

## CAFÉ MINISTRY - CAYA Café

When we reach out to the Japanese people, we start with something they are interested in. With some, their need is for a sense of community. Each week, on Saturday afternoons, up to 40 visitors come from the community to join us at Japan Mission for fun and fellowship over a cup of coffee or tea.

The purpose of CAYA Café is to create a space where workers can share God's love and connect with the community. CAYA stands for 'Come As You Are.' In Japanese society, there are few places where people are accepted 'just as they are,' but that is what the grace of God does for us. It embraces us 'just as we are.'

One family learned of CAYA Café because their children attended the same kindergarten as Alex's children. They came to various events, including our English Camp. They started to show interest in Christianity, so we introduced them to a local church. It has been wonderful to see this family attend church each week and make friends with other Christian families!

### CONNECTING SEEKERS TO LOCAL CHURCHES

Japan Mission does not plant churches. We reach out to the lost and introduce them to local churches. This is why we often work in partnership with ministers in the area.

Rev. Yoshida is one such partner, who regularly visits CAYA Café and Kids Club. Many of the children and parents have befriended him and some have started to attend his church.

Yasutaka Yoshida is a minister who sometimes uses his flair for graffiti to communicate the message of God's love. He recently demonstrated his colorful artwork on a big canvas by drawing a Christian message at our English Camp, where he also shared his testimony with many who had never heard the Gospel.

**Please pray** that many would be reached and come to know the Lord through these ministries.



Rev. Yasutaka Yoshida



# JAPAN MISSION

CALLED TO SERVE

Jan / Feb 2019

## PART I – GRAFFITI ARTIST FOR JESUS

Yasutaka Yoshida was born in December 1985 and raised in Osaka. He was the oldest of four boys.

"I had barely started elementary school when I remember crying in my bed on the second floor of our run-down apartment that reeked of mold," Yasutaka shared. "My father was leaving my mother to care for me and my brothers by herself.



Yasutaka Yoshida with Alex Verwey

"Ever since I can remember, my mother took us to church on Sundays. We attended a church that seemed to be quite legalistic. We were taught that on Sundays we could not watch TV, play sports or go to McDonalds. I came to believe that being a Christian was mostly about keeping a set of rules.

"When I was a senior in high school, I was at a loss to know what to do about my future. My family was poor and I knew that if I went to college, I would have to accept money from my mother. I no longer wanted to attend church and live a life according to her expectations, so I decided to leave home and join the Japanese Self-Defense Forces.

"When I was younger, I prayed that my father would return home, but he didn't. This caused me to doubt the existence of God. I started to feel that there was no sense in believing in something that was unreliable and uncertain, so I eventually became an atheist.

"One day, I was talking to my colleagues in the Self-Defense Forces about drugs. One of them had some, so we smoked marijuana and it became a regular habit.

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"I looked forward to the holidays, because I could smoke weed. One summer break, a colleague called me saying, 'Yoshida, the commander wants to speak with you. I know you're on break, but it looks like he wants you to come back.'

"When I arrived at the garrison, I went to see the commander. 'Listen up Yoshida, I'm going to ask you something very important,' he said. 'Drugs, have you ever smoked marijuana?'

"I said 'yes' and the commander yelled at me, saying, 'Go right now! The Narcotics Control Investigator is here!' After the investigator inspected everything I was fired.

"I was 19 years old when I was thrown into solitary confinement in Osaka Prison. I was later confined to a very small room and saddened to see the disappointment and tears in my mother's eyes.

"After 3 months of confinement, I was released. I decided that I did not want to make my mother cry again, so I tried to make a fresh start. I was determined to stop smoking weed and live a good life from that time on.

"One day, I was drawing in a notebook while riding on the train, when a graffiti artist spoke to me. He showed me his notebook and I was really impressed. We became drawing buddies and he showed me some of his graffiti. He would use spray paint and markers to leave signs throughout the town. It was pretty intense. He had even drawn on the side of a train. I

wondered how on earth he had pulled that off!

"I thought that I could give it a try, so the world became my canvas. I went from paper to city walls. I wanted a place where I could belong. I didn't have a dad and my mother was busy with work.

"There was a part of me that was empty, and I really wanted people to respect me. The more I drew, the more people I met. Whenever I would draw letters on the wall, girls would scream 'Wow, that's so cool!'



Yasutaka drawing graffiti

"Of course, it was a crime and I could get arrested if I drew graffiti in broad daylight, so I went out at night and had a lookout watch for the police. Before I knew it, I was sleeping during the day and staying up all night.

"The promise I made myself to never cause my mother to cry again started to fade. I became friends with more graffiti artists and started to draw with them. We

would draw in places where there were security cameras and found ourselves on the news! We evaded the South Osaka Police for a while, but were eventually arrested.

"The first thing my mother sent me while I was in prison was a Bible. I refused to read it for two months, but I became so bored and frustrated that I started to read it. The Lord spoke to my heart as I read Romans 6:23 -- **For the wages of sin is death.** I knew that I would go to hell if I died.

"I was sometimes allowed to go to the recreational room, where there was a small window where the sunlight would come in. In that room, we were allowed to smoke two cigarettes per day. One day, I was watching the smoke from the cigarettes flow out through the small window.

"The plumes of smoke and dust particles were clearly visible in the bright sunlight. 'This rec room is filthy!' I thought. Just then, it was as though God was showing me how filthy the inside of my own heart was. Even though I was surrounded by people, I felt like I was alone and on a big stage. The sunlight shone on me -- the man who had led such a selfish life!

"It was like everything I had done up until then was being played back to me in a black and white movie, and all I saw was countless specks of dust and sin. I came face to face with my sin. I gasped for breath and mumbled 'God, if you're there, please save me!'

"I then remembered the words that my mother had told me as a child. 'Yasu, please read the Bible. Everything written in it is true.' I went back to my jail cell, took the Bible in my hand and read the entire book in search of answers.

"I was struck by these words:

***If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, 'Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame'*** (Romans 10:9-11, NIV).

"I realized that I had to say it out loud, so I said, 'Alright, I'll say it! Jesus, I'm sorry. Please forgive me for everything I've done. I believe in Jesus Christ.' The Lord helped me see my sin and I asked Him to forgive me.

"I felt an indescribable feeling of peace and joy come over me. For the first time, I felt free of guilt and from that night on I could finally sleep well.

"God showed me that the 'net' of salvation was so incredibly big. I didn't do anything good to deserve it, but God had saved me!" □

**Read the next issue to learn how Yasutaka became a minister and is now using his flair for graffiti to reach young people for the Lord!**