

2023 June Monthly Service -- Sermon

Good Morning Everyone! Thank you so very much for attending our monthly service for June, 2023. I hope you are all in excellent health & in bright, warm Summer-spirits

As you know, we had our Tenchi Kane No Kami Grand Ceremony on Sunday, May 28. Thanks to the prayers of those like all of you, it was filled with Kami's awesome workings.

Letting go of my own thoughts, I left everything in Kami's hands and prepared for this grand ceremony, thinking, "Believe in destiny and do my best." For more than five consecutive days including that ceremony day, we were blessed with the best of weather. Kami provided for everything. I was extremely grateful, for we were surrounded by more works of Kami than we could have ever imagined.

Since the establishment of this church I have prayed for young people in the world to get to know the Konko Faith, to serve the betterment of the world, & in December 2015 I wrote the following poem to inspire future generations:

*To you young people!
Your true Way to happiness
Is found in this Faith.
Come & learn it faithfully;
Become a light of the world!*

I conducted this year's ceremony, with my heart burning with passion to serve Kami. 12 adults and 3 children witnessed this solemn & beautiful service, including:

Ashton Kish & her husband, Patrick Keough

who joined us for the ceremony from St. Louis.

Comfort Artemis & her partner, Nathan Espenshield

attended this ceremony from St. Louis as well.

And a young lady joined us from Kenosha in Wisconsin by train.

I was very happy to see these young Americans in person at the ceremony; and knew they wished to deepen their faith.

On top of that Ms. Ashton Kish was our guest speaker. She has been an earnest believer of the Konko Faith since she first visited our church in 2010. The more she has realized Kami's wish for us humans, the deeper she has wished to become a Konko minister. She is now serving as a minister's assistant. I believe she will become one of the Konko Daijins – just as Kami has wished to have people become aware of the blessings of Heaven and Earth by having Konko Daijin be born throughout the world. Like our founder, Konko Daijin is the person who understands not only that we are provided with water, air and everything for our living by Kami, but also understands the true blessings of heaven and earth. In other words, "Everything that happens is Tenchi No Kami's doing. This includes major upheavals," or "All is Divine Love."

Her speech was so wonderful & inspiring that each participant listened to it diligently, interestingly and attentively. She talked about how she had wished to become a doctor of palliative care and then through Kami's great arrangements she is now working as a plant researcher.

Her desire to become a doctor of palliative care had started back in 2017, when she began to learn more about end-of-life decisions. She had already had an important experience about this. Her best friend, Kevo, at 17 years old was killed in a car accident Nov. 26, 2010 the same year she had first visited our church. His brain was severely damaged. Suddenly, his family was faced with some difficult decisions and asked her a very heavy question: "Should we let him go?," because she had known him very well.

In that moment, Kami and Kevo were telling her the answer. Ash made the palliative-care decision with Kevo's father. She was honoring quality of life over quantity of days. At that time she was only 20 years old and didn't realize how much effect this moment of clarity would have on her life.

Soon after that car accident she called and e-mailed me to seek my Mediation. Though Kevo died, Ash could constantly improve her life by seeking Kami's wish through Kevo's death. Then we realized: "It is a miracle that the fatal illness or injury can be cured, but even more of a miracle is the heart that can accept fatal illness or even death with gratitude."

Then, in 2017 while watching a TV documentary, Ash was inspired by the palliative area of medicine that values quality of life over quantity. She wished to become a doctor in that field. She knew it would be hard, expensive, and maybe impossible. The only thing she could think of was if she tried, Kami would help her, and would, at least, guide her to where she was supposed to be.

She studied very hard to accomplish her dream. However it was discovered that she had narcolepsy, a disorder where one's circadian rhythm is no longer functional, and a person could enter REM sleep at any moment.

She also found the expectations of medical school was double the workload of what she was doing right then! She wasn't sure if she'd be able to handle medical school mentally or physically. However, she decided that she would keep trying.

Then COVID came and shocked the world. And the pandemic changed everything. Kami led her to change the course of her life, and she ended up choosing to study of plants. She came to love learning more and more about plants. She wanted to be a plant scientist.

Her Granny, Mrs. Norma Jean Sommer was the person who was pleased with Ash's decision to become a plant researcher, instead of a palliative care doctor. When Ash had learned about palliative care in 2017, one of the first things she did was to have a conversation with her grandmother about her end-of-life wishes. Granny then told her, *You are the first and only person to have ever asked me this. I'm getting old. I'm just really grateful you asked. I really feel like you care.* And above that, a couple years later... her Granny made Ash her Power of Attorney, saying, *If I'm ever stuck in the hospital, you know exactly what to do.*

It was April 2022 when her Granny was suddenly hospitalized. Ash cared about her Granny so deeply that she always directed her heart to Kami while trying to make each

palliative care decision as 'Quality over Quantity'. And Kami's miraculous workings helped Ash to proceed making those decisions. Then her Granny peacefully passed away on May 8, 2022, Mother's Day, surrounded by family and relatives, which seemed like being honored by Kami. It was exactly how any palliative care doctor would have envisioned a 'good' end.

Ash concluded her speech as saying:

I think I realized at that moment that Kami-sama had helped me fulfill my wish - not in the exact way I'd imagined, but in a way that mattered deeply to me and my very beloved Granny. I prayed and prayed for Kami-sama's 'nariyuki' (outcome of events) to become true, and when you look to Kami-sama, I believe strongly that any wish you make, any request that you have, will indeed come to you. Maybe not in exactly the way you envisioned, but Kami-sama knows better. That's why the 'Divine Reminder' is called 'Divine Reminder'! It's always there to remind you of exactly what a person needs to establish a Wagakokoro in this life - a heart of joy and peace.

I don't need things to go exactly as planned - I just need Kami-sama's arrangements. Then everything will fall into place.

After carefully reading her text, I was so impressed with it that I wished to summarize her speech for this sermon today.

After the grand ceremony the KCNA East Regional Seminar was held virtually. Rev. Amy Uzunoe-Chin, our CAM delivered her lecture about KCNA theme this year: "Renew and Maintain Our Communication with Kami Through Sacred Mediation, Daily prayer, and Teachings." Then she led our discussions. We joined in as a group. And to my surprise and pleasure all participants sincerely and actively answered every question Amy Sensei had.

All participants, especially the young members who joined from some distance were so impressed with our grand ceremony that they wanted to join us in the next grand ceremony, that is, Ikigami Konko Daijin Grand Ceremony that will be held Sunday, October 1. While vowing to see each other again, we parted regrettably.