

August, 2016

Greetings to you from Lima, Peru. I've just finished my first week of classes. Nancy didn't make the trip this time.

We have 15 students studying at CILTA, a linguistics program open to all comers, but especially geared to those who want to work cross-culturally as Bible translators or literacy workers. We have some teaching assistants as well who are honing their skills. 2016 marks ten years that Nan and I have been involved with CILTA. We were both here first semester, but I'm on my own for second.

I'm heading up one course—advanced phonology. I can't vouch for how “advanced” it is, but it keeps me hopping to stay ahead of the students. I'm also helping with another class, Field Methods, where students learn how to organize all the data elicited, transcribed and recorded in the process of learning another language. This year's language is Yanesha', an Amazon Basin language spoken here in Peru by some 8,000 people. The language, like those of most smaller people groups around the world, is endangered. Endangered basically means that it could be gone within a generation or two unless the group takes charge of its own future and gets proactive about keeping the language alive. In fact, Wycliffe and SIL International have worked with community and Christian leaders in languages around the world to help them figure out what they would like to see happen as far as the future of their languages is concerned, and what they need to do to see that come to pass. Literacy and Bible translation are often a big part of their strategy. They want the language and they want the Scriptures in the language. It's a privilege and a pleasure to be involved in that.

As always, people wonder if this might be a bad idea; that if we just had a few languages, wouldn't communication be better and wouldn't we all have a better shot at “peace in our time?” Just how well are newly-written languages serving minority people in this modern day and age?

Most of us would agree, I trust, that we should let the speakers of these languages decide, and that it is not our right to decide for them. If people want to keep their languages going, they should have the right to do so—and perhaps even with government support.

I know you've heard this all before, but here it comes again. Across the world, language is the main act of identity that people use to determine who is “us” and who is “them.” And when languages are lost, not only do people lose communicative options, but the world loses another way of being human. Even the Church loses a way in which people reflect the image of God as his children. God loves linguistic and cultural diversity. We should appreciate it as well. Plus when languages die, cultures are right behind on the same slippery slope. And all the wisdom and knowledge of these cultures are also lost as well. This is unfortunate, and is a loss for humanity.

In any event, there are four Yanesha' men studying literacy principles and programs here at CILTA and in exchange for what they are learning they will pose as language assistants to give our students some real-world experience in learning another language. This is a great opportunity for everyone, students and faculty and Yanesha' alike. There's always plenty to learn.

I'm a fan of the Olympics. I was encouraged and surprised to see that I could have qualified in an event with the times I ran back in my prime. Yes, I had a prime. What I would have qualified in was the women's 800 meter finals, not my best event, but with a time fast enough to qualify for the Olympics. However, I wouldn't have medaled.

Some of you may recall that I picked Usain Bolt to lose the 100 meters back in 2012. I felt he was too given to partying and not given enough to training. I was proved wrong and I vowed to myself not to doubt him again. This proved wise as he scored a triple triple, winning gold in the 100, the 200 and the 4X100 meter relay three Olympiads in a row. What is it like to be that fast for that long? The only person to ask that of is Bolt himself. No one else has been that dominant, except perhaps Michael Phelps...or maybe Michael Jordan.

Here's a riddle for you. Successful answers must be rhyming—like the riddle itself:

One-time athletes won't ask for more
Than three point two eight oh eight four.

If you come up with a good answer I will post it (them), along with your first name, in my next update. Is that motivation enough?

Blessings to you all.

Wes, and for Nancy