

Seeds of Grace 2017

From the Editor

“Dear Readers, it is the beautiful season of the year in Japan with a bunch of cherry blossoms (Sakura). Lately it has started raining but it is still nice to see fallen flowers. God sees us beautiful and precious. May the Lord bless you. Our colleagues, Peter and Edi Wilson have left for their furlough in March. Here it is what Peter Wilson says his ministry last years.”



Prayer points

For annual conference in May as we gather together for meetings and sharing, pray God would lead us in all the sessions and bless all our missionaries.

Pray that the Membership Department would be prepared and led by His provision and strong intercession.

Pray for Nick Mason and Carla who will have one year furlough in Canada and Brazil, respectively.

Contextualization

It has often been said that a trust relationship is one of the first requirements for being able to share the gospel meaningfully with a Japanese person. They will not listen to someone they do not trust. So, one of the first things a missionary must do is win the trust of the people they want to witness to. This is, of course, a slow process and results (if a Japanese person actually becoming a Christian should be described as a ‘result’) can take years. So, what can be done to win trust?

I believe that one very basic, but very important, way is to be involved in the local community as much as possible. What things do the local community do together?

Wherever you live, once a year, always on a Sunday morning, there will be a time of cutting down weeds. For an hour or two the roads will be full of local people working together. The weeding day can become a cause of tension for Christians wanting to go to church while also feeling the obligation to be a part of their community and likely to feel uncomfortable whatever they choose to do. What was our solution for the church service in this Japanese context? On that one day in the year we shortened the service and started it an hour later. That way people could finish weeding and then go to church. If the weeding was postponed a week because of rain, then we would do the same on the following Sunday.

How many people have become Christians because we have been involved in the local weeding? Probably none at all, but I feel we have given a good impression to the neighbourhood, not ignoring them and not removing ourselves from them. Twice I have been the representative of our group of houses for a year in the local committee; another year I became vice-chairman. Towards the end of that year my fellow vice-chairman came with a friend to the church carol service, something I don’t expect she would have done without getting to know me in two committee meetings every month before then.

In the area where we now live there is a weekly Japanese class. I thought it would be good for me to go to that, so I went along and discovered that it is run primarily for the benefit of war orphans. These are Japanese children who got left in the care of Chinese parents when their own parents had to flee from China at the end of the Second World War. In the 1980s these war orphans, now in their forties, were allowed to return to Japan with their families. A lot had difficulties learning Japanese and fitting into the culture. Several live in the flats near us. Christmas came a few months after I started going to the class, and Edi and I were asked to take charge of the Christmas party because, "You're a missionary and you can tell us what Christmas really means." We were permitted to be open in talking about Jesus' birth and the meaning of some of the Christmas symbols.

Eleven months later the chairman of the neighbourhood association asked me to lead the annual children's Christmas party for the area, as he had heard about what we'd done the previous year. We weren't permitted quite so much freedom that time but still we were able to explain about Jesus' birth.

Has anyone moved closer to becoming a Christian through all this? Not that we can tell, but we have been able to proclaim something of the truth of the gospel in

places where it would otherwise not be heard and, I believe, helped to remove some of the sense of foreignness that many Japanese feel towards the gospel.

This is similar to Christian weddings, which have become the most popular style of wedding ceremony over the last thirty years, to the extent that many Japanese say they are Shinto when they're born and their parents take them to a Shinto shrine, Christian when they marry, and Buddhist when they die, as almost all funerals are Buddhist.

Through Christian weddings I am able to pray for a new couple near the start of their married life, to preach a short message to a different audience each time, and to make the Christian faith feel a little less faraway to the people who attend. Stories of someone becoming a Christian because of attending a Christian wedding are almost completely unknown, but who knows what the effects are in contributing to the breaking down of some of the barriers in people's minds towards what they see as the foreign and irrelevant religion called Christianity?

In a country like Japan where only a few people have come to the Lord, and where they come to him very slowly, we aim to do all we can to draw close to the people, identify with them and build a relationship of trust between

us, as this is essential for the gospel to be listened to as and when we have the chance to proclaim it.

Written by Peter Wilson



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