

ELCA Global Missionaries in Japan

THE WILSON FAMILY



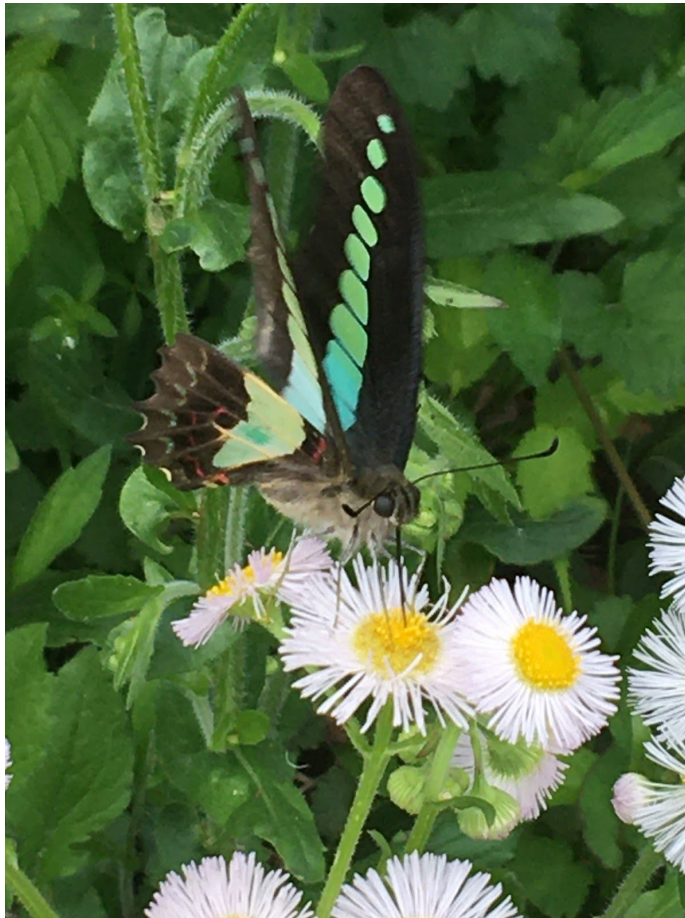
September/九月 2020

Normally in these newsletters we try to share unusual and interesting news from our curious existence as American co-workers with the church in Japan.

But I suspect that our life for the past couple of months has been much the same as yours: restricted and a bit boring, with low-level anxiety, uncertainty about the future, and not nearly enough to get out and do.

Overall, it seems, the situation is calmer in Japan than the U.S. Cases of covid-19 are fewer in total with very low mortality rates, even with everything more or less opening up again.

School is in session, including now for our high-schooler Zeke who went 200 straight days without in-person class time. Plenty of people are still opting to tele-work, everyone wears a mask (but that was a lot more common here to begin with), and we still haven't had



communion again at church. But overall it's fairly calm and cheerful.

We're grateful for that, especially seeing the suffering that continues to mar the existence of our American friends, family, and churches. The hardest thing about it for us is that we cannot easily leave Japan: if we do, we have to have special permission and follow very strict procedures and quarantine on both ends. We certainly won't visit anymore in 2020 and at this point I'm not even sure about 2021. It will depend, of course, on far more factors than anyone has the foresight to predict now.

So, we've been living much as you, no doubt: mostly at home. Our trips out are few and only as needed (groceries, church, back-to-school shopping, a breath of fresh air in the park). We have been able to socialize again, but there's always a layer of caution, and it's certainly not the time to go out and meet new people. We spend way too much time on our screens—grateful as we are for them—and value face-to-face encounters more than ever as a result.

That said, it's a good exercise to count our blessings even in this hard time. Here are a few things that I'm particularly thankful for:

—I started a Wednesday night, half-hour Zoom prayer meeting for our congregation while the church was closed, but we've continued even with church open again. Since our people live scattered all over Tokyo and even beyond, it's actually the ideal way to "gather" midweek, see each other's faces, share news, and pray. We'll keep doing this from now on.

—A handful of new people have started coming to church, even as some of our regulars have had to stay away. We sure didn't expect to see growth at this of all times! But I've heard many people in all walks of life say that the pandemic has forced a reevaluation of how we spend our lives, and not just regarding career but in matters of faith, too.

—Zeke has taken up the drums (an electronic kit that makes less racket than a real one!), his first engagement with a musical instrument. Drumming leads to Ringo Starr, and Ringo Starr leads to the Beatles, with the result that our boy is now a full-fledged Beatlemaniac. His mama couldn't be prouder.

—Andrew is just weeks away from beginning the work we moved here for: teaching! He'll team-teach his first class in Japanese for seminary students on modern church history, and he'll also teach in English the "Introduction to Christianity" class offered at our neighboring International Christian University. He has waited a long, long time finally to do the work he was called to do, and I'm so pleased and proud that the hour has finally arrived!



—After a long evolution of my own, over the summer I started up a still-tiny independent publishing venture, called Thornbush Press. So far I've published three short books: a "poetic paraphrase" of the Sermon on the Mount, a "memorizing edition" of the Small Catechism, and a collection of short stories called *Pearly Gates: Parables from the Final Threshold...* an effort to think about heaven in a way that actually correlates to the gospel of Jesus Christ and not just vague notions of angels, harps, bodilessness, and fluffy clouds. More about all of them at www.thornbushpress.com.

—And, last but not least, we took our first vacation since moving to Japan two years ago! In August the three of us, plus Zeke's classmate Elliot, flew up to Hokkaido, the north island of Japan. Unfortunately we hit probably the only rainy week of the summer there (and that following two solid months of rain in Tokyo), which meant we couldn't hike in the

mountains as we hoped. But we did enjoy the beautiful scenery, much more like the landscapes and plant life of North America that we're used to, and stayed in some charming places, as well as enjoying Hokkaido's famous ramen and cantaloupes. More than anything else, it was just really nice to see something different for awhile.



We know it's a hard time for everyone, and for churches in particular. Our faith values bodies so much that our worship is premised on gathering our bodies in person, joining our voices in song, and sharing the same food. Let's hold one another in prayer and trust that the Lord will see us through, as He has always done for His people. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32).

—Sarah Hinlicky Wilson

Stay in touch with us at sarah.wilson@elca.org and andrew.wilson@elca.org. To donate, visit <https://community.elca.org/MissionaryGiving> (we're the last on the list—hurray for the W in Wilson!). Checks are payable through your church to "ELCA Global Church Sponsorship" with "Wilson GCS2052" in the memo line. You can follow Sarah's theology podcast "[Queen of the Sciences](#)" and subscribe to her "Theology & a Recipe" e-newsletter at www.sarahhinlickywilson.com.