

REACHING THE OTHER 99

church planting with you to reach the 99% in Japan

APRIL 2012 NEWS

Kevin & Kaori Laverman CHURCH PLANTING IN KAWASAKI, JAPAN



➔ Coffee & comfort for Taro

The coastal town of Taro in Iwate prefecture was devastated by the March 2011 tsunami in spite of its super seawall. We've partnered with the 311 Network in survivor care work in Taro since then. Follow the activity at www.311.ichurch.jp



With the residents in the cafe.
Sign held reads: "Please pray for Tohoku"

It's a 12-hour drive to Taro from our home in Kawasaki, farther than an international flight from Tokyo to Chicago (and not any easier on the legs and back). The March snow added to the adventure. We finally slip and slide our way into the town to find an eerie emptiness...everything around us was washed away a year ago.

The survivors who lost their homes in the tsunami have either moved out of the area or are living in temporary housing. There are several temporary housing villages within a short distance of Taro. Over the next few days, we visited two of these. Nearly 1000 people are packed in what resembles army barracks. Living is cramped and uncomfortable.

We cooperated again with a local church to host mobile cafes where residents could

gather and share. When we arrived in the villages, half the team went to set up the cafe, the other half door knocked to invite residents. I could tell by the surprised looks that some had not encountered a big-nosed American recently, much less one that spoke Japanese. I'm not sure whether this generated more curiosity about the cafe...or added to the fear.

We used a community room with rows of tables for our cafe. Off to one side, a table of Christian resources was set up. People looked through and took the literature as they pleased. Although we brewed some



The temporary housing village near Taro, the site for our mobile cafe

great coffee, these cafes were hardly quiet coffeehouse experiences. They were times of loud interaction as residents had a chance to share freely and process the events with relief workers. Restoring the

social fabric of community that was torn apart by the tsunami is probably the most difficult part of the recovery, but the most needed for mental health. One resident said to me, "If I didn't have this cafe to come to, I don't think I'd be able to put up with this place (temporary housing)... I might lose the fight with depression."

➔ continued on back

PRAY with us thru the week

SUN Pray for the ongoing survivor care work and for many new churches to begin in the tsunami stricken area of Tohoku.

MON Pray for 9 seekers to respond in faith to Christ, 6 new believers to seek baptism, and more men to attend our church plant.

TUE Pray for Denen Grace Chapel to adjust and flourish under Pastor Kondo's new leadership. Pray for our good partnership with him.

WED Pray for our 30 gospel choir members (90% not believers), to respond to the real Gospel. They come to us twice monthly to practice.

THUR Pray for faith in the financial challenges of our church plant as this year we fully underwrite the salary of our new Japanese pastor.

FRI Pray for Kaori's sustained health with hepatitis B. She needs to rest and strength for the great ministry that she has as the better missionary in the family.

Give online. Additional support: \$411 needed monthly



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➡ continued from front

I have the sense that God is doing great things in this town and will build His church here in the years to come. The mission potential of historically tough coastal towns like Taro has seen a reboot with the tsunami. Closed networks have cracked open. Community is being reborn. And in that newly-forming community, I believe the church will find an opening for its message. 📧

Jesus said, "By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). Taro can't deny that it's being gently loved by God's people. Pray that Taro would respond to this Christlike love in the days to come.

We'd like to keep you updated!

But we need your email address! If you haven't received an email update in 2012 (sent every 1~2 months), please register or update your email address here:

www.lavermansinjapan.org/signup



➡ One man's vision for change



Mr. M's house is at the very edge of the tsunami devastation in Taro. It survived while homes in front were lost. Perhaps God spared his large home for the purpose it now serves: a sort of base camp for the many volunteer teams coming through the area and working in his town and others. Our team to Taro also stayed at his home.

After 311, Mr. M. picked through the wreckage and gathered up scrap material. Returning from relief work one day, I

found him crafting dragonflies from scrap tin. On the back of each was a clear cross design. This especially caught my attention because I had noted the Buddhist altar in his entryway and assumed his religious perspective would be like many in the traditional sea towns of rural Japan.

When I asked him about the cross design, his reply surprised me: "The dragonfly is a symbol of a change in Japan (rainy season changing to summer). All these Christian volunteers that have stayed in my house have shown me the power for change. That's what my Taro needs. So, I put the Christian mark on these to show what change is really about."



Would you pray for Mr. M. that the cross of Christ will change him, too? He's seen his Good Friday. Now he is well on his way to his own Easter new life. 📧

from the BLOG

Why it's still Good Friday in Japan



Is Jesus buried in Japan? Of course not! But the rumor, as outrageous as it is, has become the center of a local attraction in the village of Shingo, Aomori Prefecture.

The legend here is that Jesus traveled to Japan as a youth and learned Japanese

ways. He returned to Israel in his 30's where his teaching was rejected. At his crucifixion, his identical twin brother Isukiri snuck in and took his place. Afterwards, Jesus returned to Japan and spent his life in Shingo as a rice farmer. He lived to 106, raising a family and doing good deeds locally. He was buried in the Shingo village where a mound with a cross marks his grave.

The grave attraction even has a small museum where some Hebrew and Japanese artifacts and writings are displayed. There is also a festival every June that centers around the grave and features traditional Japanese dance.

When I first read this silly story of Jesus' grave in Japan my reaction moved from surprise to outrage to sadness. Especially sadness. As a missionary, it breaks my heart that Japan has left Jesus in the grave. In many ways it reflects the historic response of Japan to Jesus. Ninety-nine percent of Japanese have no hope

of a living Savior that offers strength for life, and life eternal. They have stopped at Good Friday as a nation. Let's be too judgmental, though, let's remember that we as believers can also live as if Christ were dead. Although He is alive forever, we can forget his resurrection power to transform us, his resurrection promise to secure our future, and his resurrection strength to guide and carry us. We, too, can get stuck at the grave.

It's the empty tomb that encourages me to a more optimistic missiological outlook for Japan. Because He lives, there is hope for this people. Japan can move toward the empty tomb and experience real Easter joy. God is doing that one by one today. Perhaps He will do so in greater numbers tomorrow.

So even though the Shingo Village seems to have used the cross for personal gain, I see in their foolishness one ray of hope. In some way these Japanese are trying to make a connection with Jesus; trying to understand His story through their own.

As gut-wrenching as their attempt is, perhaps it gives some place to start. Even Paul had to start somewhere with the foolish Athenians (Acts 17).

Because Christ is risen, we move forward in declaring his message in Japan. By faith, I see Shingo, and all Japan, celebrating not around the grave of Christ, but at the great message of the empty tomb. He is risen! He is risen indeed!



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www.lavermansinjapan.blogspot.com