



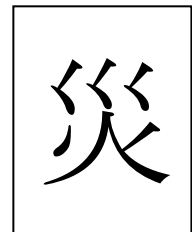
“Behold, I make all things new.”

Nagasaki, Jan 2019

Happy New Year! The Protestant churches here in Nagasaki started the year together with joint worship at the United Church of Christ in Japan Nagasaki Church on the afternoon of January 1st. The preacher reminded us that we are temples of the Holy Spirit, and suggested that as we tend to forget this in the busyness of everyday life, it's important to attend worship every Sunday and be reminded and renewed. We worshipped together in the hope of being encouraged to serve faithfully during 2019.

In Japan in general, however, the change of the calendar year has seen a focus on doing things for the last time in “Heisei”, the era of the current emperor who will retire at the end of April. We have just been informed that the name of the next era will be announced a month in advance, a compromise between the views of the traditionalists, who think it should be made public on May 1st, when the next emperor takes over, and the rest of society, which would like to know how to write official dates after April 30th. As a Christian institution, Kwassui (where I teach) uses the western calendar dates wherever possible, but anything to be submitted to the Ministry of Education has to follow the unique Japanese system of dates. To refer to 1st January, 2019, for example, we get 2019-01-01 (Western system, Japanese order) and 31-01-01 (unique Japanese system, Japanese order).

Many people hope that this year will be calmer and more “average” than last year was. Every December, the head priest at the Kiyomizu Temple in Kyoto draws the Chinese character that seems to best depict the year that is ending, and the character for last year was 災 (sai) which means disaster of any kind, but in this case referred to natural disasters. 2018 was a year of four major natural disasters in Japan, with earthquakes and typhoons resulting in loss of life and extensive damage, especially because of flooding. Recovery was not helped by a long summer which saw prolonged periods of record high temperatures.



2019 in Japan is the Year of the Wild Boar, different from China, where the next lunar year will be the Year of the Pig. When the animal zodiac system was imported to Japan from China, pigs were not familiar to most people here, so they substituted an animal which was (and still is) common in rural areas.

Kwassui has many problems, but we start the new year with hope, encouraged by the fact that a colleague who has participated in church life for many years was moved to be baptised this past Christmas. May it be a year of blessings for you!

Sheila