

**1994 E.H. Johnson Memorial Luncheon Address
John H. and Clarabeth McIntosh (Jack and Beth)**

**June 7, 1994
Toronto, Ontario**

**BONES,
BREATH,
AND FIRE**

Mission and Commission in These Times

Jack: Let me preface our "set-piece" address with a few words of personal greeting and appreciation. Yes, it is me, Jack McIntosh, not Rip Van Winkle. I am really back again after eleven years, so glad to meet and share time with friends today and every day, whether old or new. Please take a good look, pinch me, hug me if you like. I feel like a walking miracle at times, whether thinking of my recovery from heart surgery, or of my missionary residence status renewed, with freedom to come and go from Japan. I have come back, a farm boy from Paisley Block, west of Guelph, whom God has placed on one of the cutting edges of his mission in these times. Having been there with the Korean Christians in their mission engagements so long, I have been accused of looking like them and acting like them. However, I hope that in them and in the two of us, the most obvious common feature is the face and heart of Jesus. Thank you, dear friends, for the ways in which you upheld and supported us in trying times, and for watching over us with our Lord. And now to our message for this moment.

Jack: Glory be to God, Creator and Sustainer of all good things!

Beth: We have enjoyed so much as creatures and children.

Glory be to Jesus, the Christ, source and fulfillment of faith and life!

Jack: We have enjoyed him and his mission so much as disciples and friends;

Beth: Glory be to the Spirit, presence and power among all who serve love and truth!

J & B: Glory be to God, one in three, as heart, body and breath, three in one in all beginnings, engagements, and partnerships

THE PRIVILEGE AND THE PROMISE OF MISSION MEET TO INCREASE THANKSGIVING AND JOY

Jack: Such an acknowledgment was the only way we felt we could begin our response to the awesome privilege and glorious promise of this occasion. We have been tremendously privileged through so many people like Ted and Kitty Johnson for so many years. To express our thanks, and to celebrate with you God's working together with us all, I will share some reflections, and Beth will tell some stories, out of our life in the mission and commission of God.

Koreans and Japanese enjoy fresh fruit after a good meal; so in thanking you for the honour and privilege of this occasion, we hope our words are "fresh fruit" to you, a joy.

Beth: What a privilege it is to be commissioned to involvement in the mission of God! Awesome is the only way to describe it. What a promising engagement when the Lord of love and life is in

charge, no matter how absurd one's presence and deeds may seem, or how paradoxical the Gospel message which we share with people may appear.

In pulling together our thoughts for this occasion, we recalled a picnic in the early '70's which we enjoyed with the Johnsons and Ransoms, and with other world mission staff and overseas returnees. At that time, Kitty Johnson did not teach us the ditty "Just One Meatball". The poem of that title (App. i) about a picnic in China in the late 1930's gave us the hint about the absurdities to be faced in the mission enterprise. The poem ends with the word of promise, leading us forward,

resonating in our bones. Let me read some of the poem dedicated to Kitty:

"So Kitty made a picnic....
And insisted that we sing for our dessert;
sing your favourite ballad, that utterly irrelevant,
utterly absurd account of a lonely man in a restaurant
complaining bitterly because he could get no bread
with his order of just one meatball!

So we hurled those rhymes at the bombers
floating lazily through the sunset.
We rolled those silly absurdities across the bay,
And on around the planet
until they echoed against our backs;
Resonating in our bones....

Resonating

- the absurdity of a picnic at Peitaiho
while the people we had come to save were
being destroyed....
- the absurdity of thinking that just being there
mattered....
- the greatest absurdity of all - that out of all those
tiny absurdities there grew a church whose
last official message to us could be

'Our spiritual bonds can never be broken...
Christian memories and influences abide....
and in Christ no thought, or labour, or prayer,
or love is ever lost'."

Jack: In the year following her passing on in life, finding this theme for the E.H. Johnson Memorial Luncheon in a poem dedicated to Kitty Johnson is most appropriate.

Another hint came from the Ezekiel 37 reading at Pentecost this year, as we listened again to the seeming absurdities he was led to prophesy in the bone-strewn plain to which God had led him. More about bones, breath and fire from that story later.

About the privilege of living in mission the question of the "privilege" of my living on in mission in Japan, even the silliness of such an emphasis, proved a bone of contention among my four lawyers as we prepared our final arguments for the Japanese court. Please note that the court

statement attached (App. ii) is my own attempt to pull together my own thoughts. In recognizing that "privilege" meant sharing the cross of Christ, we came to see the right and the responsibility of choosing to live up to God's commission as Jesus did. With the awesome privilege, there is the promise which we embrace - that God will do a new thing, that God will act, that God will prevail, through those who live out their commission in whatever circumstances.

ABSURDITIES AND PARADOXES IN MISSION LEAD TO THE HUMILITY AND WONDER OF CONFESSION

Beth: The absurdity of Bible study in a courtroom of Japan left some shaking their heads, others chuckling -- but all of us on tiptoes in expectation of another of God's surprises. That is what happened -- three judges sitting with open Bibles, the legal counsel for the Ministry of Justice searching the Scriptures, a packed court hearing a strange Word, as Jack spoke from twelve biblical texts about the grounds for his action and his appeal. Like Ezekiel, we said, "God, only you know", in wondering whether those words would give life to dead, dry bones.

The situation was critical for us, and dangers were there for mission freedom in Japan, but this was seized as an opportunity to share the gospel mission on whichever side of the bench, or fence, or the tracks, people might be.

We know Ted Johnson was a linguist of note. Undoubtedly he, too, appreciated the paradox in the two Chinese characters for **CRISIS** - the first meaning **DANGER**, the second, **OPPORTUNITY**. To those accustomed to viewing crises only negatively, this provides a welcome, promising insight. The paradox of danger and opportunity, of dry bones and new life, of lessness and fullness, were exemplified in those court scenes.

Jack: In my "In again, out again, gone again Finnegan" life of the past several years, the absurdities, the paradoxes of our mission pilgrimage were stimuli for confession along the way. On the one hand, one's shortcomings in the commission received would often be repented, so that grace and good could overcome. On the other hand, God's gracious but persistent disciplines make us wonder, and confess joyfully with others, in our responses as involved witnesses. We came to perceive more clearly the paradoxes of God's mission and commission as we walk more closely with people tagged with "lessness" - the powerless, the homeless, the marginalized and least among people without status or role in human society. Our confession is that any upward orientation or true spirituality in mission leads inevitably to the downward and outward way - AND vice versa! Our focus in mission is sharpened by the responses we make in each time and place, and the responses we make to the cries and parables of people's lives is given breath and light by the focus we maintain both on the Lord and on the people. Responding with the freedom of being committed to God's agenda in our times and places fills each new day with new opportunities, new partnerships. The focus and the response come to full bloom in the covenant commitments between God, me, and you.

THE PARABLES AND THE PEOPLE IN MISSION FOCUS OUR COMMISSION, AND SPUR US ON TO NEW RESPONSES.

Beth: Commitment is a well used word in our home, linked both to the mutuality lived out in the triad of God and you and me, and to the movements in mission observed here and there around the world. Korean colleagues in Japan are being stretched to the full, doing their moving and shaking with focussed commitment. We encourage them as best we can, and try to live through the crises of human lives in solidarity. For instance, we have played on the derogatory name given them by

the Japanese, CHOSENJIN. "Chosenjin" is the colonialist, discriminatory description of Koreans, but we have challenged them at times to live up to being CHOSEN persons in this difficult place in these times according to God's mission plan, turning despair around to opportunity.

Yukio LEE represents such a turnabout - the turnabout possible when leastness calls and commissions people to greatness. In the paradox of powerlessness, the praxis of committed help becomes a lesson for Christians living in God's mission as neighbours. Yukio, autistic from birth, abandoned by his family at five, is one of many doubly and even triply challenged among our neighbours in Ikuno, Osaka. But now he is a member of a group home and bakery, surrounded by a caring circle of Japanese and Korean friends, many of whom have come through hard struggles themselves. Now he beams his contentment, accepted unconditionally, just as he is. Because of the caring relationships in some twenty such group homes and sheltered work shops in this one small district, NHK, Japan's national television corporation, produced a documentary so moving that it was aired four times in two months. The message got through to a young lad in a nearby city, hidden away like so many severely disabled in Japan, in his own home. He pled with his parents, "Can't our family move to Ikuno where I could move about freely, happily, like Yukio?" Strength shared out of weakness; worth and hope found in harsh circumstances - such is the paradox of a radical gospel of changed lives and relations.

Jack: Stories, oh so many to tell! From those 7 years in outreach evangelism at Courtroom 809 at Osaka District Court about the struggle over outright refusal of repeated forced fingerprinting in 1985; about deciding in 1987 to make a test case of the government's threat to end my mission work in Japan; about the tremendous demands, physical, mental, and missional, which were made in the 2 years of monthly day-long interrogations, and in faithfully doing our best in 28 hearings over the 6 1/2 year civil suit: And all of this done while nurturing a brand new congregation into active ministries of reconciliation. I share some of my reflections on losing in court, but winning in the end, in the bulletin insert "THE FINAL CHAPTER" (App. iii). To tell it all would take at least one more luncheon.

But there are many other stories. Stories of lives so devastated by their experiences as Japanese army "comfort women" that only as their parting cry for some restitution of their dignity have Korean, Filipino, and Dutch women mustered the courage to speak out recently. There are stories of children of the street, of children brought by grandmothers to the House of Reconciliation, the new church we began from 1980. They brought them from broken homes, hoping that they might learn something of God's love and the good which we were seeking with Korean families for all. Korean and Japanese young people, along with our own children, have been great partners in sharing the love and truth of Jesus. They have taught us and renewed us in our day-by-day commitments, sometimes in circumstances very hard for them.

PRAXIS AND SPIRITUALITY ARE BREATH AND FIRE TO MISSION RESPONSES.

Beth: This is a poster from our daughter's room which she treasures from her summer clinical internship in a native community in northern B.C. In a striking way it sums up lessons we have been learning together with neighbours in Ikuno. A native youngster is dancing with an eagle feather held high, laughing with joy at this living sign of the great eagle spirit hovering overhead (or is it a mother earth figure?), enjoying the bond and partnership with the live-giving, life-blessing Spirit. The caption beneath reads:

ACCEPTING, CARING, HELPING, HEALING

It calls us, too, to be

ACCEPTING of ourselves and others in life and in mission, in whatever state, because we are accepted, radically and realistically;

CARING in word, touch, and deed, because we have been cared for in that abundant incarnate way;

HELPING with all that we are and have because God has come to our aid so often through a friend;

HEALING, restoring, sustaining others in their brokenness and struggling because we, too, have been made whole by the Source and Lord of our life.

Jack: We would go on to learn more of this with the Korean Christians in Japan. Remembering the saltiness of the few Korean Christians in Japan, and how they are moving and shaking people in society, I have put pamphlets by the salt shakers on your table, telling a little bit about the KCCJ. Whatever the alleyway, courtroom, or cathedral; whenever the cry of pain, anger, or hope; whoever the partner in daily encounters and mission engagements, we can only say Amen and Amen with them to the jubilee promise, to God's mission promises.

1995 is the jubilee year for the Japanese as well as for the Koreans and other Asians - the 50th year since their liberation from a cruel, military imperialism. With renewed dignity and power, people hope now for a true liberation from the burdens of history which continue to plague the hearts, minds, and relationships of Asian neighbours. For God's commissioners to those plains strewn with disjointed, unfleshed bones, God's mission through a faithful minority within an ethnic minority in Japan seems impossible, even absurd. But the Lordship and Friendship of God in Jesus Christ keeps calling us all forward, resonating in our bones, like a holy fire which never consumes.

SHARING THE LORDSHIP AND FRIENDSHIP OF JESUS INVITES COMMITMENTS WHICH MAY CUT AND COST.

Yes, even dry bones can be brought to life, now as in Ezekiel's day. God's recreating action is real. But we have to recognize THAT breath which must come, and THAT fire which must continue to burn. In the mission and commission of God, the breath of life came as Ezekiel prophesied. And it comes, as the Word is proclaimed to the four winds, so that they come from the corners of the earth to bless with new life the great host of God's people. In reading Ezekiel, the coming of the four winds to become the breath of new life struck me as a parable for Christian mission and commissions today. Winds come from all directions, from beyond, from unexpected sources, to give new breath to the reordered, to the newly incarnated body. They blow upon the coal of fire in mission, so it burns on with new and wondrous signs, though never burning out.

May our commitments and yours in renewed responses to God's commission be ready for and worthy of the breath blowing from all directions. To the Lordship and Friendship of God in mission in these times, let us all say "AMEN" by singing together the hymn "Partners in Christ's service".

Called as partners in Christ's service,
Called to ministries of grace,
We respond with deep commitment.
Fresh new lines of faith to trace.
May we learn the art of sharing.
Side by side and friend with friend,
Equal partners in our caring
To fulfill God's chosen end.

Christ's example, Christ's inspiring,
Christ's clear call to work and worth,
Let us follow, never faltering,
Reconciling folk on earth.
Men and women, richer, poorer,
All God's people, young and old,
Blending human skills together
Gracious gifts from God unfold.

Thus new patterns for Christ's mission
In a small or global sense,
Help us bear each other's burdens,
Breaking down each wall or fence.
Words of comfort, words of vision,
Words of challenge, said with care,
Bring new power and strength for action,
Make us colleagues, free and fair.

So God grant us for tomorrow
Ways to order human life
That surround each person's sorrow
With a calm that conquers strife.
Make us partners in our living,
Our compassion to increase,
Messengers of faith, thus giving
Hope and confidence and peace.

- Jane Parker Huber
(sung to Beecher "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling")

AMEN. SO BE IT, LORD!

Just One Meatball

*(Dedicated to Kitty – whose graciousness and vitality
is captured in this poem by Archie Crouch)*

You taught us to sing “Just One Meatball”
as we sat on the rocks
overlooking the sea
toward Shankaikuan
where the Great Wall of China
steps into the Gulf of Po-hai.

All day long we had watched squadrons of Japanese bombers
flying from Manchuria with loads of destruction
for the people of China.

So Kitty made a picnic;
conjured up home-made chocolate ice cream,
so dear to the North American palate.
And insisted that we sing for our dessert;
sing your favourite ballad, that utterly irrevelant,
utterly absurd account of a lonely man in a restaurant
complaining bitterly because he could get no bread
with his order of just one meatball!

So we hurled those rhymes at the bombers
bloating lazily through the sunset.
We rolled those silly absurdities across the bay,
Bounced them along the spines of the Great Wall,
Echoed them among the mud-walls of the villages
up toward the Great Khing-An Mountains
where you had twenty congregations under your care,
Reverberated them over the steppes of Central Asia
And on around the planet
until they echoed against our backs;

Resonating in our bones....

Resonating
the absurdity of a picnic at Peitaiho
while the people we had come to save were
being destroyed....
the absurdity of thinking that just being there
mattered
the greatest absurdity of all – that out of all
those
tiny absurdities there grew a church
whose
last official message to us could be

“Our spiritual bonds can never be
broken...
Christian memories and influences abide...
and in Christ no thought, or labour, or
prayer,
or love is ever lost.”