



A Publication of the San Lorenzo Japanese Christian Church

“Growing together and reaching out in the love of Christ”

Firmly Rooted

Our Values

Serve Adore Nurture Learn Outreach

“Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him.” Col. 2:6a

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Blessings in Babylon

I have no idea when you are going to read this, but chances are good that by the time you do, the 2020 U.S. elections will be over (or maybe ballots are still being counted!). How you feel about this country, its leadership, its popular culture, or its general direction could be all over the map. You may feel like I often do – exasperated from all the conflict and anger, unsure of whom to trust, tempted to recede from public dialog. This is just too much for you right now, thank you very much, and I’d rather just mind my own store and tend my own garden. This is all temporary, anyway – why bother with it when my real life is going to be eternally in the new heavens and new earth?

I’m struck by how God encouraged and challenged the exiled Israelites in Babylon during Jeremiah’s days. They were in an incredibly demoralizing situation: their nation had been conquered, their beloved city was in ruins, loved ones (including children!) had been slaughtered, the best of those who survived had been carted off in chains to the pagan capital of the world, and maybe worst of all, because of generations of rebellion and sin, they knew they were not entirely innocent in all of this.

So it’s not much of a stretch to imagine these folks as struggling with despair, finding it all too much, ready to “check-out.” Probably more so than any of us! But here’s what God told them: *“Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce...multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare”* (Jer. 29:5–7).

In other words, live out the life I’ve given you, and do good – even in Babylon, of all places. Even though Babylon was no picnic and not the long-term destination for Israel, it was nonetheless accounted for in God’s plan, and there were blessings to be experienced there. Only, do good – seek the city’s welfare and pray for its wellbeing. I need that good message (and maybe you do too!)

Yes, I have a future and a hope that is not here, not in this time or this nation. But that doesn’t mean I cannot raise my children here, love and pray for my neighbors, and seek (that’s an action word!) the good of my city. I can be faithful here, starting with the people around me. Especially with those I might otherwise consider enemies. I can love and accept. I can bear burdens. I can engage. I can have patient endurance. Brothers and sisters at SanLo – we can be good citizens. But not because we belong to the U.S., but because we belong to the Kingdom of God. Not because we love our president, but because we love our good and true King. And His good plans for us, in any place, stand firm. -- Chris Wu



My Journey of Faith

By: *Ran Tao*

Cassidy (now my wife!) was an important person in my journey to know Christ. I had my spinal cord injury in Jan. 2016, and this life changing experience challenged my spiritual life. I grew up in an atheist household, and I had no belief in God. At the time of my accident, I believed it was just that, merely an accident. My parents had become Christians at that point, and many of their friends prayed for me. This experience gave me a lot of internal conflict and frustration because I had a hard time believing and accepting their prayers. With this, I felt that my rejection of God was also a rejection of my parents.

Near the end of my rehabilitation, I talked with a chaplain who gave me passages from Romans. I was honest when talking with him, as there was no relationship being risked. After one of the sessions, I noticed my own rejection of God and wanted to try to speak to Him. I prayed directly to God for the first time. I repented for rejecting my Father who loved me so much. Suddenly, I realized how hard it must be for a Father to deal with a rebellious son. Tears flowed down my face.

I didn't think about that incident any further until three years later. During those three years, I focused on transitioning to my new life in a wheelchair, figuring out new routines, dealing with medications, as I graduated and lived on my own. In the summer of 2019, I got together with Cassidy. I love her so much and we had so many wonderful conversations. She is a very devoted Christian, and said things I couldn't understand. Specifically, the concept of her loving God more than me confused me. She spurred me on to re-explore my faith in God.

In the fall of 2019, I started reading the Bible and Cassidy also brought me some bible studies. The more of the Bible I read, the more questions I had. I asked big questions like, "Is there free will if God knows and is in control of everything?" "If God is good, why is there evil and suffering?" "Why doesn't God produce more supernatural events nowadays?" Cassidy introduced me to apologetics to find answers to my questions. I read "The Reason for God," by Tim Keller, and that made everything clearer. I was convinced by logic. The book starts discussions from a position of rejection and posed questions that I was asking, in order to then answer them with logical reasoning.



On Sun., Oct. 4, Ran took a step of faith and was baptized a week before he got married to Cassidy. Ran became an official member of SanLo. We welcome him to our church family and give God all the praise!

It spells out the steps of reasoning that I went through, and took it a step further with great answers. It talked about hard topics such as suffering and how can only one religion be correct. I remember driving to work one morning on Dec. 9, and listening to the ending of the book. Tim Keller challenges the reader that one doesn't need to have full faith in God to be saved. It is not the strength of our faith that saves us, but God that saves us. He uses the analogy of falling off a cliff and grabbing a branch, not knowing whether the branch would save us. Disbelievers could say, "I don't believe that branch will save me so I won't grab it," but someone with even a weak faith could grab the branch not knowing whether it would save them, and be saved. Tim Keller also gave an easy 3 step plan to coming to faith: repentance, faith, and committing to a community.

I remembered repenting to God years ago in that hospital, I felt that I'd already taken the first step. I was ready to take the second and third. In the silence that followed, I prayed to God, "Oh God I believe in you, that you save us through your Grace. I'm sorry for rejecting you, please forgive me. I want to love you God, please show me how." By the time I parked at my office, tears were streaming down my face. I told Cassidy and my mom the good news that night, and then on the following Sunday I told the pastor's wife. I asked her, "At what point do I become a Christian, should I get baptized next?" She told me that I was already a Christian!

I wanted to commit myself to becoming a member at SanLo because of all the wonderful people I've met. I like the personal anecdotes the pastors use and the variety of speakers we have; it makes it much easier to understand the Bible. Thank you for allowing me to share my story.

God's Amazing Plans

By: Cassidy Tao

I did not grow up going to church or really knowing anything about religion. I struggled especially in high school to feel secure in my friendships and in myself. I grew curious about Christianity when I noticed that several of my classmates attended church, and when I read a friend's blog about her honest struggles and her faithful hope in Jesus. What struck me was her vulnerability and her consistent trust in Christ, and I wanted to understand what it meant to have a relationship with Jesus. So, the summer before college, I started visiting churches and attended a youth fellowship at San Ramon Valley Gospel Church (which is now part of East Bay Trinity Gospel Church). They gave me my first Bible and introduced me to the basics of the gospel.

In college, I also started going to Bible studies and church on Sundays. However, it wasn't until spring semester when I went on a service trip to New Orleans that I realized that Christians were more diverse than my preconceived understanding of who Christians were. I began to see myself as someone who could call herself a Christian, and on Easter of 2014, I decided to commit myself to Jesus.

After deciding to become a Christian, I learned from several experiences and more mature Christians how to pray, how to read the Bible, and how to seek answers to my own questions about faith. I still encountered many challenges, but I was constantly amazed by all the genuine and unique people I met because of our shared connection in Christ.

In my third year of college, I went to Japan to study abroad in Osaka. I joined a church called Mustard Seed Christian Church, and noticed how this church talked a lot about baptism, because they especially focused on encouraging new and growing Christians. In the U.S., I didn't hear about baptism as much, and I was inspired by all these people who wanted to make a public act of faith by being baptized. I originally wanted to wait so that I could invite my family to this important event, but I was reminded on Easter in 2016 that ultimately baptism is about my relationship with Christ, so I decided to get baptized the following week. Several of my university friends came to witness my baptism. What made it really special was that Ran watched my baptism over a video call that beautiful Sunday afternoon. On April 3, 2016, I was baptized, surrounded by friends from all over.



Congratulations to Cassidy To and Ran Tao who were united in marriage on Oct. 10! Praise God that Cassidy became a member of SanLo on Sept. 20.

Fast forward to summer 2019: I had just moved back to California after working in Japan, and I was looking for a new church home. In Japan, I went to church with a faithful sister named Masami Miyake (née Nishimura) who was saved through SanLo in the 80s, when she was a high school/college student. Wanting to stay connected to the Japanese Christian community, and also seeking a church that was Biblically-based, Jesus-centered, and missionally-minded, I started attending SanLo. God showed me through multiple encounters with amazing people that SanLo would be the church that would change my life here in the Bay Area. The SanLo community has been an answer to many of my prayers and I am incredibly grateful for all the people who have supported me and prayed for me. I hope that we (Ran and I) can continue to connect with people here, and grow in our faith.

I have been truly blessed in the last year to witness Ran's growth as he learns more about his faith. I often asked, "God, what are you doing, because I have no idea!" Ran is so passionate about everything he does, and I observed this as he read the Bible, read books about Christianity, and asked many questions before and after he decided to become a Christian. We became members together at SanLo on Sept. 20, and we celebrated Ran's baptism on Oct. 4, a week before we got married on Oct. 10! I am humbled to see his growth in his prayers, and his desire to learn. He has challenged me to grow in my faith, and I know that we will grow together. I am honored to take this new step of faith in marriage with Ran, and look forward to our many more adventures together.

Rev. Eric Yata, Pastor (English)
Rev. Brian Tekawa, Marriage/Family Pastor
Pastor Joshua Scott, Young Adult/Worship Pastor
Pastor Scott Shimada, Youth Pastor

Rev. Sunao Shimada, Pastor (Japanese)
Tomoko Shimada, Director of Christian Education
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 Like us on our Facebook Page!

Any newsbriefs or articles for “Firmly Rooted” should be at the church office by the second Sunday of each month.

San Lorenzo Japanese Christian Church
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Dated Material
Week ending Oct. 24, 2020

Newsbriefs

* **Little House** at home for young families is on Fri., Nov. 13, 6:30 p.m. Sing lively songs, hear a story, and see friends! Contact Michi Shimada at michitds@gmail.com if you're not on the email list.

* After each Sunday worship service, there is a **Zoom prayer and fellowship time**. All are welcome to join in by following the worship service reminder email sent out each week. If you do not receive it, request it from Pastor Josh at josh@slzjcc.org.

* Tune into **SanLo Together Podcast!** SanLo Together” is about growing and walking together even as we are physically apart. We'll visit with staff, members, and others in our community to hear each other's stories, learn from God's Word, and just grow! You can find us at the link below or on Spotify. Check it out! <https://anchor.fm/sanlo-together>. Questions? Contact Chris Wu.

Reopening for Worship Services

The Elders did decide to plan for a soft reopening two weeks after the indoor restrictions are lifted within Alameda County, so the new developments allow for a careful reopening soon.

Please watch for the latest updates in service for this potential date. We will continue to maintain our strong online presence as well as be committed to a safe and meaningful in-person worship service. -- Pastor Eric

* Every year our church has participated in **Operation Christmas Child**. Although we are not collecting shoebox gifts at the church, there is still an opportunity to send a gift to a child in need. You can send a donation or build a shoebox online! Go to: www.samaritanspurse.org/operation-christmas-child/buildonline/. Let's continue to send God's love to children in need around the world and pray for God's blessings upon them.