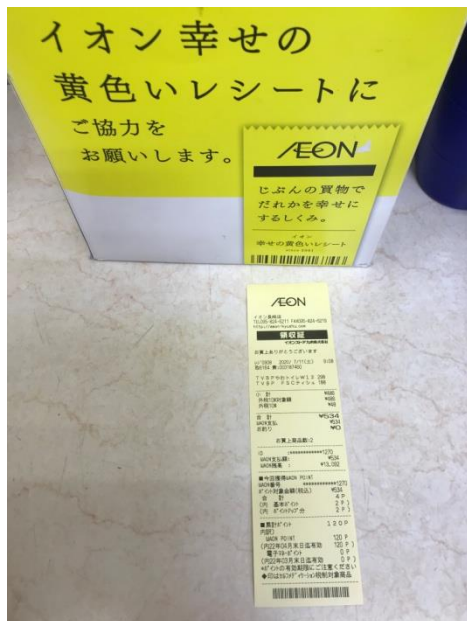




At last it's beginning to feel like autumn. In Japan, as in much of the world, this has been a summer of what didn't happen, rather than what did. The Tokyo Olympic Games are now rescheduled for next year, and the official policy is that they will go ahead. The commemorations for the 75th anniversaries of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and

Nagasaki took place with about a tenth of the normal number of attendees, rather than being the major events that were expected. Many jobs have been impacted, with major companies declaring losses and smaller ones closing altogether, so the focus is now on re-starting the economy, even though it's clear that this is having a negative effect on efforts to contain the spread of the virus. However, compared to many places, the number of infections and deaths remains very low, and we are thankful.

Actually, for much of the very hot summer we have been more concerned about Nature than COVID, and about deaths from heatstroke rather than from infection. Record heavy rainfall has led to flooding and landslide disasters. Relief work has been slow, because whereas usually volunteers would gather from all over the country to help clear up, fear of infection led authorities to ask people from outside their own prefectures not to come. We are now into "typhoon season" with two going up the coast of Kyushu in a week earlier in the month, leading to wry comments about typhoons not observing social distancing. Having taken the recommended measures to limit broken glass if the windows were hit by windblown objects, I actually slept through the second, worse one, unlike the night at the end of last week when Nagasaki had over four inches of rain in an hour and record gusts of wind at the end of the peninsula. Not reasons we really want to make national news!



Japan is used to natural disasters, though, and this is a reminder that the old problems haven't gone away just because there are new difficulties. After the major earthquake and tsunami disaster in 2011, one of the supermarket chains started donating a percentage of its profits to the relief funds. The way it works is that, as the disaster occurred on March 11th, on the 11th of every month the receipts are yellow, and if you want the supermarket to donate the profit from your own bill, you leave the receipt in a collection box in the area for packing your bags after checkout. The name and ownership of the supermarket chain has changed since this started, and whereas for a number of years the donation was specifically for Northeastern Japan, more recently it has been for Japanese disaster relief in general. And although I'm sure they could make a donation whether people submit their receipts or not, it means that we don't forget that there are always situations where people are suffering and financial support is needed, and also allows us as customers to feel that we are involved too.



Church worship, in a shortened form, continues to be possible, though at Ginya Machi church we now lead and preach from behind clear screens. As you can see, the reflections are a real problem, though I have discovered that from the seats on the left hand side you can see a reflection of the clock on the back wall in the screen. I wonder if the minister knows! As of July, we are two ministers short in the circuit, and I am now preaching at Ginya Machi at least once a month so our own minister can go to the other church for which he is responsible. We hope this is just until March, the end of the administrative year for churches as well as society in general. Ministers here don't like to be away from their own churches, and whereas I am happy to preach, and I don't think that, having worked out what I want to say, I then still need the 51 minutes of preparation per 1 minute of Japanese sermon that I did when I first started speaking in Japanese, it's still a very different proposition to preaching in English.

Next week we start the second semester of university classes. Not that it proves very much for the teaching staff when classes are online and can be taught from home, but as of this academic year, we are required to clock in and out when we arrive on and depart from campus. This is not to prove that we're working enough, but to prove that we aren't overworking to danger level! You can do it through an office computer or by setting your mobile phone so the system recognizes your presence, but there is also a machine near the main reception desk. When touched with an ID card, the machine beeps and shows the word "good" very briefly instead of the time. It's my own opinion that it should say "very good" when we leave, but it does beep twice, so I suppose that's "good, good"? And we also have to fill in a document stating when in the year we have taken the minimum five days annual leave required by law, and stamp it with our personal seal. Signatures carry very little weight here, and a stamp (in red ink) with a personal seal is required for anything official. And as companies (and universities!) require multiple levels of recognition for decision making, and everyone with responsibility at every level has to stamp documents before they are finally approved, working from home has caused some real logistical headaches. Digital seals that can be used online have been developed, but change to traditional practices comes slowly. But every time I stamp a document as an equivalent to signing it, I am reminded of the lines, "O let me commend my Saviour to you / I set to my seal that Jesus is true" from the Wesley hymn "Thy faithfulness, Lord, each moment we find."



With prayers that as we continue to experience God's faithfulness through the challenges of the days ahead, we will be able to see and take the opportunities that come to commend our Saviour to others.

Sheila