



March 2023

Dear Praying Friends,

This morning on my way to a meeting, I noticed the cherry blossoms were really starting to bloom all around our city. It was something that I have been looking forward to for a long time. In Japan, this is a big thing. There are even cherry blossom forecasts on the news that announce weeks ahead of time when they estimate the cherry blossoms will start blooming throughout the country. You could say it's the national announcement of spring and warm weather, where new life begins to flourish all around us. And by God's grace, it seems to be a season of potential new life flourishing in our church family too!

SO REFRESHING!

Our church family has been excited to see a surge of new people who have been coming with a deep desire to know more about Jesus. Let me tell you about a few of them. Noriko hasn't been saved for very long, and she's still eagerly learning about what it means to be a Christian. A few weeks ago, in our Thursday Bible study at church, she mentioned that she wasn't a Christian yet. So the next Monday, when Bethany and a few ladies were gathering for their morning Bible study at a local coffee shop, Bethany wanted to see where she was in her faith. "Who do you think Jesus is, Noriko?" "Oh, he's the Son of God." "Why did He come to earth?" "Well, He came to earth to die on the cross for our sins and to give us eternal life!" "Do you believe that?" "Of course!" "What happened after Jesus died, Noriko?" "He rose from the dead!" "Do you believe that too?" "Definitely!" "Has Jesus forgiven your sins?" "Oh yes!" All the ladies responded, "That's what a Christian is, Noriko!" "So why did you think that you weren't a Christian yet?" "I just don't know enough yet, and I haven't read the Bible enough yet." Here's the thing about Noriko. Even though she's figuring out what it means to be a Christian, she's sharing her faith. Two months ago, Noriko brought her friends to church to share Jesus with them. Kenji and Yukari haven't missed a Sunday since. One week, Yukari told us that she was going to have surgery on Wednesday, but she was still pretty sure she could make it on Sunday. Sure enough, they were both there, soaking in the Scripture, asking questions, and learning more about Jesus. Noriko, Bethany, and other believers often sit with them after church to help them know more and more about Jesus.

Sitting in another part of our small auditorium is Youko. She called me three weeks ago out of the blue on a Thursday. "Hi, is it ok if I come to your church tonight?" "Sure! Come on over!" That night, she told us she had never been inside a church in her life. But earlier that morning, she just had a strong feeling of wanting to go to a Christian church. This coming April will be our 20th year of ministry here in Japan. I can count on one hand (with probably a few fingers left over) of someone who just came to church out of the blue like that without knowing anyone.) As we gathered around the table, our brothers and sisters shared what they had learned from the Gospel of Luke, our passage for the day. And through their testimonies, Youko was introduced to Jesus for the first time. At the end of the study, she exclaimed, "So I just realized for the first time that I'm not alone. Jesus is here!" That's not a bad response for your first encounter with Jesus! She hasn't missed a Sunday OR a midweek service since, always asking questions.

Over the past month or two, if you look at our Sunday gatherings after the service, you will find small groups of people scattered around our auditorium. Christians happily sharing Jesus with those who want to know more, and brothers and sisters encouraging one another in their faith. Last week they didn't go home for almost two hours. It's fun to see. It's not always like this. But right now, it's SO refreshing. God is helping our church to grow, to mature.

A few things that we would love for you to pray for. Our **Easter outreach** is coming up in a few weeks, on... you guessed it: Easter Sunday. Because of Covid, this will be our first one in four years. We're really excited about it! Pray for us to be able to share Jesus with more people in our city! Pray for lots of families to come to hear about the resurrection of Jesus!

Serving Him,
The Carters to Japan