

“JOHN FRANKLIN GOUCHER: A MAN OF FAITH AND VISION”

**Sermon for Goucher Hall Memorial Chapel
Aoyama Gakuin University
Friday, November 15, 2002**

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Bible Readings:

Psalm 1, verses 1-3; Jeremiah 17, verses 7-8; Matthew 13, verses 31-32

It is an honor to take part in this chapel service and to follow in the footsteps of John Franklin Goucher. In his diary of 1907, Dr. Goucher wrote that he had spoken at Aoyama Gakuin's commencement exercises in the then “new” Goucher Hall, which had been rebuilt after an earthquake. I am sure he would be pleased to know that members of the Aoyama and Goucher communities are gathered together today, in this Goucher Hall, for these special ceremonies.

Dr. Goucher was a unique man. Through his deep-seated faith, he was able to accept “the assurance of things hope for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11, verse 1) Through his penetrating vision and practical, studious nature, he was able to put faith into action in countless ways that have benefited the world for over a century. Today's Bible verses from Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17 speak of the strength, wide reach, and longevity of a man of faith – an apt description of John Franklin Goucher. He put his trust in the Lord, delighted in His words, and like the strong, spreading roots of a tree, he reached out to share his faith with others in near and distant places. His vision for sharing this faith led him to found both this institution and Goucher College, as well as others like them in various lands.

Throughout his life, John Franklin Goucher responded to God's call with the words, “Whatever you ask, I'll do with the greatest pleasure.” His call to faith as a Christian came early, the first of six God-given “commissions” that he said guided his work. A second commission was to enter the ministry, where he served a total of 53 years. Although he was not a physically strong man, his religious faith gave him a different kind of strength, and he believed that God guided him day by day –from the smallest to the largest undertakings. He began his career as a circuit minister, traveling from church to church in Baltimore County, while boarding with a local family. We see a wonderful example of his unquestioning faith in his 1869 diary, his first year in the ministry. On a Saturday evening before his Sunday commitments, he spoke of being so tired that he couldn't read or think, and he had no sermon prepared for the next day. He wrote, “But the Lord, in whose service I am so worn down, will provide for the morrow when it comes. So goodnight.” The next day he woke to pouring rain, and in

such weather, it was the custom of his circuit for neither the minister nor the congregation to attend church. God had provided for him as he expected - but in an unexpected way.

Dr. Goucher spent 21 years of his ministry as pastor at various churches in Baltimore, and he oversaw the building of 15 churches in the area, including First Church, now called Lovely Lane United Methodist Church. During his pastorate there in the early 1880's, as the Methodist Episcopal Church was preparing to celebrate its centennial in the United States, he and other church leaders proposed a college for women, to "give them equal advantages in the business of life." As they did for the founding of Aoyama Gakuin, he and his wife, Mary Fisher Goucher, gave land and funds for the first college building, also named Goucher Hall. Thus in 1885, the Woman's College of Baltimore City, now Goucher College, was chartered, creating a school which, in less than 10 years of operation, was ranked among the top 14 men's and women's colleges in the nation. In addition to his namesake college, he also was an active leader and supporter of education for African American students, serving for many years as trustee and Board president at Morgan College, now Morgan State University in Baltimore.

Two other important commissions for him were to undertake missionary work and to extend Christian education in all lands. These commissions, while separate callings for him, most often ran side by side with his ministry to shape the international work he undertook. Dr. Goucher had wanted to become a missionary himself, but he was asked instead to assist others in the mission fields. He strongly believed that education had the power to change lives and affect societies, and his vision was to extend educational and religious training to young people around the world. This vision became action as he studied the needs in various countries, opened doors for those who would lead, and helped finance the projects. During the last two decades of the 19th century, he helped establish Goucher College in Baltimore and Aoyama Gakuin in Japan, and as well as helped found schools, universities, and hospitals in India, China, and Korea through missionaries in those countries.

In many ways, the first seal of Goucher College, designed by Dr. Goucher himself in 1892, symbolized not only his vision of education for students in Baltimore, but in a broad sense, it also stood for his vision of education for students in his schools around the world. The center of the seal was a triangle, the points of which represented mind, body, and soul; he felt that each of these areas could be improved through education. From the triangle emanated rays of light, symbolizing the responsibility to serve others through the blessings of education. Generations of his graduates have shared the light of their education with others, and Dr. Goucher's work has yielded fruit for many seasons.

And like the tree planted by the stream, John Franklin Goucher was nourished by the deep waters of his trust in God and was not deterred by the heat and drought of societies' doubts or resistance to his educational vision. For all his enterprises, he planned carefully and thoughtfully, persevered, and knew he was following the path God had set for him. In Baltimore, he turned aside prejudice against educational opportunities for women and African American students, two overlooked groups. In India, he started

more than 120 primary and secondary schools for both boys and girls of different castes, another educational innovation for that time. And in Japan, China, and Korea, he helped persuade the leaders of those nations to allow the establishment and expansion of foreign missions and their children to attend mission schools. In his later years, he worked to unify the Methodist missions established abroad and to foster interdenominational missionary work, his last commissions.

Dr. Goucher continued during his lifetime to give of his talents, his time, and his financial resources to ensure that these fruits of his faith and vision would continue to flourish. In spite of dangers and difficulties of long-distance travel and usually at his own expense, he attended numerous church conferences worldwide, and visited often the schools and universities he helped found. During a span of almost 40 years, he traveled around the world three times, crossing the Atlantic 25 times and the Pacific eight. It was estimated that he covered more than 1.5 million miles during his lifetime, including 30,000 to and from China when he was 75. The *Missionary Review of the World* noted that “at every mission station where he called, his presence was a blessing and a benediction.”

Dr. Goucher viewed his work as part of God’s calling for him and took no glory in personal honors or recognition. He said, “I have only cared for the doing, to accomplish the task laid out for me by my heavenly father, and if the work is done, what matters it who did the work.” Others, however, recognized in tangible ways the importance and impact of his vision and generosity. In 1910, the Woman’s College of Baltimore changed its name to Goucher College to honor him and Mary Goucher, who shared his faith and supported his work and ideals. Both Japan and China awarded him their highest civilian decorations for his contributions to their countries. In 1919, he received the insignia of the third degree of the Order of the Rising Sun from the Emperor of Japan, and in 1921, the President of China bestowed on him the insignia of the third degree of the Order of Chia Ho.

The verses in Matthew 13 speak of the grain of mustard seed as the smallest of all seeds, which grows into the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree. The life of John Franklin Goucher was like that grain of mustard seed. He was just one man of faith, but his vision and dedication produced a multi-branched tree of educational opportunities that still thrives. For more than a century, he has affected the lives of multitudes in many countries, including those of us here today. We are like the birds in the parable, coming to this “tree” from all directions, yet sharing a common bond created through Dr. Goucher’s legacy.

John Franklin Goucher died in July 1922, knowing that he was facing his final calling from God – to return home to the Lord whom he had served for so many years. He was eulogized in many places, including here at Aoyama Gakuin, where a memorial service was held for him on November 10, 1922, the annual Founder’s Day, almost exactly 80 years ago. Faculty and students planted a tree on the lawn of that earlier Goucher Hall, perhaps as a symbol of his likeness to the blessed man in Psalms and Jeremiah. The President of the Aoyama Gakuin Alumni Association also wrote to Dr.

Goucher's daughter in Baltimore: "Time alone will reveal the extent of his great services to our work here.... He was a permanent contribution to Christian educational ideals and accomplishments, and though he rests from his labors, his works will long follow him." The ongoing success of both Aoyama Gakuin University and Goucher College is proof that Dr. Goucher's vision has endured the test of time.

But as we celebrate his long-lasting accomplishments, we should ask ourselves how we can carry the legacy of his faith and vision into the future. In this year of 2002, when the world has become close in distance but often far apart in political thoughts, as we come from different cultures and religious beliefs, we can still promote Dr. Goucher's unwavering commitment to the unity of education for all people. Through our educational institutions we can bridge differences, create understanding, and teach our students to emulate Dr. Goucher, as described by Bishop W. F. McDowell in the July, 1922, *Washington Christian Advocate*:

"More than almost any man I have known, [John Franklin Goucher] was a citizen of the world...To him there was no foreign land, to him, no foreign person. He passed from one country to another without sense of strangeness."

We have the opportunity to be offshoots of the deep-rooted tree or grain of mustard seed in the Bible, to propagate Dr. Goucher's faith in people and his vision for universal understanding, wherever we are planted.

(Prof. Chan-Hie Kim sent this file to me on July 21, 2010)