad days, especially when I cough or when I lose my weight. Honestly speaking, sometimes I am scary when I think about what this may happen or what that may not happen in the future. But, I do not want to feed fears. Instead, I focus on feeding love, God's love within me more often. God's steadfast love strengthens my faith and lifts me up. Yes, it is well with my soul. Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!

Let us pray,

O gracious God, thank you for creating us as your image and breathing into our nostrils the breath of life. We are living beings and Your precious children. When we encounter a sudden life storm, we are afraid of it. But, You are always with and within us because of our faith in Jesus. Thank you for not leaving us alone. We continue to bless Your name and proclaim the good news as long as we breathe in this world, In the precious name of our LORD, Jesus, we pray. **Amen.**