



25 Main Street, P.O. Box 61, Grand Bend, Ontario N0M 1T0 * (519) 238-2402
huronshoresunitedchurch@gmail.com * www.huronshoresunitedchurch.com

June 9, 2020

Today's message has been prepared by David Kai. David and spouse, Marly Bown are our Voluntary Associate Ministers (VAMs).

"My help comes from God, the maker of heaven and earth." Psalm 121:1

An "Ombu" God

These are difficult times. Some of us, especially the extroverts, are not doing well being isolated from others. We are horrified at the racist and brutal acts we see every day on the news. Others are grieving the loss of loved ones, and many more are grieving the loss of everything that seemed normal. How do we cope, and how are we to maintain hope? We may feel much like the disciples would have felt on Good Friday. Does it seem that God is absent in the world's suffering? Where is God in these bad, even desperate times?

We are likely familiar with the story called "Footprints" by Canadian Margaret Fishback Powers. Where is God in our troubles? The "Footprints" story tells us that God is there, carrying us through our most difficult times. God is with us, closer than a friend, mourning with us, crying with us, carrying us, even when we were not aware of God's presence.

The God in the "Footprints" story is a powerful, comforting image. But there is a similar image from my early childhood that particularly fits my conception of God in troubled times. But to describe that image, first I have to tell a story to set the scene, and also teach some Japanese.

When I was a toddler, my grandmother, or Bachan used to take care of me during the day. Each weekday morning I would be dropped off early at my grandparents' home in Toronto. During those days I can remember having lots of time to explore the house and the backyard. My Bachan hardly spoke any English, but somehow we managed to get by with sign language, her few words of English and my few words of Japanese.



One of the Japanese words that I knew was the word, "ombu". Ombu is a traditional Japanese way of carrying a child on one's back. Typically a mother, grandmother or older sister carries a child in this way. But ombu is not only a means of transporting someone; it can also be a way of comforting a child with the motion of rocking and swaying.

One day there was a bit of a commotion in the house as a bathroom was being installed. When I saw a worker leave the room being renovated, I snuck in to have a look for myself. It was interesting to

see, as they had cut a hole in the floor and put a metal flange around it. I could see right through the hole into the basement, so I leaned over for a better look, putting my hand down for balance. Suddenly I felt a searing pain. I had put my hand on metal that had just been welded into place. I screamed in pain as I pulled back my hand to see that a large area of skin had been burned away.

Hearing my cries, my Bachan came quickly; she took me to the kitchen and put on some ointment and a large bandage on my hand. But I continued to wail, "Ombu! Ombu!" So Bachan lifted me on her back, ombu-style, and carried me all around the house - bouncing me, comforting me for a long, long time until my tears were dry.

During the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster in Japan, I noticed that often the rescuers carried people on their backs in the ombu style. In the midst of devastation and desolation, these acts of compassion, courage and utter determination stood out to me as signs of God's unending care. They struck me as an image for a God who is there with us, caring for us and carrying us through our troubles and disasters; an image that I would describe as the "Ombu God".



One picture of an "ombu" rescuer stands out for me in particular, for I am sure that I saw this same rescuer breaking into tears while telling an interviewer that he had lost his wife and children to the tsunami, but still wanted to keep on helping others. This fits even more the image of a Good Friday God, the Ombu God, who despite being bereaved, despite losing a child and a family, keeps on caring, carrying, and carrying on through the worst of days.

The Ombu God - that is an image that makes sense to me in difficult times. For like God in the story of the footprints, we have a God who carries us – through our most troubled times, through the most unthinkable disasters, even to life beyond this life. A God that comforts and carries those who do not have the strength to carry themselves.

When I am the most hurt, in the midst of my Good Fridays, I can picture that I am safe, not in everlasting arms – but on the back of a tender, loving, God; an Ombu God that rocks and comforts me. To this God be thanks and praise, now and forever.

David
davidwkai@gmail.com