

ST. THOMAS MISSION

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“I wanted to be loved because I was great; A big man. I'm nothing.”

Terrence Malick's
The Tree of Life.

Empty Me

by Ryan

Before my decision to teach in Iraq, I wanted to do some definite service to God, but I wanted it to be comfortable and on my own terms. I wanted exactly what is impossible: that Christ would live in me without me emptying myself. Before Iraq, I wanted to follow a safe path of material abundance and recognition. I made the decision to go to Iraq seeking something to break up my experience thus far, to do something different, and then to return eventually to my plan, seeking to hold on to myself in the process. But after just three months, it became impossible to imagine returning to my pursuit of wealth and prestige, and little by little I was able to cease clinging to my own fragments and empty myself more and more for the sake of my students. After two years in Iraq, I have returned to the United States, but thanks be to God the spirit of self-effacement learned in Iraq continues to be nurtured in me.

Editor's note: This month's issue features writings from the 2022-2023 teaching team.



PHOTO BY ELIZABETH ALVA

More Beauty Than Eye Can See

by Elizabeth Alva

A gift I was not expecting to encounter during my time in Iraq was a deeper understanding of beauty. You see, Erbil does not contain beauty in the typical sense—a city under rapid expansion, reflected in the modern architecture and bright billboards that line streets undergoing construction. Rather, as St. Augustine once so eloquently reflected “since love grows within you, so beauty grows, for love is the beauty of the soul.” And, that love can be indeed found quite strongly among the Chaldean community who I spent the past year with. When asking myself and fellow missionaries why we would dedicate time to this cause, the answer is always unanimous. Our motivation always came down to our students. While all children are loveable, those at Mar Qardakh are especially unique. Whether it is their excitement to learn, inquisitive nature, or their incredible sense of humor, the students never cease to leave an impression on every visitor who walks the halls of the school. Being able to encounter these students as their teacher, left that indelible mark, one that I know continues to walk with me in the months after leaving Erbil. From the time inside the classroom, I have gained a deeper understanding of that beauty, because to love ones’ students as their teacher taught me so much about the beauty of the human person. And what a gift that is to receive.

Missing

by Myranda Stawowczyk

I miss piling into the Nissan Sunny after a long day and exchanging the funniest stories from our students. I miss peanut butter cookies at Miss Rebekah’s and growing in newfound appreciation of my own nationality. I miss celebrating feast days, going to the local pub, ordering an old fashioned, and musing about beautiful things over the loudest music ever played. I miss drinks and a good meal at Miss Bianca’s apartment. I miss the shenanigans that naturally flowed from a building that serves the purpose of forming tiny little people to be who they were created to be. Most of all, I miss my students, and the wonder in their eyes as they learned another thing about our Lord - and it being another reason to love Him.

