Sunday, October 4, 2026　Sunday Morning Worship Sermon

"The Qualities of a Disciple"　Pastor Takaaki Inoue
2 Corinthians 2:14–17, Luke 14:25–35

❶【The Meaning of the Two Parables】

Jesus told the large crowd that had followed Him that no one can be His disciple unless they are willing to give up their parents, wife, children, brothers and sisters—even their own life—and unless they take up their cross and follow Him. He said that unless one makes Jesus their top priority—rather than putting family or oneself first—they cannot be His disciple. To take up one's cross means to deny oneself. There are often people who complain that church life is too difficult. This is because they either misunderstand what church life or a life of faith entails, or they haven't read the Bible or truly listened to Jesus' words. Becoming a believer means being prepared to take up the cross.

Then He told two parables. The first parable was about someone who wants to build a tower: anyone would sit down and carefully calculate whether they have enough funds to complete it. Otherwise, they would only lay the foundation and never finish, and everyone would laugh at them. The other parable is about a king who, when preparing for battle, would carefully consider whether he could defeat an enemy with 20,000 soldiers using only 10,000 of his own. If he realized he could not, he would send envoys to make peace while the enemy was still far away. What are these two parables trying to teach us? I never understood their meaning for a long time, but I've come to understand it recently. It means, "Know your true self." Otherwise, you will abandon your life of faith halfway through and become a laughingstock. Later, the Lord said, "In the same way, none of you can be my disciple unless you give up everything you have" (Luke 14:33). To give up everything you have means that unless you let go of everything you rely on, you cannot become a disciple of Jesus.

❷【Knowing oneself is the beginning of faith】

When a wealthy young ruler asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" the Lord replied, "There is still one thing you lack" (Luke 18:22). That one thing is "knowing oneself." In other words, we must recognize that we are incapable of loving others, unable to keep the commandments, sinful, unrighteous, and gravely ill in spirit. Knowing oneself is the first step toward salvation. That is why God first gave the Ten Commandments to humankind. The Ten Commandments are a checklist designed to show us that we are no longer truly human. However, both the rich young ruler and the Jews misused them as tools to prove their own righteousness.

●What I learned at a study group on mental illness is that "many people feel

unwell but lack insight into their condition." People are often reluctant to admit that they are ill. People with alcohol dependence say, "I just like drinking; I'm not an alcoholic." People with schizophrenia say, "My auditory and visual hallucinations are real," and refuse to acknowledge that the images and voices come from their own brains. The criterion for determining whether someone is simply a heavy drinker or an alcoholic is "whether they are causing trouble for those around them." If those around them are troubled, it is a mental illness, and treatment is necessary. That is why you cannot understand yourself unless you engage with others—because other people serve as a mirror reflecting who you are. If the people around you are troubled, even if you yourself are not, then you have a mental illness.

No matter how much we try to heal someone, treatment is impossible unless that person acknowledges they are sick and truly wants to change and be healed. Only those who acknowledge that they are sick and that they must and need to change will come for treatment—that is, they will come to church. Such people are disciples of Christ. We have a habit of rushing to the hospital the moment our bodies fall ill, yet even when our souls are sick or beginning to rot, we never go to church to be healed. When our sins are pointed out, we lash out in anger. This is because we cannot see our own sins. This is the most severe symptom of the serpent's venom. The devil has blinded our eyes.

❸【Have Christ, who is the salt, within yourselves】

Jesus went on to say, "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot" (Luke 14:34). In this context, the "salt" refers to Christ. He is saying that if Christ is removed from Christians, they are of no use whatsoever.
The other day, on Wednesday, September 30, I was asked to conduct the funeral service for a member of Senri Seiai Church. This is because Senri Seiai Church currently has no pastor. I knew this member personally; he had taken care of me 38 years ago when I was assigned to Senri Seiai Church as a seminary student. I find this to be a mysterious connection. I was with the family until the very end, when the ashes were collected. When the remains were taken out of the cremation chamber, they were brittle and had almost completely crumbled. It was not possible to place all of the remains in the urn—only a small portion could be placed inside. I thought to myself, "Ah, so this is what becomes of a human being in the end." And at that moment, I understood clearly: our physical bodies in this world are merely vessels for the soul. Once the soul departs, this vessel returns to the earth.

●The Autumn Grand Sumo Tournament ended the other day. On the final day (Senshūrak), I learned that there is a ceremony called the "God-Sending Ritual,"

in which the spirits of the gods are sent back to the afterlife from the ring. Afterward, they brought out a shovel and began digging up the soil in the center of the ring, and six types of items emerged from it: dried squid, chestnuts, rice, salt, kelp, and nuts. These are called "calming offerings"; they are offerings to the deities—buried in the soil at the start of the tournament—to ensure the safe conclusion of the Grand Sumo Tournament and to soothe the spirits of the deities. After the spirits of the deities have departed, the ring is broken up with a pickaxe and restored to its original state of soil. Once the spirits of the deities have left, even the sturdy sumo ring returns to being mere soil.

I believe that the Japanese people knew from experience that when the spirit departs, a person returns to the earth. I think we, too, intuitively understood this whenever we attended a funeral and viewed the deceased—they always seemed like empty shells. No matter how much science advances or medicine develops, science is ultimately limited to tinkering with and repairing this physical body—the vessel of the soul—and cannot truly understand what it means to be human, nor can it elucidate the meaning of our existence.

There is no purpose to this world. This is because we cannot take any of this world's possessions with us into the next life. Cicadas live underground for about ten years, but their purpose is not simply to live underground; they are born to emerge from the ground, break out of their shells, acquire new bodies, and fly freely through the sky. In the same way, the purpose of human life is not simply to live in this world; rather, we are born to leave this world, break free from the shell of our old physical body, obtain a superior, heavenly body, and live freely in the Kingdom of Heaven. People are born to be resurrected. If we become completely immersed in this world—that is, if we are filled with the things of this world—the Spirit of God cannot enter us. This is because there is a limit to how much can fit into the vessel of the physical body in this world. Therefore, when one fasts, practices self-restraint, and discards the things of this world to become unburdened, the things of God enter, and that person's soul becomes purified, enabling them to see more and more of God. When the soul is ready to leave this world, the things of this world gradually cease to enter—that is, the person stops eating—and the physical body gradually shrinks until it returns to the earth.

A Christian is a person in whom two entities—the human soul and the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit)—dwell within the vessel of the physical body in this world. The early Church Fathers said, "God practices dwelling eternally within human beings." The fate of those who possess this Spirit of God is entirely different from that of those who do not. We must invite God into this earthly vessel. A disciple of Christ is one who relies on Christ, not on the things of this world. In the end, even we ourselves cannot be relied upon. We must not miscalculate. Neither we humans nor this world possess the power to save anyone. "Stop relying on human

beings—on those who breathe only through their noses." (Isaiah 2:22)

If the Spirit of God, Christ, dwells within a person, that person's body becomes the body of God and will be used in this world. However, if Christ departs, that person will be of no use and will simply return to dust. Yet Christ came to dwell within you, and He longs to do so. It is so that you will not return to mere dust. It is to make you a true human being, a child of God, and one who lives forever. I pray that all of you will put your trust in Christ and become a dwelling place where the Spirit of Christ may dwell securely.