





Connie and I spent the last 10 days of March ministering to the EFCA missionaries in Japan.

The number of missionaries in Japan has declined there over the years, due to discouragement and not seeing a lot of fruit in a very difficult culture. The main religions of Japan are Buddhism and Shintoism. Ancestral worship is common practice and tradition is so ingrained throughout many generations, that seeing people turn to Christ in great numbers, is just not happening. After all of the years that missionaries have been in Japan, less than 1% of the population are followers of Jesus. Regardless, there still needs to be a strong Christian presence there.

 Another part of the problem that our missionaries face is the language barrier. It takes many years to learn this difficult language and then it takes many years beyond that, to really feel comfortable preaching in Japanese. Few missionaries ever really get to that level. We first went to Japan to minister to our missionaries back in 1988. They were considerably more in number then, but those who remain have a deep love for the people, which keeps them there. The Japanese are extremely polite, courteous, and accommodating, whether waiting on us in airports or elsewhere (we in the west could learn some things from them). Their gentle attitude also gives you a heart to see these people come to Christ. It is heart wrenching to watch them bow in temples before their man made gods, who, "...have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see; They have ears, but they do not hear" (Psalm 115:5-6 NKJV).

We ministered in one church, and then spent five days ministering to the missionaries at  a resort where the families could have recreational leisure time together. This is a very important gathering for them each year and one that they look forward to with great anticipation. We had rich times interacting with them as a group and on an individual basis, as well.

Did we accomplish the purpose for which we went? Let me allow two of the missionaries who were there express their thoughts on this:

*...how wonderful it has been to have Steve and Connie with us. The Lord has gifted them both with such a wonderful gift of encouragement and they have liberally shared that with us*



*these days. We have been richly blessed.*

☒ Steve preached at our little church here last Sunday and our folks very much appreciated his message. I know it was a rich encouragement to our folks as he challenged us from Hebrews to run the race with our eyes on Jesus!! It was good!! And of course when Connie sang, “We Shall Behold Him” WOW!! What a precious experience that was!!!

On Monday, we headed out to a very nice hotel for our mission conference. We were there until earlier today. Each day Steve brought us messages from the Word. He is such a good preacher and does so well in bringing the message right home to us!! Our folks were each and all very much blessed. Connie sang a number of times at our conference and that was very special as well. She has such a beautiful pristine voice all given to our Lord in praise of Him!!

Our conference schedule was set such that there were quite a number of slots of time allowing for more personal times of interaction. This was especially neat as our missionaries here had the chance to get to know Steve and Connie and to benefit from the rich encouragement they know so well how to give.