

“A community laboring for something lovely and rare”

April 3, 2020

Dear Students,

If you're one of my advisees or Mai Ru's advisees, you're lucky, because Thursday kitchen duty is by far the best day. If you're not on the Thursday kitchen duty, here is what the scene looks like...

I'm at the sink arguing with Olive, who tries hard every week to prevent me from washing dishes, but usually loses the argument. Russell is debating Kirie, Tafadzwa and Amara as the four of them dry the dishes, and it's always him alone and the other three on the same side. Leon is filling buckets of water outside, but I'm never really sure what exactly he does with them, and Daisy is washing dishes outside with Mr Brandon and Tatenda. And even though Mai Rue can definitely hear him, Trymore is talking about how difficult chemistry is.

All we're missing is Damascent trying to creep out of the kitchen and sweep the floors so that he can avoid washing dishes. But that's for Wednesday's group to enjoy.

I was imagining that scene this evening while I was...ummm...washing dishes. That's right. Usually when I'm at home, my family cooks and then I clean up after. I don't really know how this happened, since I enjoy cooking and am not bad at it, but this is the pattern we've fallen into somehow.

I'm guessing that many of you have been doing a lot of dishes as well since you've gotten home. (And, let's be honest, the girls have probably been doing them more than the boys, unfortunately. More on that later.)

You might be shocked to learn this, but I have found that washing dishes here at home is just not very fun. When I'm home, dishes feel like a chore; whereas at school, Thursday kitchen duty is actually something I look forward to. Truly, I miss Thursdays in the kitchen. Never in my life did I think I would miss washing lots and lots of dirty plates, but now I do.

I have a lot to say about work, perhaps more than almost any other topic. I actually wrote a 10-page letter before deciding that it would be too much to send, so I'm leaving you with just this message.

Work is different when you do it together. It's more fun, the time passes faster, and you do more knowing that others are in it with you, doing the same job. When our work is done well, with other people, and as an act of gratitude, I believe it even takes on a spiritual significance. You might remember the lines of a poem that I included in my letter a few weeks ago, from Wendell Berry, who wrote that “Work done in gratitude / Kindly, and well, is prayer.”

I think of this as we are all working, all in our different corners of Zimbabwe and even abroad. I miss being together - and working together - but know that our community is still here for us. I'm thinking of all of you as we all face these challenging times alone, but together.

Sincerely,
James