



December 2020

Volume 132 Number 12

From our Interim Pastor

It's time. Are you ready?
Rev. Celestine Fields

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. – John 1:1, 14



Reiko sensei reminded me on the Sunday of Osamu san's memorial service that we are entering the Advent Season. Basically, she was saying, "Pastor Celeste, it is time for the coming of God. I need you to be ready. "Okay...let me focus!"

I had listened to several theologians talk about Advent in one of the online Work of the People films. I heard the usual, "God is coming among us," and "God comes into the darkness." Something else caught my attention - the wrath of God or the anger of God and its coming in violence. I think we have had enough violence this year. We need God to come and take some of this mess away...a mess humanity made.

When I think about everything that has happened in 2020; the pandemic and its repeated increase in new cases, hospitalizations and death, police brutality, and the racism, I know it is humanity's doing. Many have refused to wear masks, social distance, and not hold large gathering. We have watched police brutality and sat silent. And the racism, is truly a work of a sinful humanity. Humanity makes a mess of God's perfect creation and we pray God will come. We read about the violent in-breaking of God in our sacred text. We believe, as the disciples in the early church, that God will break through the darkness of our world bringing a wrath, which will facilitate light. Wrath against whom? Light for whom?

God came to us in the flesh, in a man named Jesus. He lived among humanity. He saw the violence, the hatred, the hunger and thirst of those in need. Those who walked with him saw His glory. We still see His glory. Thousands of years later, God continues to show us the way through Jesus. God continues to come to us through Jesus. Jesus, full of grace and truth.

Can we expect God to come or anyone to come and clean up our mess? Are we to clean up this mess ourselves? God, through your Spirit, your Holy Spirit, come to us and give us courage to break out the light which shines within each us. Give us courage to take action to bring hope, peace, love, and joy to our world. Give us courage to be the hands and the feet of a humble, gracious and gentle savior.

God bless you all!
Pastor Celeste

Sermons from Worship Services in November

November 1st

"Partners in Service"

Pastor Celestine Fields

[Video](#) Passcode: j&\$%BeW8

[Voice record](#)



November 15th

"Extravagant Opportunity"

Pastor Celestine Fields

[Video](#) Passcode:Kj=N&u1M



November 8th

"Between Sundays"

Rev. Heather Haginduff

[Video](#) Passcode: w12ML*#P

[Voice record](#)



November 22nd

"Reigning Compassion"

Pastor Celestine Fields

[Video](#)

Osamu Kumao's Memorial Service

A beautiful virtual memorial service was held on Nov. 22 for Osamu Kumao who passed away on Sept. 29. Thank you to the many participants who took part in the service. A special thank you to Rev. Sharon MacArthur who planned and officiated the service. It was wonderful to have Osamu's current and former Nichigobu pastors take part in the service from Japan.



Osamu Kumao was born on May 19, 1932 and raised in Fuji, Japan. He attended Waseda University, a very prestigious institution of higher education in Tokyo. He came to the United States to attend U.C. Berkeley on a Fulbright Scholarship to study business law. Having met in Japan at a Bible study meeting, he reconnected with his future wife, Joyce, in the U.S. and they married in the early 1960's. They were married almost 60 years until Joyce's death in February of this year. They had two daughters, Victoria and Heidi. The daughters described their father as being practical and hardworking. He taught himself many skills and was very handy around the house.

Osamu began attending Sycamore around 15 years ago and became a member a few years later. He was very active with the Nichigobu and took on various leadership roles. He especially took pride in leading Tomonokai, a group for Japanese speaking seniors. They met regularly for lunch and he would often lead discussions on current events and other topics. He will be greatly missed by his family and friends.

[Click here to watch the video of Osamu Kumao's memorial service.](#)

From the Moderator



by Karen Nishilawa

Greetings, Sycamore Family! As we head into the year end holidays, we can look back on this most unusual year and reflect on our community. It is a tribute to our worship leadership that we can gather every Sunday for worship, and even though we do not see each other in person, it is always heartwarming to see your faces and hear your voices. It gives us strength to go on in this year of COVID-19 and elections that do not seem to end. Out of curiosity, I thought about the pandemic in 1918. Originated in China as an H1N1 virus in March and due to WWI, spread with troop movements in the war. A second, mutated virus wave then swept through and in total an estimated 50 million American lives were lost. The pandemic lasted 2 years. They did implement a “mask mandate” to help reduce the spread of the virus. Fast forward to 2020 and here we are with only recommendations for mask wearing, social distancing of 6 feet and washing your hands. BUT several versions of vaccine are in the works and may be available in the near future.



Despite our environmental issues, we are SO GRATEFUL for those who have been generously donating non-perishable foods for the Bay Area Rescue Mission. Last month, we started a “reverse” Advent calendar with a list of food items in a box. Our Sycamore Family once again comes through with about 15 boxes – which will be distributed to families in need through the Bay Area Rescue Mission.

We have scheduled our various church meetings to accommodate the time difference between here and Japan so Rev. Ishida can become more comfortable with his Sycamore Family. While he is “stuck” in Japan, he is being proactive and studying English and he spoke at the last Council Meeting in English. Very impressive!!

Pastor Celeste had her knee surgery on November 17th and was back home on the 18th. Before her surgery and during her move, she was told that one of the people helping was COVID positive and she would have to quarantine. Turns out, that was a false positive and she was not exposed to the virus. We continually pray for her recovery and thank those who have signed up to provide meal support.

I just heard that people are once again hoarding toilet paper and paper towels and various other essential items. I was thinking that it would be nice to put a roll of paper towels in each box and perhaps a box of Kleenex – until I found out that these items are again unavailable due to overbuying. I do have co-workers who have been helping us out with the “hard to get” items, so I can continue to tap into them to pull items for us when they arrive at Costco.

For many, this will be a virtual Thanksgiving which should “guarantee” a safe holiday. Please try to stay in your established social bubbles to keep yourselves safe. We are planning on our traditional Christmas Eve virtual worship on December 24th. AND mark the date on your calendar: Virtual Annual Meeting on January 31, 2021!

Advent Challenge Food Drive

By Karen Inouye

This year we tried something new with our annual food drive for the Bay Area Rescue Mission. The Advent Challenge was to fill a box of 24 different food items for each day of advent. We started this challenge on November 1st-24th in order to have the boxes ready by Thanksgiving. I'm happy to announce that today, November 24th, 17 food boxes were picked up by Virginia Spears of the Bay Area Rescue Mission. She was surprised, delighted and excited to see all these boxes overflowing with food. Each box is for one family and will be delivered in time for Thanksgiving. She expressed that many more families are in need of food this year.



We wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who participated in the Advent Challenge. Thank you for taking the time and effort to gather the 24 items required for this challenge. It was amazing to see such a variety of food and how creative some of the boxes turned out. Thank you to the Sycamore family for your generosity, warm hearts and your continued support for our food drive. Thank you for helping Sycamore Church provide Thanksgiving dinner for some local Bay Area families.

From the Editor

Happy Thanksgiving! It may be difficult to find things to be thankful for during these most unusual and unprecedented times. We, at Sycamore have not been unaffected. We have had members lose jobs, suffer serious injuries and pass on to be with God during this time. However, we have many things to be grateful for. We continue to meet weekly for Sunday worship services via Zoom and we have filled many, many barrels of food for the Bay Area Rescue Mission. Pastor Celeste has had two successful knee surgeries and is recovering nicely. Also, Akiko Kobayashi has been able to offer weekly Zoom Zumba classes. The Nichigobu (Japanese speaking division) have been able to connect, via Zoom, with their new minister, Rev. Motomu Ishida, who has been unable to come to the U.S. due to the pandemic. They have changed their worship time to 3:00pm on Sundays (8:00 Monday morning in Japan) so that Ishida sensei can join and worship together. Our "no bazaar" fund raising was very successful with more than \$11,000.00 in donations. Yes, we have much to be thankful for.



This coming Sunday, Nov. 29, is the first Sunday in Advent. Advent is a time of waiting and preparing for the birth of the Christ child. As we wait, may we be reminded that Jesus brought "hope" in our future, "peace" in our hearts, "love" to all and "joy" into our lives. May the coming month be full of anticipation for what is to come.

From Sycamore Christian Preschool

by Yoshimi Kinoshita

Coronavirus cases have been increasing in Contra Costa County but preschool will resume on January 4, 2021. As director, I have thought about reopening the preschool many times but have been anxious about whether I will be able to protect the health of the children, staff and their respective families. However, such fears and anxieties have been replaced by the knowledge that I am not alone in my feelings. I have spoken with preschool children and their families in the park and on street corners to find that we share the same fears. We can only do our best to protect each other by building trusting relationships and working together in our daily lives.



Also, our new teacher and Pastor Celeste have given us the opportunity to reopen the preschool. Our new teacher, Ferroudja Tamani, is from Algeria. She is fluent in Arabic, Berber, French and English and has worked as a preschool English teacher in her home country. She is an accomplished baker and mother of a 4 year old girl and a 2 year old boy. I am looking forward to working with her and seeing a world view from another perspective.

Midori sensei, Akiko sensei and Aki sensei have supported Sycamore Preschool in the past but are currently on leave. We look forward to seeing them all again someday soon. I would like to ask you to continue to pray that God will keep them healthy and safe in their respective places. May God watch over us as we reopen the preschool.





Let Us Remember in Our Prayers...



Holy Love, Today, we know suffering. We may not understand it, but we know what it feels like, as it a collective suffering. Many feel the pains of shelter in place, and this virus deeper than most. We lift up to you O God, those who are sick. Send your healing. We pray your peace over those who are grieving the death of a loved one. Have mercy. We ask that you supply the needs of all those who have lost employment, have not received unemployment compensation, and/or closed their business. Bless. Give rest to essential workers, doctors, nurses and all those who work that we may be safe. In your great name. Amen!

Acknowledgments for November 1 – 22, 2020

Sycamore is proud to be a self-supporting church - all operating and ministry expenses are funded by donations from members and friends of Sycamore and from special fundraising efforts. Thank you!

NAMES:

Silvia Akinaga including
inmemory of Sunao “Yun”
Aknaga and Osamu Kumao
Darold & Kaori Davis
Jan Fabini
Rev. Celestine Fields
Satoko Fogarty
Georgia & Dr. Mark Fujkawa
including in memory of Osamu
Kumao
Ruth Fukuchi
Aiko Kobayashi Gray
Dr. Harlan & Marilyn Head
David & Ellen Inada
Masao Inada including in
memory of Tatsuno Inada
Karen Inouye including in
memory of Osamu Kumao
Shingo & Reiko Kamada
Nori & Akiko Kobayashi
Rev. Deborah Lee
Jimmy & Kathleen Louie

Rev. Sharon MacArthur
Annette Matsunaga
Eiko Matsuoka including in
memory of Osamu Kumao
Martha Matsuoka
Tina Matsuoka
Gloria Morita
Karen Nishikawa including in
memory of Takako & Dr. Roy
Hashioka
Muts & Dr. Philip Nishino
Konomi Nishiyama
Stan & Bea Nomura
Sara Pillow
Sycamore Women’s Fellow-
ship in memory of Osamu
Kumao
Mark Takeuchi
Akiko Taylor
Hiro Taniguchi including in
memory of Derek Taniguchi
Sherry Watson

Rie Webster
Sumi Wu
Tasha Yorozu

Donations were made to the following Funds:

General Fund including
Thanksgiving Offerings
Nichigobu Fund
Property Maintenance Fund
Neighbors in Need



Donations can be made online at <https://donorbox.org/pledge-7?default%20interval=o> or
by mailing your checks to Sycamore Church, 1111 Navellier St. El Cerrito, CA 94530

SYCAMORE TREE



「平和に向けて一歩前に」石田 求

「暗闇と死の陰に座している者たちを照らし、我らの歩みを平和の道に導く。」

(ルカによる福音書1章79節)

今年も残すところ早一ヶ月となりました。2020年は記憶に残る年になったことと思います。ウイルスの脅威の前に私たちの生活は一変しました。強烈なインパクトの記憶が日常の記憶を消し去っていくように思います。また大統領選挙に伴う混乱が世界に与えている影響も大きくあります。分断や差別、罵り合う人々の姿がより不安を煽ります。まさに暗闇とも思えるような世界に、今年もまたクリスマスが近づいています。

私はこれまで礼拝の祝祷の前に「派遣の言葉」を言ってから、祝祷をしていました。このような言葉です。「平和のうちに、この世へと出て行きなさい。主なる神に仕え、隣人を愛し、主なる神を愛し、隣人に仕えなさい。」しかし、平和とは全く言えない世界に「平和のうちに」と呼びかけることに抵抗を感じました。そして感染拡大が進む中、今年の3月頃から派遣の言葉を言わなくなりました。

今年も平和の君、希望の光であるキリストを迎える季節となり、私は改めて思いました。平和とは一体何なのか。この世界は確かに平和ではありません。憎しみ合い、争いが絶えず、心ない言葉が飛び交い、平和と呼ぶには程遠い世界です。しかし、その世界に今年もクリスマスを祝う私たちがいます。そこで私は思いました。世界は決して平和ではないが、私たち自身が平和であることから始めるべきではないのか。キリストが来られた時、世界が平和になるために、まず小さな私たちと同じ姿で小さな平和を作り出したことではなかったのか。この時に派遣の言葉の「平和のうちに」の捉え方が少し変わりました。

私たち自身が平和な状態のうちにこの世へと出て行く。私たちから平和が広がるように、神を愛し仕え、隣人も愛し仕えるようにとされているのだと思いました。本当に厳しい、困難な時代です。しかし、それでも希望を捨てず、平和に向けて小さな一歩を踏み出したいと思います。神も世界を根底から変えるような劇的な業ではなく、小さな赤ちゃんイエス様を私たちのもとへ送るといふ、小さな一歩から世界にメッセージを送りました。そこから広がる愛の業を信じ、私たちもこのクリスマスから小さな一歩を始めて行きたいと願います。



天国の話

愛子グレイ

11月の石田先生の創世記のバイブルスタディーで、私は「犬や猫も天国に行けるのでしょうか？」と質問した。実は何人かの牧師先生にもう訊ねているのだが、最初の先生の「動物には信仰が無いので行けませんね」という答えが犬好きの私としてはとても悲しかったことを思い出す。もちろんそれぞれの聖書の解釈や考えがあり、どれが正しい正しくないと言えないのはわかっている。天国に行ったことがない人ばかりだし。

それで石田先生の答えはこうだった。「私は行けると思います。」とそして続いた。「神様は自分が作ったものをお忘れにはなりません。」と。胸のつかえがスーッと降りた。これでもう私は安心して別の牧師に聞くことはもう無いと思う。

先週、別の教会での少人数のバイブルスタディーに参加した。(コロナのおかげでズームで簡単に参加できる)「救い」の学びだった。

キリスト教の神様やイエス様をまったく知らない人たち、家族で洗礼を受けてない人は救いにはあずかれないのか、天国には行けないのか? 受洗したクリスチャンのみが選ばれるのか? というのがテーマだった。

牧師先生はジョンウエスレーやカルバンの救いについての考えを説明する以外自分の考えは述べない。私たちはそれぞれ自分の考えを言い、お互いの想いを尊重しあいながら自分の経験を通しての意見を交わしていた。私の考えは、「神様が自分が作られたものを忘れない。だからすべての人は救われると思う。」だった。次のテーマは「皆が救われるのならなぜ伝道は必要か」ということにつながっていく。私が思い出したのは一枚のカード、イエスがドアノブの無いドアを外からノックしている絵、内側からしか開かない。そう、こんなふうにもいつも働きかけている神様、そのドアを開ける手伝いをするのが伝道ではないかと私は思う。

こんな深いことを学べるのもコロナのおかげだと心から感謝している。

写真のタペストリは日本から連れてきた飼い犬チューが天国に昇るところ。4匹の犬ではなくスローモーションで天に向かっていく。





神様あのね

デイス佳織

私たちDAVIS家は食べるものもバラバラだったり性格もバラバラで統一感にかけるとは、唯一「祈り」だけは一緒にしている。そして「祈り」をすごく大切な事としている。夫婦喧嘩をしても、最終的に夫婦で神様に祈る。どんなに怒っていても「祈りましょう」と声をかけるw子供を叱っても、最後に祈る。寝る前にも必ず祈る。私がいつも祈りをリードして一番に旦那さんの健康や仕事について、その次は子供達の事。そうこうしていたら自分への祈りは後回し、まわたりは忘れてもするのだけれど、これこそが私にとっての真の癒しのひとときで祈りながら聖霊さんを感じ不思議と平安の中に入るのだ。そして祈りの力は本当にすごいと何度も経験している。切羽詰まった時の本当にどうしょうもない!!!って時の祈りっていうのは聞き届けられる。それをペラペラと話したくはないのだけれど、本当にそおいう経験を積み重ねると心からの祈りの強さを目の当たりにさせられる。最近もそんな祈りが聞き届けられた話をシェアしたいと思う。娘のマナの手が長い間荒れて手の甲が火傷をしたように肌がガサガサで酷くなっていた。前に使ったアルコール消毒や何かの液体に負けたようだ。色々な塗り薬を試しても逆効果で、余計に酷くなっていた。肌の色は黒く変色もしていた。ある日、あまりにも何ヶ月も治ってないことに気づいてフト使っていない薬箱に目をやる。ヒビケア軟膏が出てきた。それは八百屋さんの奥さんが私にくれた薬でこれがまたひび割れがよくできる私のヒビを1日で治すすごい薬なのだ。ああ、もしかしてこのクリームが合うかもしれないと思い。そのクリームを手の甲に塗って。そして強く祈った。「神様、あなたは皮膚病の人も癒しました、あなたの奇跡を私たちにも見せてください」と言うような祈りだった。その祈りが終わると娘のマナが「ママ、今日の祈りは何かいつもと違ったね。すごく強かった」と言うのだ。そうそう、私もなんか途中からすごい感情がプラスしながら不思議な感覚になる祈りだった。そして朝。なんと、手の甲はきれいに癒されていた!神様とヒビケアの相乗効果がすごいことに!マナと私はびっくりして感動したのだった。



幼稚園より

木下佳美

コントラコスタ郡ではコロナウイルスの症例が増加している中ですが、幼稚園は、2021年の1月4日から保育を再開致します。今まで、幼稚園のボードメンバーと共に保育の再開に向けて検討を重ねてきました。子どもたち、スタッフ、そしてそれぞれの家族の健康をどのように守っていけるのかという事が一番の課題です。これらの不安や危機感、お互いを守るために日々の生活の中において、ガイドラインに沿って最善を尽くしていくという信頼関係において、実現する事ができるのではと信じています。

保育を必要としている家族に保育の場を提供していきたいという願いのもと、1月からは、新任の先生とセラステ牧師が保育に携わってくださいます。私たちの新しい先生、Ferroudja Tamaniはアルジェリア出身です。彼女はアラビア語、ベルベル語、フランス語、英語に堪能で母国では幼稚園の英語教師として働いていました。彼女はパン作りが得意で、4歳の女の子と2歳の男の子の母でもあります。フェロージャと一緒に仕事をすることを楽しみにしています。これまで、シカモア幼稚園を共に支えてくださっていたみどり先生、あきこ先生、あき先生は、現在休職中です。いつかまた先生方にお会いできる日を楽しみにしています。これからも、先生方がそれぞれの場所において、健康で元気に今の時を過ごされます様にと改めて神様にお祈り致します。どうぞ、皆さまにおいても、引き続きお元気でいてください。

- ・ 12月 1日(火) ドネーションドロップオフ開始 1:00-2:00pm
- ・ 11月 6日(日) 日語部礼拝 3:00pm
- ・ 12月13日(日) 日語部礼拝 3:00pm
- ・ 12月17日(木) 教会役員会 6:00pm
- ・ 12月20日(日) 合同礼拝 3:00pm
- ・ 12月24日(木) クリスマスキャンドルサービス 4:00-5:00pm
- ・ 12月27日(日) 日語部礼拝 3:00pm

- ・ Zoomのリンク
- ・ 日語部礼拝/聖書研究会:<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/611700303>
- ・ 合同礼拝:<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/252245482>
- ズンバ教室:<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82880251961> PW: zumba



～シカモア組合教会集会案内～

- ◇日語部礼拝：毎週日曜日午後3時
- ◇英語部礼拝：毎週日曜日午前11時
- ◇聖書研究会：毎月第3日曜日午後4時
- ◇Worship Night：休み中
- ◇友の会： 休み中
- ◇ズンバ教室：毎週金曜日午後3時
- ◇お散歩会：随時
- ◇絵本を読む会：随時
- ◇Sycamore FC：随時
- ◇Praise Hula 随時

*教会が閉じているので全ての行事は基本的にお休みかZoomより行っています。質問がある方は日語部議長の吉井クリス、(chris@yoshii.me)または教会までお問い合わせください。

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*献金をしたい方は下記リンクからまたは郵送で受け付けています。

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<https://sycamoreucc.churchcenter.com/giving>

チェック:

Sycamore Congregational Church

1111 Navalier St, El Cerrito, CA 94530

Memo: Nichigo





Sycamore Congregational Church, U.C.C.



"Embracing Japanese Culture, Language, and Christian Faith"

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Chieko O'Dea and Reiko Kamada

*The Sycamore Tree is published on the **last Thursday** of each month. Articles are welcomed. The deadline for articles is seven days before publication and are included as space allows.*

For address changes, call 510-525-0727
e-mail: sycamoreoffice22@gmail.com
Website: www.sycamoreucc.org

*We are Sycamore United Church of Christ...
Rooted in a legacy of Japanese ministries;
Rejoicing in the gospel and worship;
Reaching out to all people*

Live Streaming

- English or Joint Worship Service

<https://zoom.us/j/252245482> ID: 252 245 482

- Japanese Worship Service

<https://zoom.us/j/611700303> ID: 611 700 303

- Thursday Interfaith Meditation at 6pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/843333587> ID:843 333 587

- Friday Zumba class at 3pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82880251961> ID:828 8025 1961

Password: zumba

- Giving to Sycamore Church

<https://donorbox.org/pledge-7?default%20interval=o>

Sycamore Christian Preschool

The preschool will **resume on January 4, 2021**.
For more information, please contact the school.
sycamore.c.preschool@gmail.com.

Sunday Morning Schedule

*Please see the Virtual Worship Schedule.
Regular scheduling will resume at a later date.*

Virtual Worship Schedule

December 6, 11:00 am

English Worship Service

December 13, 11:00 am

English Worship Service

December 20, 3:00 pm

Christmas Service Joint Worship Service

Thursday, December 24, 4:00 pm

Christmas Candlelight joint Worship Service

December 27, 11:00 am

Memorial Sunday English Worship Service

<https://zoom.us/j/252245482>

Meeting ID: 252 245 482

Phone Number: 1 408-638-0968