

Hitachinaka Happenings

Greetings from Kathryn & Rob,

A big "Thank you" to those who keep us here in Japan through your praying, and financial giving. Japanese sometimes ask us how long we have been in Japan, and Kathryn rounds down by saying, "More than a quarter century". Sounds kind of long that way. Living in Japan we miss our kids, but are enjoying regular Zoom times with them. Tess and Jacob are in Toronto, Julia is on a Coop work term in Etobicoke, and Grady and Britt are "fellow" Fellowship International missionaries, who are just beginning a two-year placement teaching at Faith Academy in Manila.

Pray as we continue our regular ministry schedules. Rob encourages seven small churches in the area through preaching and assisting in outreach using Discovery Bible Studies (DBS). These seven churches total about 120 believers, and only one has a paid pastor. These churches are in cities and towns totaling about 1 million people, and there are likely less than 1000 Christians total. Kathryn is meeting with 8 ladies in 4 different DBS studies. This week, Miss Y, who meets Kathryn every week said, "My mother (94) needs to be saved!".

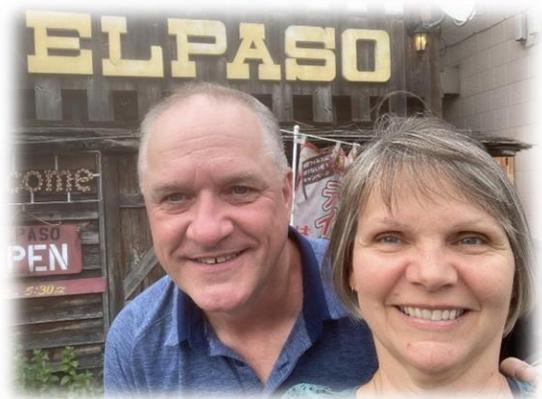
Jeremiah 9:24 teaches us three of God's favourite things: kindness, justice and righteousness. God delights in them! Many of us would have guessed the second two, practicing social justice and moral purity, but the first one, "kindness", is a bit of a surprise. But why not? Kindness seems to be in short supply, and there are plenty of ways to get good at being tender!

*"I am the Lord, who exercises
kindness,
justice and righteousness on
earth,
for in these I delight," declares
the Lord.*

In Japan, once you start being kind, a competition of paying back that kindness starts in order that a "debt of gratitude" cannot build up. Maybe that is why Japanese are so good at being polite, but need some help being kind. Kathryn and I have been continuing to find ways to be let our tender side show. Japan has a number of societal problems that have led the government to appoint a high-level

politician as "["Minister of Loneliness"](#)."

Our first reaction was, "that's pretty weird!". But his (of course his) job is daunting. Japan's increasingly widespread social isolation, (even before Covid), has led to high rates of suicide and solitary deaths, an aging society now boasting 85,000 centenarians (Canada has 6,000), low marriage and birth rates, and extreme social reclusion. Social reclusion, affecting some 2% of Japanese, even has a name, "hikikomori", which means "pulled inward". One million Japanese almost never leave their rooms, relying on parents or ordering in for everything.



36th Wedding Anniversary celebrated Mexican style!

Pray for us as we are finding that grace can easily be shown in ways that do not create a social debt. Rob has been helping aging neighbours with no one to help them with their gardening, while Kathryn has been making time each week to listen on the phone to a lady with hikikomori. Kindness costs the giver, but often it is just the time and expense of making some muffins for the widower next door, or sharing your bumper crop of cucumbers! Pray as we think of new ways to be salt and light in our very dark neighbourhood.

We hope we have given you something to think and pray about today. Let us know your kindness ideas! If you would like more details of our ministry so that you can pray more specifically, please send us an e-mail at the addresses below. We would love to hear from you.

Gratefully,
Rob and Kathryn