

TRAILNOTES

MAY 2020

The Christian life is a journey.

TrailNotes speaks to forward movement, paying attention to the "landscape" we are passing through in this trail-laced wooded hillside and valley, not to mention the world beyond. *TrailNotes* is an unfolding, ongoing journal of the people who share the trail with us and the things we're learning and doing.

ElderTalk: "The country may tumble but I won't grumble!" - Ray Charles

JADAÉ FOX

It's a time when our nation and the world are occupied with a virus that is incredibly contagious. I would like you to consider this: there is something else that is very contagious: **Grumbling**.

Philippians 2:14-16:

Do everything without grumbling... so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.

Paul gives us a command not to grumble or complain. A lack of grumbling is an indication of the Holy Spirit's work. As we will see later, it is a litmus test of the mind of Christ functioning in our lives.

The Greek word translated "complain" means literally "one who is discontented with his lot in life." Complaining is certainly not a fruit of the Spirit. Complaining steals our joy and peace. It hurts our witness and leads to fighting and quarrelling because complaints come from unfulfilled desires. It comes from the heart and happens long before we even open our mouths. Therefore, victory must be won at the heart level.

So, grab your Bible and turn to Philippians 2:

We should be mindful of our motives and mindset. We must not be selfish but humbly consider others more important than ourselves. We need the mind of Jesus. (verses 3-5)

Jesus' death on the cross shows us what the mind of Christ looks like. It's a profound example of humility, care for the needs of others, and submission to authority. (verses 6-8)

God has placed Jesus in authority over everything and everyone. We need to submit to Him as our Lord like Jesus submits to the Father. This is one of the keys to having the mind of Christ. (verses 8-11)

Working out our own salvation is called sanctification. We are continually being changed day by day



"Moses leading the (grumbling!) Israelites" (1861)
- oil on canvas by József Molnár (1821-1899)

to be more like Jesus. Yes, it takes hard work, but it is God who is working (the most) in you. (verses 12-13)

This passage challenges us to consider others as more important than ourselves. It shows us how Jesus thinks and operates. The amazing thing is that a believer has the ability to think and act like Jesus does.

Just like complaining is contagious, so is thankfulness. This is keenly illustrated by my children. When one starts to complain, it's not long before others join in. Sadly, I must admit that I have been known to complain about my kids' complaining. On the other hand, when we are intentional about stopping and considering what we are thankful for, it can often remind others what they have to be thankful for.

In the midst of concerns about COVID-19 where many people have lost jobs and are forced to "shelter at home," we have a lot to grumble about, right? The issue is not that we cannot address wrongs, hurts, or frustrations.

Ask yourself, "Am I bringing my complaint to the right person, at the right time, and with the right heart motive?" We all need someone with whom we can trust our troubles and frustrations. In fact, it's healthy to deal with these. The way we balance complaining is by remembering what we are thankful for.

This is illustrated in many of David's psalms. David would vent his hurts, fears, and anger to God. He would also speak of God's faithfulness, love and ability to

“Grumble” continued from page 1.

respond to the problems. I like to complain to God. I know He can take it. But when I am done, it is His turn to talk. He will often point out the flaws in my thinking and that’s a good thing. (See Psalms 142:1-2)

So, having the mind of Christ takes humility, thankfulness, submission, and work (our own work, but mostly the Holy Spirit’s.) When we have this mind of Jesus, then our testimony of God working in our lives shines brightly for the world to see.

When we find ourselves complaining and grumbling, we need to seek forgiveness and ask the Lord to change our heart so that we are humble, thankful, and able to rejoice.

Some new books ...

The Moment of Tenderness

Madeleine L’Engle



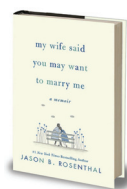
If you are one of the many Madeleine L’Engle fans, check out a brand new collection of 18 short stories. **The Moment of Tenderness** stories were written in the 1940s and 1950s and contain summer camp drama to science fiction. These stories provide the reader an evolution of

L’Engle’s writing before her famous *A Wrinkle in Time* written in 1962.

My Wife Said You May Want to Marry Me

Jason R. Rosenthal

The author’s wife died in 2017 of ovarian cancer.



An accomplished writer, she wrote a moving column for the New York Times about her hope that her husband could find love again. In this book, Jason shares about his life with and without his wife, Amy. He is a lawyer, but a whole

new speaking career has developed about dealing with dying and and grief and how to move ahead.

The Book of Longings

Sue Monk Kidd

The setting is the 1st century and the plot deals with a young girl who falls in love with Jesus (*yes!*) after He



was the only one who had comforted her. The book contains research into Jesus’ life and how society dictated how she should behave. Sue Monk Kidd is also the author of *The Secret Life of Bees*.

“It’s a Grand Night for Reading”

DONNA KURTZ

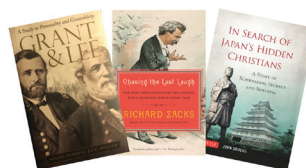
Maybe you remember the old song, “*It’s a Grand Night for Singing*.” My parents used to sing it to start their concerts. But now John and I have changed “*singing*” to “*reading*.” From 1 a.m. to about 3 a.m. (*or sometimes later*), we’re esconced on our pillows, buried in books. (*Very different categories*.)

In the summer after 8th grade I took a speed reading course. (*So valuable!*) Unless books are extremely technical, I can read right down the middle of the page and get through many books quickly. John savors every word and remembers what he reads much better than I do. (*A good quality for a doctor!*)



Here’s the pile on his side of the bed. A few days ago there was a second pile next to it, even higher. (*Books he wants to read “someday.”*) These are the titles: *The Splendor and the Vile – a saga of Churchill during the Blitz (WW 2)* - E. Larson. (*Reading now*),

Rediscovering the Church Fathers - M. Haykin. *Prohibition* - Dunn, *Constantine’s Sword* - J. Carroll, *A War of Frontiers and Empires* - D. Silbey. *Magazines* (*not in photo*): *Highlander*, *Model Railroader*, *Grammophone*, *BBC History*, *National Geographic*, *Smithsonian*, *German Life*.



Some of John’s recent “good reads”

My books: *Symbol or Substance - a three-way discussion on the Eucharist*: C.S. Lewis, Tolkien, Billy Graham - Kreeft (fascinating, sometimes hard to understand, but I love the imaginative approach), *The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning* - Magnussen. *The Didache - a window on the earliest Christians* - O’Laughlin. *The Piano Teaching of Walter Hautzig* (my grad school piano teacher) - See. *At the Corner of East and Now* - Mathews-Green. *SING!* - K. and K. Getty. *The Emancipation of Robert Sadler* - M. Chapien, *Memories of His Mercies* - P. Gillquist. *Magazines*: *Country Living*, *Magnolia Journal*, *Christianity Today*, *People*, *TIME*. (I’m not a big fiction reader but we like listening to John Grisham and Jan Karon in the car.

Send us your list now! (bucytalent@aol.com)



Three of Donna’s recent favorites

Greetings from Japan! Kon'nichiwa!

こんにちは!

It has been a long time since I have provided everyone an update via newsletters. However, have no fear, the wait is over. I am happy to share all that has happened since the last newsletter. Hoping this one finds you and your family in good health and safe with what is going on in the world.

As always, my hope is that this letter will continue to be informative in 1) sharing the experiences of living in a foreign country, 2) encouraging you in your own walk with Christ, and 3) keeping you up to date when you wonder how Andy is doing in Japan. 😊

WINTER IN JAPAN: 日本の冬

This past winter provided many firsts: first time not physically with family for Christmas (digital presence had to do); first winter spent in Japan; and first Christmas and New Year celebrations from the perspective of the Japanese people and culture.

Christmas day in Japan was actually warmer than expected, so I took the opportunity to hike up Mount Katasone, the mountain by our hometown of Funehiki, to take in some breathtaking views and to enjoy Christmas Day with the Lord on the mountain.



I took the time during winter break to travel to two different places in Japan. One place was seeing the Sendai “Pageant of Starlight” with a Japanese friend. This was in the city of Sendai in the Miyagi prefecture, north of Tamura by a two-and-a-half hour bus ride, near Ishinamaki. My boss actually recommended that I see “activity celebration” while staying in Japan for the winter break. The second place was south of Tamura, an hour-and-a-half bullet train ride to the Tochigi prefecture, visiting Utsunomia and Nikko, with another Japanese friend I had made. We visited the shrine, ate delicious ramen, and took pictures of the famous Shinkyo Bridge found in Nikko. It was a great time!

The rest of winter proved to be the mildest it has been in the last fifty years, according to the people who have been here before. That said, I struggled to stay warm a lot of the time! However, it was very reminiscent of the weather back in the midwest of the United States, so thankfully Ohio had trained me well.



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JAPANESE TEST RESULTS and PLANS FORWARD 日本のテスト結果と今後の計画

If you recall from the last newsletter, I was preparing to sit for a Japanese standardized test. I went with three other American English teachers to sit for our capable levels of the language for fun one cold Sunday in December.

Unfortunately, I will be honest, the test did not reflect the results I would have wanted to see. However, I do not think that a test is a measure of one's grounding in a language. The support from my co-workers, Japanese friends, and even my students on this ambition was overwhelming, and I am eager to continue, knowing that there is much to learn! Will I sit for another test in the future? Only time will tell. Until then, I will keep doing my best to learn all that I can!

CLASSROOM HIGHLIGHT: 641

教室のハイライト : 641

Class 641 is a class full of fourteen bright and hard working sixth grade students. Of all my older classes, this class had the biggest desire to learn English and practice what they had learned in the lessons. They truly had set the bar high for how a class could be cultivated to have that desire to learn and grow in their studies, even as far along as the sixth grade. It was a compliment to the efforts of the English and elementary teachers that they had previously who encouraged such a positive class behavior!

In Japan, sixth grade is the last grade before the students enter junior high school, so they are expected to be strong role models for the younger grades and have high standards in their academic performances. That said, the English School had the students take the English standardized test near the end of the winter term before they graduate. Even as their teacher, I did not get to directly teach them much during the end of the fall term and most of the winter as they had a rigorous study plan by another teacher to prepare them for the test.



The end of the term, the students received their results. They all had passed!! I was very happy with the rest of the English school that all fourteen of them had done so well, and I did my best to say that their English teachers of the past would be very proud of their hard work in their studies!

As of right now, the students are in junior high school, and while I see some of them in the evenings before they go to conversation class, I generally have little interaction with them. Yet, I pray and hope that for the short time I had with them, I, too, had made a small impact on their lives. The only indicator of this: a couple of the boys wrote some Christmas cards for me during our Christmas party late in December, so I give that as a hopeful sign that I did. Praise to God!



FINAL THOUGHTS

最終的な考え

In summary, the first year being an English teacher at Wakakusa has been a wonderful opportunity and blessing to experience! From learning to be a better teacher to growing as an individual and even developing new interests and hobbies, it has been quite the adventure. It has had its ups and downs, but I know in the end, it was a year well spent. The memories I have made will be treasured for the rest of my life. I am eager to start off this new year with some experience under my belt as a teacher and in the language, as well as having developed relationships with my students, the family owning the school, and the team here in Tamura.

I look forward to sharing more updates in the future! I appreciate all your prayers and support on this journey God has me on. I will savor every moment I have in this once-in-a-life-time experience!

PRAYER REQUESTS

祈りの要求

- 1) Continue to pray for the hearts of the Japanese people to be receptive to God's love and acceptance of them.
- 2) Pray for God-Incidences that will allow each of us to have divine appointments with someone in Japan with whom to share the love of Christ.
- 3) Pray that the team is discerning of when the Holy Spirit is leading us to act out of our comfort zone for His plan.
- 4) Pray that I continue to strive to be a better teacher for each of my students.
- 5) Prayers for the world in this time that we are facing, to not give into fear but to hold onto God's promises of hope and peace that surpass this finite life.

Until next time ...

またね!
(See you!)

P. S.

Andy Brubaker

Oh, yeah! You are probably wondering how life in Japan has been affected also by this pandemic, right? Well, don't let it be the focus of this newsletter, but just know that it had ended the school year sooner than planned and closed the schools again this week after the new school year started. Despite this and a limitation of travels in the area, God has kept us all safe at the time of this writing: Japanese co-workers and friends, the family and the American teachers.

Newsletter from Andy Brubaker (cont. from p. 5)

Just remember, that no matter what is happening in the world. Jesus is still on the Throne, so let us not be afraid, but hold onto hope!

“And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from His love. Death can’t, and life can’t. The angels can’t and the demons can’t. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can’t keep God’s love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8: 38-39 (NLT)



*“Sakura are in bloom again.
It is time to begin anew,
and God’s blessings continue
to shine in our lives.
We just need to remember
that they are there
and thank Him for them.”*

Andy



Memories of a “Socially Distanced” Resurrection Sunday 2020



He has risen, just as He said!



*We're gathered
in Your Name!*



Halleluia, Christ is risen!



He is risen, INDEED!

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(A list of church functionaries
will return next month)