

Some thoughts on Nature at Harvest

The trees changing colour and the dark and chill approaching each night remind me that we are in the midst of a shift in seasons at Harvest. Autumn always makes me think of a time when I was living overseas in Japan. Up until then I had never really stopped to think about the changes that go on during the year with Spring, Summer, Winter and Autumn. I just sort of lived through them and soon enough it was Summer yet again. However I was really challenged by the Japanese people because they treat the changing of the seasons very seriously.



I was surprised one morning in April when I was watching the news to see that in the weather forecast they had just finished talking about the rain we could expect the following day and were now discussing the cherry blossoms. I turned to my host, "cherry blossoms?" I asked. He smiled, "yes, Hanami". You see, they report on national television the state of the cherry blossoms throughout the country - where will be optimal tomorrow, whether storms are coming that might damage the blossoms and which parks will be most crowded for viewing. I couldn't believe that a slot on the news would be devoted to that. That Saturday we went out to one of the local parks to try some "Hanami" which literally means, "look at the flowers". Hundreds of people were gathered under the trees, with small barbecues (and sake). What a difference to where I was from, where people tended to have a quick look, then sweep up the blossoms when they fall!

Much more than in Western countries I came to realise that each season is anticipated and appreciated in Japan. That Autumn I was asked if I wanted to go and see the "Koyo" - I agreed, and was taken to Kyoto, one of the ancient cultural places in Japan. It turned out that Koyo refers to the changing of the colours of the leaves in Autumn. We spent the day wandering around looking at the trees and observing and commenting on how red or yellow they were. It was beautiful. Later that month I took a trip by myself up to Nikko, which was deep in the mountains and truly stunning. When you think of Japan you may think of a big city, like Tokyo, but it also has some of the most beautiful scenery I have seen in all my travels. More than 70% of the country is mountainous and those mountains are full of trees which change colour. While there I met people who were travelling the country in tour buses, following the changing colours down the islands of Japan.

This appreciation of the beauty in nature really challenged me because I realised that I had very seldom stopped in the past and devoted a whole day to appreciate the changing seasons. This started a shift in outlook that caused me to consciously take time out from the busyness of life to simply sit and be still and observe (a practice I fall out of all too easily). I also started to search for nature itself wherever I could find it. I was living in Osaka, a very large city which, believe it or not, is much more concreted than London. It is not beautiful, but with this shift in mindset came a new willingness to seek out beauty where it could be found and soon I was seeing and appreciating the grass growing between the cracks on the sidewalk, the knee high weeds in abandoned lots and the pigeons on my windowsill.

I imagine that Jesus, as he wandered Israel for 3 years, would have spent a lot of time outdoors. It makes me think of the disciples walking through the fields and picking the heads of grain to eat during Harvest - somehow I think Jesus would have been someone who saw beauty in the changing of the seasons, what do you think? I wonder if when he 'went away to a quiet place' he had a favourite tree that he used to sit under. I like to think that he did.

SM

**Do you have a poem, short story, picture, article, crossword, thought or other item you would like to contribute to this space in future weeks?
If so, please pass to Jane or Steven Moe**