Sunday, September 13, 2026　Sunday Morning Worship Sermon

"Only the Kingdom of God"　Pastor Takaaki Inoue
1 Peter 1:13–19, Luke 12:25–34

❶【Life has a set duration】

"Which of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do even this very small thing, why do you worry about the rest?" (12:25–26) Here, Jesus calls extending one's life a "very small thing." Yet I believe extending one's life is a major concern for human beings. Recently, when I read news articles about people dying in disasters or accidents, I've come to wonder if it isn't the case that those who live long lives are predetermined from birth, just as those who die young are predetermined from birth. In the Old Testament, there is a king named Hezekiah. He "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord in every way" (2 Kings 18:3)—he was a very good king—but he fell ill with a fatal disease. This shows that being a good person does not guarantee a long life. The prophet Isaiah came to visit him and said, "You are going to die; there is no hope for your life, so make your will known to your family." The Bible records that when Hezekiah wept and prayed, God extended his life by 15 years. This means that our lifespan is determined by God, and there is nothing we can do about it.

❷【People do not live by their own power; they are kept alive by God】

And Jesus spoke using the birds and flowers of nature as examples. "Consider how the flowers of the field grow. They neither labor nor spin. Even Solomon in all his splendor was not dressed as beautifully as one of these flowers. If God clothes the grass of the field—which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire—in this way, how much more will He clothe you, you of little faith? Do not worry about what you will eat or drink, and do not be anxious. For all these things are what the pagans of this world eagerly seek." (12:27–30)

●When I read these words from the Bible, a vivid image comes to mind. A long time ago, when I was young, I saw a movie called *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*. It's a film about a monk named Francis of Assisi who lived in medieval Italy. Francis was the son of a wealthy merchant who dealt in cloth. He joined the Crusades, experienced the horrors of the battlefield, became deeply disheartened and fell into depression, and eventually returned to his village. While he was bedridden with illness, a small bird perched on his window. Watching it fly freely through the sky, he longed to live as freely as that bird, so he set out into the fields. As he walked through the fields, he came upon a church in ruins. He entered the crumbling church and, as he prayed before the cross, he heard a voice say, "Rebuild my house." So he returned home, gave all his possessions and clothes back to his parents, and became a monk, living a life of service to God with nothing to his name. He gathered up the fallen bricks and rebuilt the ruined church, and soon the poor, the sick, and those with nowhere else to go began to gather there.

Eventually, his fellow monks grew in number, and he founded the Franciscan Order.

These children have nothing. Yet they believe that their parents will always provide what they need, so they live each day carefree. That is why they have no worries. We worry not because we have problems, but because we do not trust in God or in others. It is because we try to manage everything on our own. I became a Christian because I longed to have that childlike heart once again. I long to experience once more the freedom that comes from letting go of everything, and the joy of having a heart that is full even though I possess nothing.

❸【Seek only the kingdom of God】

"Your Father knows that you need these things. Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock; for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." (12:31–32) Here, Jesus says, "Seek first the kingdom of God." By using the word "first," the Gospel of Luke is telling us to seek God alone. In the Gospel of Matthew, it is written, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (6:33). This establishes a priority, telling us to seek God first and foremost. It goes on to say, "And all these things will be added to you." It means that if we seek God first and seek Him alone, our earthly needs will be provided for; otherwise, they will not be. This is a word of God accompanied by a promise. I have lived my life to this day with God and Christ as my top priority. In the 37 years since I first came to this church, I have never once faced hardship in my earthly life. Everything I needed was provided for me.

So what does it mean to seek the Kingdom of God? Does it mean engaging in peace movements to establish a kingdom ruled by God on this earth? Long ago, there was a nation called the Byzantine Empire (Eastern Roman Empire) that adopted Christianity as its state religion. From the emperor down to the vast majority of the people, they were Christians, but in the end, it did not work out, and the empire fell. Even today, cults attempt to establish the Kingdom of God on earth by collecting enormous donations and purchasing land. However, Jesus said, "The Kingdom of God does not come with observable signs. Nor can people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is.' Indeed, the Kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:17), and He also told Governor Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). The word for "kingdom" in Greek is "basileia," which also means "rule" or "king." The Kingdom of God is not of this world; though invisible to the eye, it exists. It is the kingdom over which Christ reigns, and Christ Himself is the Kingdom of God. When He said, "The Kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15), He was referring to Himself. Therefore, to seek the Kingdom of God means to seek Christ and to ask Him to rule over your heart. Through baptism, we have died to this world and been born into Christ's kingdom. Since Christ is our Lord, seeking the Kingdom of God means serving Christ, doing what pleases Him, and becoming His instrument.

●Father Sava Mazko, abbot of St. Nicholas Monastery, visited the Taizé Community—a Protestant monastic community—and gave a talk to the monks there titled "The Monastic Vocation: Abiding in the Beauty of God." It was so wonderful that I would like to share it with you all.

"Beauty is one of God's names. God is the source of beauty. God is beauty itself. Later, I came to understand that God has revealed Himself to many people through the revelation of beauty. … Father Sergei Bulgakov, a great theologian, lost his faith in his youth and became a fervent Marxist. However, while traveling through Europe, when he encountered Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* in Dresden, he found himself beginning to pray and could not stop. Sergei Bulgakov heard the call to consecration in this encounter, and he later became a priest. … St. Benedict once said to one of his monks, "Come, let us go out and preach to the people." They set out and walked the streets all day without uttering a single word. That evening, the disciple asked St. Benedict, "What happened to the sermon?" St. Benedict replied, "The very fact that we monks walked among ordinary people—that is our sermon." … When I first started going to church, an elderly woman gave me a book with no cover. It contained the words of the Egyptian monks of the early Church. I was particularly captivated by the passages concerning the life of St. Anthony. Every week, young disciples would come to him to seek guidance on the path they should follow from his words. However, among them was a disciple who remained silent the entire time, never asking a single question. So Saint Anthony asked him, "Why do you remain silent all the time?" He replied: "It is enough for me simply to gaze at you." … Brother Roger (founder of the Taizé Community) established a community dedicated to true apostolic mission—that is, the mission of reconciliation. But for me, Taizé was, above all, a place that reveals beauty itself. Therefore, I now offer the words of Saint Anthony's disciple to all the brothers of Taizé. "Brothers, … my true joy is the beauty reflected in your faces." This beauty is the very answer to the question of why countless young people visit Taizé in search of meaning and prayer.

While Moses was speaking with God, he did not realize that his face was radiant—so much so that people were afraid of him. In the same way, I believe that the faces of those who seek God first and foremost—those who seek only the kingdom of God—unwittingly reveal a divine light and beauty unlike anything found in this world. Let us devote our lives to what endures forever, acquire treasures that will never perish, and store them up in heaven.