

News from Nihon*

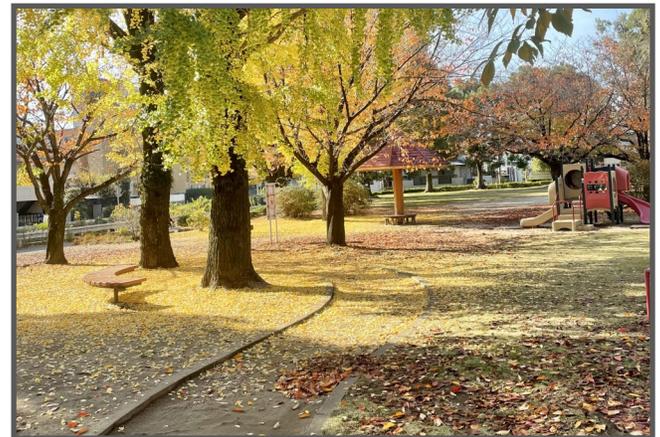
*Nihon or Nippon is the Japanese way of saying Japan.

November brought the changing of the colors of the trees, which I was not expecting at all. Given how hot and humid the summers are in Kumamoto and how mild the fall has been so far, I would have expected something closer to Texas, where things turn brown. While northern Japan boasts a greater abundance of fall colors, Kumamoto's have been nothing to sneeze at, particularly as someone who grew up without them. I have been delighted as I watch the trees in my neighborhood park turn with the season.

November has also brought another sermon at the international congregation, a trip to Kagoshima Prefecture, and two Thanksgiving dinners. In the midst of all of that, I have been dealing with a flare up of an old health problem with acid reflux. I have two main takeaways so far. First, I am amazed at how supported I am, even by people who are not in my daily life. I am very grateful for it, as navigating a Japanese pharmacy alone would be a daunting undertaking. Second, even when Japanese people are concerned with the cost of my healthcare, as I do not have Japanese insurance, but rather international insurance, there is no comparison to the cost of healthcare in the States. None.



A lovely afternoon in Ninomaru Park



The fall colors in my neighborhood



I have been blessed as an adult to have never spent Thanksgiving alone, which I think is saying something, given the number of places I have found myself in Novembers past. This year, I had not one, but two Thanksgiving meals. The first was a traditional American Thanksgiving meal hosted by one of my neighbors with a number of ex-pats on Saturday. The second was a meal of mainly Japanese food held by my English conversation group on Thursday night. Both meals made me feel very loved and connected in the face of some homesickness that crept up.

On November 13, some friends took me on a long drive down to Kagoshima Prefecture and Akune Church. We went for a church service and a piano/voice concert that took place afterwards. On the way down, we stopped for snacks in Ashikita and on the way back, we stopped for sweets in Minamata. I don't know if such behavior is typical of all Japanese road trips, but it's definitely been true of the ones on which I've been. The one English song that was sang at the concert was "You Raise Me Up." It appears to be one of the most popular English, Christian songs in Japan. Both the pianist and the vocalist were delightful, and I am glad I was invited to go.



Kyushu Gakuin had their tree-lighting ceremony at the end of school on November 25. The students held battery powered candles and we sang Silent Night and Joy to the World as well as listened to some prayers.



Another piece of Kyushu Gakuin news: this week, the students are taking their final exams for the second semester of three.



Prayer Requests

- ◇ Prayers for my healing and resolution of my ongoing stomach acid problems.
- ◇ For everyone who is dealing with loss, expected or unexpected, especially as the Christmas season is upon us. Prayers for moments of peace amidst the sorrow.

This month there was a full lunar eclipse and in Japan it was at a perfectly reasonable hour, which was great. I went for a walk down by the river, where there were fewer people and lights with which to contend. Due to the event, I learned the Japanese word for lunar eclipse is:

月食

This word is made up of two kanji or characters. The first kanji is the kanji for moon. The second kanji is the kanji for eating. As one of the English teachers I know put it, the word essentially means "eating the moon" or "moon meal." In romaji, it is written as "gesshoku." When you see a double consonant in Japanese, you hold the sound for longer, which ends up putting the emphasis on the end of "gessh." It almost sounds like guess, if guess ended in "sh."

I found the entire experience of watching the lunar eclipse to be delightful, and it seems I was not alone in that feeling. On my walk, I passed a number of children and couples hanging out under the night sky watching the moon.