

## Golden Week Greetings, Nagasaki, May 2016



May is here, the temperatures are already pleasantly hot enough for me, and the garden is blooming. However, the humidity is beginning to rise as a reminder that rainy season is on the way and we should appreciate the clear days while they last. Having said that, at the moment the view across the harbour is currently obscured by “yellow dust” blown over from the Gobi Desert, and the weather forecast, which monitors the levels of PM2.5 pollution, was advising us to be careful about spending time outside at the end of last week. We remain aware of the effects, natural and man-made, from our largest neighbour, while praying that all our neighbours can find peaceful solutions in areas of friction, whether over territory or weapons.

We are just finishing Golden Week, the time when Japan celebrates four national holidays in the space of a week, including Constitution Day. As the current government wishes to amend the constitution, that day saw gatherings both in favour of and against changes. Nagasaki, with its experience of atomic bombing, is very strongly against any change which would permit Japan a greater role in armed conflict, but if the polls carried out for national TV are reliable, it would seem that in the country in general the “Don’t Knows” are in the majority. Golden Week also includes Children’s Day (until quite recently Boys’ Day) when families with young children display carp streamers in the hope that the children will grow strong like carp swimming upstream.



The picture on the left is the “real thing” – hollow streamers made of cloth on a bamboo pole, whereas the middle ones are one-dimensional on a multi-storey car park wall, and the last ones are biscuits made at Sunrise, a sheltered workplace started by one of our Kwassui Japanese Department graduates some years ago. Members of Sunrise come to our church worship once a month and have a stall with their goods for sale after the service. This helps solve the problem of what I am going to take to share with the main campus Bible Study group, which currently has eight members after several months last year when there were just two of us. We give thanks!



One of the occupational hazards of speaking in church, Sunday School, university and high school worship regularly is constantly being on the look-out for sermon illustrations, and sometimes they come sailing right into the harbour! The end of April saw the Tall Ships Festival in Nagasaki, and here we have sailing ships joining the paddle steamer that is usually docked here and a modern cruise vessel in for the day. The big sailing ship is the Nihon Maru – “Nihon” is “Japan” in Japanese, and “Maru” meaning “circle” is part of many ship and boat names here, the idea being that they will complete the circle of their voyage and return home again safely. The need for a pilot; the unseen “wind” that gives the power and shows in its effects; the hope of returning “safe home” guided by the Spirit; even the need to learn to move step by step and obey orders, as the cadets do as they learn to climb the rigging and haul the sails – all of these are likely to find their way into talks in the coming months.

Kwassui is also moving step by step. As of April we have a new chancellor, Mr Yuguchi, and a new high school headmaster, Mr Oiwa, and we pray for wisdom for them as the institution faces the continuing challenges brought by the ever decreasing population of 18-year-olds and changes in what society is looking for in education. We look forward with hope, but these are uncertain times, and your prayers are appreciated!

Blessings,  
Sheila