

Kurigasawa Baptist Church, November 2, 2025

Memorial Service for the Departed

Sermon Title: "Longing for Our Heavenly Homeland"

Hebrews 11:13-16

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Today's worship service is dedicated as a Memorial Service for the Departed. We will name those who have gone before us to heaven from this church, remember their days among us, rejoice that they now share in life with God in His kingdom, and offer this worship together with their bereaved families as we remember the departed. The weekly bulletin you hold contains a list of the names of those who have been called home. I did not personally meet most of the individuals listed here. However, I have heard repeatedly from our congregation members about how these individuals supported our church for many years, either as members themselves or as family members of our congregation. As pastor, I express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation for the way they carried a significant era of this church through worshipping together here and sharing in its activities. Thank you so much. Furthermore, alongside these individuals, the names of those who have passed away in recent years, for whom I myself had the privilege of officiating the funeral service, are also listed here. Each of those funerals was irreplaceable and remains vividly in my heart. The act of sending fellow church members or their family members, with whom we shared church life, to the Kingdom with gratitude through funeral services is one of the most important ministries within the church.

According to the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament, "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being." Humans were made from the earth. And eventually, they will return to the earth. This is a solemn truth ordained for all people. Human beings are finite; we cannot live for hundreds of years. Yet, without fear of misunderstanding, I believe that the very limitation of human life is itself a divine providence ordained by God. It is through this finitude that we learn our own limitations and are taught to be humble before God. Furthermore, it compels us to cherish the finite life given by God and strive to live it wholeheartedly. To be alive means to possess one's own time. How we use that time—that is, how we choose to live—is the question death poses to us. Remembering those who have gone before us in today's Memorial Service for the Departed also means seriously confronting the question of how we who remain should live.

In 2 Corinthians 5:1, one of the letters of the New Testament, the Apostle Paul says: "For we know that if our earthly tent is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." A tent refers to a temporary dwelling erected by pitching a tent. It served as a place for the Israelites, a pastoral people, to sleep and stay. Paul says that for humans, death is the destruction of that tent. It could be called the collapse of the physical body. So, what remains after this collapse? Without the faith of the Bible, wouldn't only nothingness remain after the collapse? If death means everything ceases to exist, vanishing like dew, leaving only an empty feeling, a sense of futility—this is why people say things like, "Can anything bloom after death?" It is viewing death as nothingness.

However, the New Testament teaches otherwise. It is based on the event where Jesus Himself, after dying on the cross, broke through the tomb on the third day and appeared before His disciples. The Lord Jesus was resurrected and is alive even now. Those who live by faith have received the resurrected life of Jesus Christ—eternal life—and have been made new. They are no longer those who die the death of sinners, but those who live in a new relationship with God. Of course, obtaining this relationship does not mean the end of earthly life is eliminated. However, that end is the end wrought by God. Beyond the end, God continues. Beyond the end is not nothingness. The same God who was in the beginning is present. This mirrors the relationship in God's history of salvation, which has a beginning and an end, just as the God who created heaven and earth has a beginning and an end. God is the Alpha and the Omega. It begins with

creation and is completed at the Second Coming. Human death is one scene within that divine history of salvation. God desires death to be the completion of life. Therefore, the end of earthly life is never meant to be suffering or calamity. It is the end prepared by God. Death, too, is under God's rule. Therefore, death, like life, should be expressed in the passive voice. That is, not "to die," but "to be called home."

Now we turn to today's Scripture, Hebrews chapter 11. The preceding paragraph lists the names of the patriarchs, the fathers of Israel's faith, who died in faith. These individuals appearing in Genesis—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—were all shepherds. They moved from place to place seeking pasture, living in tents as temporary dwellings. Originally from Ur of the Chaldeans—in Mesopotamia—they migrated to Aram Naharaim, northern Syria, and then came to Palestine. This journey spanned well over 1,000 kilometers. These regions receive little rain throughout the year, and grass does not grow abundantly. Therefore, they moved in search of grass to raise their sheep, goats, and cattle. They lived by moving, not settling in one place. They walked through life on earth as sojourners. What sustained their lives? It was faith. Faith means living according to God's word, acting in belief that God will show them what is not yet visible. Abraham's life was one opened up by obeying this word of God. In Genesis 12, God tells him: "Leave your native land, your family, and your father's household, and go to the land I will show you." "Leaving his father's household" meant parting from his family to start life in a completely unknown place. For Abraham, this meant abandoning a safe place, a place where he could live with peace of mind. Without knowing where he was headed, Abraham set out on a journey toward the land God would show him. Naturally, he must have felt anxious. Therefore, to determine if each place he visited was indeed the land God had promised, Abraham built altars to the Lord wherever he went. He offered worship, seeking to hear God's voice each time. During his journey, he faced famine and sought refuge in Egypt. It was only later, in chapter 15, that God promised to bless the place Abraham chose. Abraham lived a life of worship wherever he went, continually obeying God's word.

Faith is not relying on what we see, but believing in God's unseen promises and staking everything on them. It is acting on the word God speaks, believing it will come to pass. We often become captivated by what we see, tossed about by it, and lose sight of God. We must strive not to let that happen. When we turn our eyes to the real world, it is filled with things that darken the heart. Even now, wars rage on across the globe. Attacks persist in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, in our own country, we have seen the inauguration of our first female prime minister, yet the future of the coalition government remains uncertain. Where is this nation and the world headed? Should we not say we are entering an era of uncertainty and obscurity? However, running around in confusion over earthly matters accomplishes nothing. Like Abraham, we must live clinging to God's word even when the future is unclear. By looking up to heaven, he pressed forward without ceasing and fulfilled his life as a man of faith. For him, earthly life was a temporary dwelling; he believed his true homeland was in heaven. Heaven was his true home.

This afternoon, we will gather at the church cemetery for a graveside service. In Japan, where the population is declining, we sometimes hear of "abandoned graves" or families who no longer have relatives in their hometowns. Yet the church is not like that. Every year, we visit the graves, lay flowers, and give thanks. Still, the grave is not our final resting place. Our souls do not find their true home there. Our eternal home is in heaven. Even if earthquakes, typhoons, landslides, or volcanic eruptions strike this earth, our heavenly homeland will never be shaken. That is where we belong. The grave is where we place the body, but it is not where we dwell. Our dwelling is in heaven. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob looked up toward that heavenly homeland with joy, living as sojourners on earth. Their hope was fixed on heaven. For those who live by faith, death is not to be feared. It is simply the moving into the home God has prepared. Through today's Memorial Service, may we remember in our hearts that death is not the end.

Let us pray.