



Roger Lowther is filling in for Paul Nethercott for the summer issue. A professional musician working in Tokyo as Artist in Residence with Grace City Church, a new church plant in Ginza led by Rev. Makoto Fukuda, Roger and his wife Abi have been in Japan since 2005 with Mission to the World. He graduated from the Juilliard School with a Masters Degree in Organ Performance. Both Roger and his wife have a passion to see artists use their talents to spread the message of the gospel in ways that engage and challenge the culture of Japan and the world. Please feel free to contact him by email: rogerlowther@gmail.com.

Short Films and Church Planting



“自転車 *Jitensha*—A Bicycle Dismantled... A Life Retrieved.” Written by Christians, filmed by Christians, produced by Christians...and internationally recognized as one of the top short films of 2009. How rare is that? Out of over 1600 short films entered into the 66th Venice Film Festival (one of the top five film festivals in the world!), only *Jitensha* and 26 others were chosen. Out of 2,000 sent to the Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival (with an attendance of 137,196!), only *Jitensha* and 77 others were chosen. It won the “Vision Award for Best Short Film” at the Heartland Film Festival and was chosen to be screened at numerous other film festivals, movie theaters, and other venues across the globe.

Is it a Christian film? Makoto Fujimura, painter and founder of International Arts

Movement, argues “Christian” should never be used as an adjective, forcing it into a small segment of society and commerce. Rather, the work of Christians should encompass all of life. So I would not call it a “Christian” film, even though “God” does play an active role in the story. I would call it a redemptive film, not just for the characters in the story, but for the audiences as well.

Written by Yu Shibuya and filmed by students from Biola University with help from *Studio Re*: directed by Paul Nethercott, the film sets out to wrestle with one of the largest problems facing Japanese society today: the lack of real community. Part of the beauty of this film is the way it forces us to travel the same journey as the character and acquire the same hope and wisdom in the end. It forces us to interact with truths easily ignored, and yet does not attempt to answer all the complex questions surrounding loneliness, withdrawal, and *hikkikomori*. Through *Jitensha*, we not only feel but also rejoice in the need for others: for people and for God. It does what all art is supposed to do: engage us emotionally and break down the walls we build around ourselves. *Jitensha* paints us a picture of the world that ought to be, where relationships can become whole and happy, where we delight in the communities around us, and where we perhaps even delight in ourselves.

I could tell you the plot of the movie, but I'd rather you be surprised by the twists and turns as they happen. I will tell you this. It is about Mamoru, a lonely “salary man” who has withdrawn from society, his bike, and God. Through the story, Mamoru gradually rebuilds connections with humanity and within himself. He discovers what it is



new church plant I am aiding near Ginza Station, screened this film after a Sunday worship service. Quite a few who have never been to a worship service entered our space to watch the film along with members of the church. What a great catalyst for Christians and non-Christians to gather together and talk about community and the gospel!

In my short three and a half years in Japan, I have not seen a more powerful at-

like to “be whole again” and to open up the “clamshell” walls of his life that block him from the outside world (quotations from the movie).

The plot and themes are excellent, but so is the beauty of the backdrops as they artfully express the look and feel of Japan: a shrine, a boy playing on *tatami*, a lonely train ride, a street vendor in Harajuku, a party in Shibuya, etc. One of the most beautiful scenes occurs on a Kamakura beach with Mt. Fuji in the background (which reminded me of the famous poem “Footprints in the Sand”—a word painting of Jesus picking us up and carrying us when we really need him). In that vast landscape of sand, words from a wise old man penetrate Mamoru’s heart.

“Sometimes you have to rely on others to find what you’re looking for.” In this moment, we the viewers also learn the same lesson: that which we seek is found outside of ourselves. It also teaches us something else: sometimes we can only find what we are looking for by losing something we hold dear.

Why is this film important for church planting? Grace City Church Tokyo, the

attractive element to Christianity than gospel-based community. Real, honest, open, life-changing community... that is what the people of Japan desperately need to experience. *Jitensha* helps audiences see, hear, and even feel this need through the medium of film. Community is a beautiful thing the church has to offer to millions seeking this kind of intimacy. Pick up your own copy of *Jitensha* and show it in whatever venues you deem most appropriate, and may God use it as he builds his community here in Japan and around the globe.

For information on purchasing *Jitensha* on DVD, go to www.studio-re.com ^{JH}

