

1 We lived in **Urayasu**, Japan for the last four years. The city is a bed town of Tokyo and it has a population of 163,000 and it is located near **2 Tokyo Disneyland**. We have enjoyed watching spectacular **fireworks** of Disneyland from our windows every night from 8:30 pm.

3 Urayasu International Christian Church we were sent to serve is small.

It was pioneered by a British missionary by the name of **Steve Metcalf**. His mentor was **4 Eric Liddell** who won the 400-meter gold medal in 1924 Paris Olympic. His life story is shown in the movie called "Chariots of fire".

Steve Metcalf was put in a Japanese prison camp in China during WWII. He became angry and hated Japanese soldiers as he was mistreated by them. However, he was told to forgive the Japanese by Eric, a missionary to China then. Steve not only learned to forgive Japanese soldiers, but began to have a burden, a special feeling for Japanese people. Later, God called him to be a missionary to Japan.

So we feel privileged and honored to minister at the church Steve Metcalf started. We have enjoyed the work there, but at the same time we went through some stressful times.

Some of my frustrations were the unexpected reality of the slow growth of the church.

We thought that since the percentage of the people who go to churches on Sunday in Urayasu city is about a quarter of 1 percent, there should be a lot of room for the church to grow.

5 And I thought such a modern looking bed town of Tokyo with many apartments and tall condominiums would promise us a quick growth of the church.

But the reality was quite different. Most Japanese living there appear to be complacent, indifferent to Christianity. There seems to be no sign of interest to the gospel among the people living there.

6 A rabbi was praying at the famous **wailing wall** in Jerusalem. When he finished praying, a foreign reporter came and asked the rabbi. "How often do you pray every day and for how long?"

The rabbi answered, "Three times a day and half an hour each time." Reporter: "What have you prayed for mostly?" Rabbi: "For the peace between Israel and Palestine" Reporter: "Any results or progress?" Rabbi: "It's like we are up against a thick wall" That is just how we often feel.

7 We had a **Christmas concert** every year inviting a professional singer. Three concerts were held in a city hall near the train station. The hall was packed with people for the first two concerts. In the first year, 2014, some people were quite amazed at the fact that such a small church of under 10 people could draw nearly 100 people to the Christmas concert. But the crowd who gathered to hear the singing were only there for that particular moment, and not a single person came to church on Sunday morning as a result of the outreach.

We were quite disappointed. However, the effort was not in vain as we know the gospel was preached to the people gathered there, and they were given a chance to hear about the salvation of Jesus.

We have three services in a week at this church where we serve. They are Wednesday morning Bible study / prayer meeting, Friday night English service and Sunday morning service. I spend

quite some time preparing the sermons for these services. Majority of the preparation time is spent for the Sunday morning sermon. The church attendance is from 10 to 20 on a Sunday morning. But I email my sermon notes to about 100 people every week for the purpose of evangelism as about half of them do not go to church.

Some of them are acquaintances and friends I play tennis with or people whom I met and became friends with. So, I keep in mind to make my sermon easy for non-Christians to understand. I usually put two jokes in one sermon to make it interesting.

8. I hear that the church once had about 50 people in attendance. But when we took over the number dwindled to only six people.

But out of the 6, now one lady is very sick and has not been attending church more than a year. Another lady has a husband who is stricken with Dementia in January of this year and her attendance became irregular as she has to take care of him. Another lady is getting old and becomes sick often and is unable to come regularly.

And one lady stopped coming to church over a seemingly small thing. We could not believe a supposed to be mature Christian would stumble over such a minor, insignificant matter.

Another lady is involved in social work and cannot come regularly.

Another lady stopped coming because I was busy practicing the trumpet for a Sunday morning worship service and failed to greet her. These things happened one after another in the month of February 2018. This must have been an attack of Satan.

I became discouraged as the church looked like a sinking ship.

9 During that time, God encouraged me by sending a **Korean Christian** man **Mr. Shin** around age 50. He started to attend our church in December last year.

Within 10 minutes walking distance of our church, there is a church with a Korean pastor and within 3 minutes' walk from our church, there is a larger church.

But he somehow, decided to come to our church and decided to dedicate himself to help our church.

He listens to my preaching intently with his eyes wide open. He reads my sermon notes every morning before he goes to work. What a joy to have an earnest, sincere believer like him. He also helps with church finance immensely. Recently, he said that God told him to help this church.

This Korean man's faithful attendance and huge support to our church is a great uplift not only to me, but to the other faithful members.

9 Secondly, **Mr. Okano** who is about my age came to our church as he wanted to learn English. His aim is to be an interpreter to help foreigners in the coming Olympics in Tokyo in 2020.

I met him at a tennis court in Urayasu. I use my tennis exercise as an opportunity to meet various people. Several people I met through tennis came to our church services. So God has used my hobby of playing tennis as a means of evangelism. This man asked me if it is OK to come to our English service, even though he does not have interest in Christianity. I said it is perfectly alright. And he started coming to our Friday night English service.

I told him that if he came to Sunday morning service, I would speak to him in English. However, I soon stopped speaking to him in English, but he still kept attending the Sunday morning service even though he could not have English practice.

He incredibly continued to come to church on Sunday regularly for two years. He is more faithful in attending the worship service than some of our church members. He brings desserts and food to church every Sunday to our lunch gathering after the service. It is hard to believe that he has kept coming to church when he initially said he did not have any interest in Christianity. During my preaching he looks as though he is sleeping with his eyes shut.

One day I asked him the reason of his faithful attendance. He said that he enjoys the atmosphere of the service. God works mysteriously. It must be God who has planted the desire in this man to come to church. We celebrate Communion on the first Sunday of every month at our church. Another pastor was conducting the service a couple of Sundays ago and told the congregation that anyone who believed in Jesus was welcome to take communion. We were thrilled to hear that Mr Okano took communion for the first time then.

10 As we look over the past 4 years of the church work in Japan, I feel strongly **it is God who makes His church to grow**. Apostle Paul said in I Corinthians 3:6 **"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has making it grow."** This is one of the two things that I learned while I was in Japan reflecting back on the four years.

10 Another example that it is God who helps a church to grow happened about a year and half ago.

Mrs. A who had failed in her business and had a debt to pay came to our church. She was very much distraught and depressed as her business was collapsing.

Her husband who is a Buddhist somehow suggested to watch a movie of the life of Jesus Christ "The Son of God". She told me that she fell in love with Jesus and wanted to know more about Jesus.

And her friend who lives in front of our church and who comes to our Friday night English service suggested she come to our church. She came on Friday night about half an hour before the service started and asked a lot of questions about Jesus. She was so hungry to know more about Jesus, so she came to church on Sunday morning and stayed after the service.

I personally explained more about the salvation through God's grace and through faith. She later told me that she was surprised that I looked such a common and ordinary person and the church did not look like church at all. This is because she thought all the churches should look like a Catholic Church and all the Christian ministers should look like Catholic priest because of the movies she has seen.

She was expecting to have to make a confession before a priest. She was very surprised to hear that she could pray to God directly through Jesus and could be saved right there where we were. I asked her; "Do you want to be saved and know about Jesus?" To this she said "Yes" and she repeated the prayer I said and accepted Jesus into her heart right there. Since then she has been coming to church regularly.

She said that the phrase I mentioned "Direct contact with God" electrified her. It must have been a work of the Holy Spirit that she felt that way to believe and accept Jesus, the son of God. Normally, it takes much longer for a person to accept Jesus as a personal Savior and follow Christ's teaching. Her case was exceptional. Because she was so desperate and hungry to know Jesus, she was ready to accept Jesus. She simply believed that Jesus died on the cross for her

personally and was resurrected. She helps with church music and church website.

It is God and His saving grace and work of the Holy Spirit that she became saved. She is now a faithful and important member of our church. So, although we are often used as an instrument to bring people to God's salvation, it is the Holy Spirit, the work of God that people start coming to church and get saved. The Bible says **No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by Holy Spirit. I Corinthians 12:3**

11 The **second thing** I learned is that **God will reward you at the proper time if you sow good seed.** The Bible says **"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Galatians 6:9**

12 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, **stand firm.** Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that **your labor in the Lord is not in vain.** I Corinthians 15:58

13 "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you are going to get" said Forest Gump in the movie. Unexpected things happen in life.

14 When I was 21 years old I went to Misawa City in Aomori prefecture in the Northern part of Japan.

I tried to plant a church in the City and stayed there for three years.

15 Last year in October **Mr. Noda**, a high school teacher visited me in Urayasu from Misawa City. Mr. Noda was 16 years old when I went to Misawa and he became a Christian through the work I was involved with. 45 years have passed since we saw each other. He tried to look for me and found me through Facebook. He mentioned about me to other two people who also live in Misawa.

16 One of them is **Mrs. Chida** who is now 90 years old. She was 40 when I met her first in Misawa, she became a Christian and became a faithful member of the church I started. Many years later, her mother and husband also became Christians.

Another person is **Mr. Atsushi Fukuda**, I used to teach him English to help his entrance examination for University. I used the occasion to witness for Christ. While he was attending university in Tokyo, he became a Christian. He went to theological school as well. He acquired PHD and became an eye doctor and has a clinic in Misawa. He also became a pastor of Misawa Baptist Church. There are several more people who became Christians through the work in Misawa. I was young and inadequate in many ways to spread the Gospel, but the seeds which were sown many years ago have grown. And I had a great joy to see the fruit of the labor. Often we do not see the result of our efforts for God but as we continue to sow the seed, to share about Jesus with others, God will bring a harvest in His good time.

17 Those **who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.** Psalms 126:6

Although it is God who saves people and it is through grace and faith that we are saved, at the same time the Bible exhorts us to make effort in spreading the gospel. God honors and uses an insignificant vessel if he is willing to serve.

18 Jesus said **"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Mark 16:15.**