

Dear Everyone

Greetings from technically Winter in San Francisco. "Technically" because five days ago it was two degrees below zero, and today we are sweltering at 35, so we have covered all four seasons this week.

I (Hazel) was hanging out at the back of the church after the service on Sunday, when a lady came up and started making small talk. After a while she said, "Do you know who I am?" So I confessed that I couldn't recall her. "You do know me" She said. "I used to beg at the traffic lights". Except that the woman standing before me now didn't bear any resemblance to the woman we used to see at the traffic lights. The traffic light lady was a drug addict, very skinny and dirty. We used to talk to her, sometimes buy her food, sometimes give her a bit of money. I was aware that she had disappeared during the lockdown last year, but that was when everyone else had



disappeared off the streets too so I had not particularly clocked her absence. The lady talking to me in church has been drug free for over a year, and her face, hair and body are so completely different I would never have recognised her if she had not introduced herself. She is earning money selling *pasta frola* (sweet pastry with jam filling, traditional in Argentina), which she delivers from the back of a motorbike, and is usually congregating at another evangelical church in town. So we hugged (abandoning all protocols of social distancing), and I bought a *pasta frola*, and gave thanks that we have a God who changes lives. I had just a few minutes previously preached on Jesus' parable in Luke 15 of the lost sons and their loving father and it felt like we were transported from the written passage into experiencing a real life 21st century version, with all the encouragement of being reminded that God's love remains the same.

A new venture is that our church has started supporting a "mirendero"; a children's feeding and social programme, in a poor neighbourhood across town. A number of these informal schemes have sprung up in different areas in response to needs exacerbated by the pandemic. The church has committed to providing food and people to help a couple of times a week, and is also hoping to start a women's meeting with the mums and the other helpers involved in the project. We pray that this new activity will be a blessing to the community, and also that it will not be marred by petty jealousies which have been a feature of relationships in our congregation.



At home, we are grateful that schools have finally gone back to some extent. Baby at preschool is going in every morning, while Joni and Danny are on week-on/week-off schedules, which has worked out that they are on alternate weeks. There are pluses and minuses to this, and we are getting better at managing yet another set of routines. Flexibility is us! We are also thinking about organising some extra tuition for Danny's "off" week to work on key skills in maths and language, but we haven't quite yet figured out the details of how that might work. Teen and her Boyfriend are both starting to take steps into the adult world of work. Teen is now doing some housework for a lawyer, while Boyfriend started on a government-funded work experience scheme, which isn't working out too well for him at the moment. They both really need prayer and encouragement to keep going with these big changes and having new expectations on them.

Thank you for reading, and for your ongoing prayers and support. Have a good month!



Hazel X Martin



Joni & Daniel

