



Ransom Notes

Tortoise Walk and Talk

Mitani, a 69-year old from Tokyo, solved his loneliness moments in a most unusual manner. He wanders the neighborhood streets with a 26-year old friend. Currently this creeping, hard shelled companion weighs 155 pounds. No, it is neither a person nor a cocker spaniel. Bon-Chan is an African tortoise with a life expectancy up to 150 years.

Mitani and his wife had no children, but several years ago they spotted a wee tortoise, small enough to fit in the palm of a hand. Intrigued,

they purchased the little guy. Suddenly, about at age ten, the turtle began to increase in weight, and that is when Mitani began their now-daily routine — a walk around the neighborhood.

The tortoise steals the hearts of many, but the real story is the incredible bond between the human and his friend. During their daily stroll, neighbors pause to pet the slowly moving creature and visit with Mitani, a local funeral director. The tortoise, a non-sprinter, even knows the route by heart.

The owner knows his friend will undoubtedly outlive him, but he hopes to find a person willing to care for Bon-Chan. Currently, however, the tortoise lives in a pen at Mitani's funeral home, so all visitors can see him when they enter the building. The companionship is wonderful, and even the guests, perhaps experiencing moment of sadness, smile as they spot the large cage containing the slow moving creature.

You ask, however, why would I share this story? Our funeral director was lonely. His pet provided opportunity for people to stop, visit, and chat for a few moments, thus providing Mitani conversation and feeling of being useful and even loved by others. Love exhibits its face in a myriad of ways. Strolls and conversation are two examples demonstrating concern and care for others. Listening on the phone, as a friend weeps, while sharing recent health challenges with a mutual friend, models 'quiet' love.

Paul, in I Corinthians 13, describes love. Love never gives up. Love cares for others and isn't proud, thinks of others first, looks for the best in people, and doesn't look backward, but keeps on keeping on. Without love, Paul comments, in verse 2, we are worthless. Our tortoise tale demonstrates one type of love, a love that overcomes loneliness by extending himself and his pet into a community of people, some who also may have found this daily tortoise stroll something for which they could look forward. Love sometimes even requires us to be a bit uncomfortable as we care for others. The warm feelings, however, following extending ourselves in love for others, is worth it.

Love exhibits itself in many ways. Recently Jeff, the chaplain at Concordia, surprised and warmed the hearts of those attending the Sunday worship service. The temperature was several degrees on the minus side of the thermometer. The wind was quite brisk, resulting in the room being very chilly. Shortly before the service began, Jeff announced that he had some shawls, small blankets, and even a comforter, which anyone could borrow if they were feeling cold. Seven or eight people provided Jeff with an extra warm smile, as the goosebumps disappeared from their arms. The thoughtfulness of the pastor demonstrated a tiny bit of true love and care for others. Jeff was not just focused on the sermon of the morning, but looked out and spotted a simple need, and went the second mile, well, maybe only a few extra feet, but he cared. That is what love is all about. Paul, the apostle, continually discussed and modeled Christian love. He challenges us in Romans 12:20 to be devoted to one another in love. A few verses later, in 14:19, we are prodded to build up one another. Service to others, delivered humbly, is the suggestion found in Galatians 5:13.

Mitani demonstrated love as he feed Bon-Chan along their walk. He noticed a need, hunger, and reached into his goody bag for some lettuce. His eyes were open to the needs of someone besides himself. He took time to care.

By far, however, the greatest example of love, of putting others before self, is Christ's own sacrifice. He certainly bore our burden. John 3:16 sums it up. God LOVED the world. He GAVE His only son. He did this for you and me.

May each of us find multiple ways to model love and care for others.

