

## **God Save Me!**

### **(My experience of the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami)**

11<sup>th</sup> March 2011. It was a quiet afternoon.

I was practicing some calligraphy – a little hobby of mine – upstairs in an annex at my house. There was a strange noise and an earth tremor began. But it was nothing like the tremors we often get in Japan. It was big. Later they said it was magnitude 9. The shaking was so bad that I could barely manage to stay crouching on the floor. I couldn't grab anything for support, and could only wonder when the building would collapse around me. I've no idea how many minutes it lasted, but when the shaking finally stopped, I looked around the room to find that my bookcases had come crashing down and the things on my desk were spread all over the room.

As it had quietened down, I went outside with my wife to see how things were. Inside, all our furniture had moved or come crashing down. Tiles had come off the roof of my house and that of my neighbour. The local warning system was broadcasting tsunami warnings from the loudspeakers. On the radio, they said that a tsunami of ten meters was approaching the Sanriku area. But I thought we would be all right here.

I decided that I'd wait until my son got home before I tried to move any of the big items of furniture in the main house, and went back upstairs in the annex to sort out my own things. Then I looked out to sea, and saw the first wave of the tsunami. As it, and the second wave, hit the sea defences, it was as though there had been an explosion, sending a cloud of mud 10 or 15 meters into the sky, double the height of the trees that had been planted to protect us from the tide.

There was no time to run before the water had reached the house.

I had to stay where I was, upstairs in the annex.

The water rushed in like a mighty river in flood. It covered the floor and so I climbed up on to the window sill. It reached my waist, my chest, my shoulders. I tasted salt water.

“God save me!”

I suddenly thought of Jesus on the cross.

“Where's my wife? My children? My grandchildren?” As I thought about my family, the water stopped rising.

“Thank goodness. I'm safe!”

But then it was terrible.

The water receded as though a dam had broken. The annex was 5 by 15 meters but there was a terrible, grinding, crash and about half of the building was ripped away. The lie of the foundations meant that the half that I was in was saved. It was a narrow escape.

My wife had taken refuge at the church on the hill behind the house and was safe.

The next morning, members of the local fire brigade took us to the local primary school, which was being used as a shelter, and there I learned that my immediate family were safe at my daughter's house.

We lost three members of our congregation in the tsunami.

Grace Junko and her mother and father.

Junko had gone back to work part time at the kindergarten she'd worked at when she was younger. They had bundled the eighteen children into a minibus and had tried to outrun the tsunami but the bus had been swept away. It hit a house, where it stopped, and each of the children had been lifted to safety. There, the children and their teachers spent the night. However, the physical and mental efforts she put into the escape were too much for Junko and she and one of the children died.

Our church building was pronounced unsafe and has been knocked down. However, our vestry and members of the Diocesan Project are planning a new church. We've lost many of the houses in the village, however, and we need to think about how the church will operate in the future. The local government is planning housing on higher ground inland.

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