

News from Nihon*

*Nihon or Nippon is the Japanese way of saying Japan.

September brought growing friendships, the beginning of a new term, and the slow easing of the summer heat. Highlights included trips to Aso and Kikuchi Gorge (my new favorite spot in Japan), the high school's sports festival, and my first full-length sermon at the Kumamoto International Service.

I've now lived through the experience of incoming typhoons, which can result in school delays or closures. We get warning of an incoming typhoon and depending on the weather forecast, the school might start late or be closed. So far, I have experienced the storms around the typhoons, but my neighborhood has not had trouble. They even had a typhoon relay during Sports Day (more on this below) at the high school.



Kikuchi Gorge, my new favorite spot in Japan



From Suizenji Jojuen Garden, which is older than the USA

Sports Day or the school's athletic festival was a significant event at Kyushu Gakuin this month. It is like a combination of field day and an awards ceremony/parade honoring athletic achievements.

The school is divided into three teams: red, white, and blue across the academic years. The first year students (the students I teach) ran a typhoon relay, where four students run with a long horizontal pole and circle two large orange cones on the course. There were also various other relays, class dances, tug-of-war, and a game that sort of resembled playing chicken in a swimming pool. In that game, instead of trying to push students off of each others shoulders, the goal was to steal their hats while atop shoulders.

There was also a chance for the school clubs/teams to march around the track and be honored in front of their parents in a parade. The whole event lasted half a day, whereas before coronavirus, it would have lasted the full day and included a picnic.

Typhoon Relay



Final scores—a close finish!





I went on a trip to Aso, a large caldera in Kumamoto Prefecture. It is the site of rich farmland, many onsen (Japanese hot springs), great views and an active volcano. I went with a church from Hiroshima and stayed with them for a night at the local YMCA. I got to take part in a delicious barbecue (eating, not being eaten), try out two onsen (public bathing in Japanese hot springs), and learn how to make soba (buckwheat noodles).



Some takeaways: it turns out I love going to onsen, I have a greater appreciation for those who can make soba professionally as it's quite a process, and I love to eat beef roasted over a fire with flavored salt. I'm pretty sure that last one was not a surprise to anyone. I also have an outstanding invitation to Hiroshima that I hope to take advantage of in the future, not only for the sightseeing and reconnecting with the people I met, but the church there is also doing some neat things I'd love to learn



Prayer Requests

- ◇ For the commemorative service celebrating 100 years of Oe Church (my congregation) on October 10. It was scheduled to happen last year, but was canceled due to coronavirus.
- ◇ For those who experienced difficulties and damages to body and property during the recent typhoons.

I went to my first バイキング (sounds just like biking) restaurant in Aso. According to a tourist info site, the first buffet style restaurant in Japan was named "Imperial Viking" after the Scandinavian concept of smörgåsbord and a popular movie for the time. It opened in 1958 to great success and the word has now come to mean buffet in modern Japanese, as well as retaining the meaning Viking of the Scandinavian variety. There is no "v" sound in Japanese so "b" and "v" words in English have the same pronunciation. Bicycle is another word altogether and so the word has no connection to English "biking" or bicycles at all.

I was curious about this word in particular because words written in this system, Katakana, have foreign origins and are often related to English. This word really took me on a journey, especially after one of my colleagues said, "and doesn't biking have a second meaning in English?" It took both of us some digging to realize he meant Viking because the words are the same in Japanese but not in English. I