

The Bencke Family in Japan



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HE IS RISEN!

The Lord is risen, just as He said.

And in the fulfillment of this promise, so too, we press on. Whether we find ourselves distraught with the pictures we see of Ukraine, or the latest news on COVID-19, or the economy, or imminent final exams, or health concerns, or relationship troubles, still we press on. We are held in the promise of victory over death.

Our kitchen faces the park, and there are two little gardens where, it is said, that the “women’s organization” used to tend the flower beds. Since we have lived here, the two beds have been weed patches, so a couple of years ago I started planting things there in the spring. Selfishly, I liked it to look nice since I had to look at it each day. It also gave our neighbor to the north, who is in his late 80’s now, an “ikigai” (something to motivate him to keep going) for each day, as he faithfully waters the two little beds. I have always wondered if I was overstepping my bounds in deciding what would go in the beds. Last year, there were some children at the park, so I gave them the spade and the watering bucket and they made the arrangements of flowers. This year it was just me. Well, at least I thought it was just me.

Recently, as the warm weather gave rise to my need to be outside and playing in the dirt, I decided to get some flowers for the park next door again. This time, while I was planting, there were two older women on a bench in the far corner of the park, chatting. They came up, introduced themselves, and engaged me in some conversation while I chopped up clumps of dirt. Turned out that the daughter of one of the ladies had attended Luther High School. We talked about our mutual connections to the school, namely that my daughters both attended Luther and both Patrick and I work on the same campus at the adjoining college. One of the women left, leaving the other woman and me to continue talking.

About five minutes into the conversation, while they were talking with me, this lady’s daughter (the one who had attended Luther as a high school student), texted her and asked if she still had the Bible from when she was in high school. She relayed this incredible “coincidence” to me while I was planting the flowers. I told her that I had a bunch of Bibles

in my house next door and would be happy to give her one. So, I washed the dirt off my hands, found the Bible that was in the best condition, and brought it to her.

She seemed stunned by the whole interaction. There was this foreign woman who happened to be planting flowers in the public park, and who happened to be willing to engage in some light conversation, who happened to share some connections with a nearby school, who happened to have an extra Bible and who happened to be willing to give it to her. She kept saying the word “gūzen,” over and over, which means coincidence. I told her that instead of thinking of this as coincidence, that I was choosing to think of it as God forging a path of connections. I asked her why her daughter wanted the Bible and it turned out that she wanted to teach her own child a little of what she learned at Luther, despite not being baptized as a Christian. Even as I write this, the phrase, “the woman at the well” comes to mind, but in this case, it is “the woman at the park.”

Shortly, thereafter, I left the park and came home.

Worship is our response to a faithful and merciful God who desires that we turn toward Him in our daily lives as well as on Sunday morning. We worship God when we give thanks. We worship God when we pray. We worship God when we get our hands dirty in an attempt to highlight God’s hand in creation. We worship God when we bring our questions to the throne. We worship God because the Holy Spirit enables us in our faith to do so and gives us the opportunity to bear witness to the faithfulness that was first His.

Pastor’s Apprentice: Our pastor’s son (age 2) likes to imitate his dad during the morning worship.



The flowers I planted while talking with “the woman at the park.”

Petal sprinkles: When the cherry blossoms fall, it almost looks like pink snow.

