

The Bridges to True Peace

“Men build too many walls and not enough bridges.” This quotation from Joseph Fort Newton, an American Baptist minister, indicates that, in order to understand each other, we need more bridges, not walls. The relationship between Korea, China and Japan is often said to be getting worse year by year. My image of Koreans and Chinese was formed in family discussions. Both my grandfather and father have a negative image of them. They say, “I don’t trust Koreans or Chinese. They still complain about Japan even though the Japanese government has officially compensated them. They are misusing the postwar compensation!” As a result, two members of my family avoid using products or services from those countries. Naturally, having listened to their opinions, I gradually developed the same outlook as theirs. However, one experience totally changed my point of view.

Since last year, I have been working as a “Hiroshima Nagasaki Peace Messenger.” The movement of Hiroshima Nagasaki Peace Messengers started in Nagasaki with a call for world peace and the abolishment of nuclear weapons, by sending high school students to the United Nations. Through this work, I have been learning about atomic bombs, people’s lives during wars, and the history of the development of nuclear weapons in the world. Sometimes it is very sad and even shocking to learn about this history. However, it is our mission to learn about it from the people who experienced the war, because we are probably the last generation that can listen to them directly.

One day I visited Nagasaki as a Peace Messenger. I went to the Nagasaki Peace Memorial Park, which was a prison when the atomic bomb struck. I was lost for words there. I saw many peace monuments sent from many countries, including Korea and China. It was as if all the prayers for world peace had been gathered there together from all over the world! Then, another fact shocked me. On August 9, 1945, many Koreans and Chinese were killed or injured by the atomic bombing, too. Before that, I had only focused on Japanese victims of the bombing. I didn't even imagine that almost all of the Korean and Chinese victims were forced to work there and kept captive in a prison. Japan often tells the world that it is the only country that has experienced atomic bombings, which suggests they consider only the Japanese to be victims. However, how many Japanese people know about what happened to the Koreans and Chinese during the war in Nagasaki? Today, in 2020, there are 13,400 nuclear weapons in the world and over 2000 nuclear tests have been done up until now. There are also 443 nuclear power plants in operation around the world today. This made me realize that it is natural that nuclear victims should be found all over the world, gradually leading me to the belief that we should cooperate with each other toward the same goal as we know the reality and consequences of atomic bombs.

So, what prevents us? Why didn't I know the facts behind the history? Why do some people mistrust other nationalities without knowing much about them? History, of course, matters as much as world security. However, in fact, our understanding of these factors, sometimes causing misunderstandings, prevents us from

creating connections and uniting together to solve the same world problems. We should not be easily swayed by these factors. In the end, we are the same human beings, who have loved ones and emotions. Everyone wishes for happiness and we should live fully to fulfill our mission in life. I myself have found my own mission in my life through my work as a Nagasaki Hiroshima Peace Messenger. To realize world peace, I want to listen to people from different backgrounds and know more about them. This will, I believe, help remove our misunderstandings and prejudices towards others. As global citizens, we need to connect to each other not just at the national level but also as individuals. Until we appreciate the common humanity that binds us together, we will never be able to build the bridges towards true peace, like the many foreign monuments gathered in Nagasaki Peace Memorial Park.

(699 words)