

Dancho-

the heartrending grief of a mother monkey

By Miriam Davis

Eddie Askew in 'Encounters' (The Leprosy Mission International) has a meditation on the meaning of 'compassion' in Mark 1:41-42. "Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured."

"Jesus reacts with compassion. We've devalued that word. Today, compassion suggests sympathy, pity. They're good things to feel, but they're passive, not very strong. The word is really two words joined together – com and passion. With passion; and passion meant suffering. We speak of Christ's passion, his suffering on the cross. That's powerful stuff. It's also linked to the Greek word meaning guts – the heart and stomach, which were thought to be the focus of human emotion. After all, when we're faced with a crisis, something threatening, we feel sick, our stomachs churn, we're "moved to the depth of our being". Jesus enters the man's life, feels his pain, identifies with his loneliness and rejection – a hint of the rejection and pain which Jesus himself was to face later."

So how would you explain compassion in Japanese? In Mark 1:41 the phrase used is 深く哀れみ(ふかくあわれみ) and in Matthew 9:36 where Jesus has compassion on the crowds because they are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd, かわいそうに思われた(おもわれた) is used.

But it was a story I heard in a

Japanese sermon that really helped me understand the meaning behind the words. The story is from a book of legends, the Sesetsu Shingo, compiled in the fifth century AD in China. A man called Kanon is on a journey down the Yangtze when a soldier on his boat snatches a baby monkey from its mother and takes it on board. The mother monkey runs crying bitterly along the bank keeping pace with the ship for 400 kilometers until she drops dead as the boat docks and she leaps onto its deck. When she is cut open, her inner organs are discovered to be torn to shreds with the desperate effort she has made not to be parted from her offspring. This is the first recorded use of the word 断腸(だんちょう) to describe such harrowing grief that it literally rends the heart. Here is the story in Japanese below.

5世紀の初めに編集された中国の「世説新語」という故事(legends)の中に「断腸」ということばの由来が出ています。晋の国の桓温という人が、蜀という国に攻め入ろうとした時、船で揚子江(the Yangtze river)を渡って行きました。桓温の船が三峡(Yangtze Gorges)という所に差し掛かったとき、一人の兵士が一匹の小猿を捕まえて船に連れてきたのです。船が三峡の岸を離れると、母猿は岸伝いに悲しい声を上げて、岸を伝ってどこまでもどこまでも追いかけてくるのです。何と百里、つまり400kmもの長い距離を

船を追って泣きながらその猿は走り続けたのです。400km余りの航程の末、船が岸に再び近づいた時、母猿は急いで船に飛び移りましたが、そのまま息絶えてしまいました。その時死んだ母猿のお腹を一人の兵士が割くと、あまりにも深い悲しみのためか、あるいは小猿を400kmもの長い距離を追って走り続けたためか、その腸はズタズタにちぎれていたのです(shred, torn to pieces)。桓温はそれを聞いて、立腹し、その兵士を免職にしました。そのためにこの世説新語の「ちつめん篇」に故事として編集されています。これより古い資料に「断腸」ということばは出てこないのだそうです。

この断腸の思いと言う、深い悲しみや、憤り、で内臓が揺さぶられ、引きちぎられるような思いと言う意味のことばが、聖書の中でギリシャ語となっており使われています。それが、マタイ9:36の「群衆を見て、羊飼いのない羊のように弱り果てて倒れている彼らを可愛そうに思われた」というイエス様の感情「かわいそうに思われた」ということばであります。

