

Dear friends,

December 2021

Greetings! It's the end of 2021! How are you? Asking what kind of year this has been feels like a cliché so unprecedented had these two years been. But if you did ask me about my year, especially this fall, I would sum it up as "pure, unadulterated serenity". The equanimity that embraced this fall was so comprehensive that I had to really wonder about the source of it. After some reflection, I am a little chagrined to relay the reason: the absence of resentful co-workers. There are numerous drawbacks of Zoom teaching, but I'd be lying if I didn't admit that I thrived in not having to deal with these draining sources. I am well-aware that we are meant to inhabit and be sanctified through these personal conflicts and that my days of serenity are numbered, but I gush with gratitude for this little moratorium from the unpleasantness of life inflicted by others. Ironically though, I was uncharacteristically sociable this fall by the company that sought me out. God has been spoiling me through these generous, thoughtful and encouraging friends, who make me feel like a pretty awesome person.

As for my present duty, though it is a university in Taiwan, a large portion of the student body is from the mainland China. The majority of them are from Christian homes and chose to attend this school because they could not fit into the Chinese collegiate system for one reason or another. It was encouraging to interview them as many of their parents are affluent Christian business people, reminding me that my years in China had not been in vain and that there might be hope for China yet. What is puzzling, however, is just how much of a "normal" teacher I have been this semester. If you had been receiving my updates since my YUST days, you probably remember how protective, infatuated, and consumed I got with my students. I would ooh and aww ad nauseam over their tiniest improvements and treat even slightest signs of spiritual awakening as the miracle of the year. I lost countless hours of sleep worrying about them, helping them, and listening to them. Though not a sub-par teacher by any measure, I find that I am not setting the bar and I have been sleeping incredibly well all semester. I was stunned by my own transformation and knew that this required some investigation.

When I mention that I am now teaching for a university in Taiwan, two most common questions I receive are: "What about PY?" and "So are you done with PY now?" Though I lost track of the number of times I had received these questions, they never cease to startle and amaze me because I am living Psalm 137 each and every day, which so aptly and poetically describes my heart toward PY:

If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you,
if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.

Far from being done with PY, it's ever fresh in my heart and memory so that I awoke feeling both delighted and devastated because I had dreamt of being in an intense discussion with my students over the future of our school and the nation just the other day. Even in the dream, my heart went

on overdrive and my voice an octave or two higher so thrilled was I to behold them. What I am doing, until then, is trying to obey Jeremiah 29 “And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare”. Though I do not lose sleep over every slacker like I used to nor have much room left in my heart to obsess over this flock, I have been crying with a student whose mom has been battling metastatic cancer, another whose parents have been forced out of their business because of an unscrupulous landlord and are on the brink of financial ruins leaving her to contemplate whether to discontinue her schooling, and one who was tormented with taunts all of his life and made me question whether I am even equipped to deal with such tortured soul. I have also been quietly rejoicing over the underclassmen whose sweet ways do cause me to go out of my way to help them. I can’t help it.

Being displaced from my beloved home and school because of the travel ban, and being torn from those that were able to come out and study in China due to covid did take its toll on me. But this Christmas seems to fuel hope and renew zeal even in utter absence of prospects improving. I don’t know about you, but I am so excited awaiting this Christmas and feel myself getting wide-eyed again. May this update sprinkles some of that fairy dust on you.

Wishing you more joy than you know what to do with on this Christmas and the new year!

Hannah