

Greetings from our quarantine! We are social distancing here in... St. Louis Missouri!  
We know most of you didn't know we'd be Stateside this early—to be honest we didn't either. Our plan had been to return at the end of April, to prepare for the birth of our little one on the way. We want to have him born here because we felt that would be our most likely opportunity to have a natural birth after a c-section. But countries started closing borders and airlines started cancelling flights with all the recent chaos, and when Colombia (the country from which we planned to fly) closed their borders, we were advised that we needed to act fast to get new tickets before more countries and airlines closed. We got a second itinerary—it was cancelled a couple days later. The third try, we made it—and though it consisted of 50+ hours of travel and 5 flights, at last we are safely in St. Louis MO.

While we were still in transit, Brazil got added to Level 3 Travel Health Notice, which means anyone coming from that country to the US is asked to quarantine for 2 weeks. We didn't find that out until we arrived! Joanna's family learned before we did, and so had her brother's camper trailer set up as a little apartment for us to stay in. Little Andrew has a hard time with the social distancing, and can't understand why he can see his cousins out the window at times and can't play with them. But our accommodations are lovely, and we are enjoying the family time, the spring weather, and the American food. We are doing fine other than a mild cold/allergies, and are so thankful that the Lord helped us get here before the baby's birth!

Backtracking to our last couple months in Brazil— Ezra was able to have more opportunities here and there to share a little from the Word to encourage believers. It's all still been very broken Portuguese, but God's word is powerful, even when His vessels are not! "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, *that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*" (2 Corinthians 4:6-7) Praise God He can use weak things like ourselves in His service!

We continued the Tuesday night meetings, as long as we were home! We had groups as small as four, as large as 53, but be they few or many they are souls that need to hear the Word of God!

At the end of last month we went on a trip to Manaus with a local missionary family from near our area. Their church in Manaus had a houseboat to give them for ministry along the rivers here, and it was communicated that this boat was ready to travel. So their family and ours headed out there together, with the intention of driving the boat back together— Ezra serving as an extra driver, and our whole family going for the experience of river boat life, as this is something we have been/are praying about for our future.

Well, upon our arrival Ezra became sick with a raging headache, and a few days later little Andrew was down with it too. Praise the Lord Joanna was spared, as this fever with temperatures rising over 105° and that wouldn't even always come down with fever reducer would have been very dangerous for her pregnancy.

And as far as the boat was, we found things were not as we had understood. The motor had problems, it seemed when one would get fixed, another came up. It was obviously very old, and wasn't safe to make the 1,000 mile upriver trip back home. After spending a rather fruitless week in Manaus, during most of which Ezra and Andrew were miserable sick, we all decided that the best thing was to return home without the houseboat, and come again when it was actually ready. So we took the week long trip on the river boat back home, empty handed.

Sounds like exciting missionary life, doesn't it? :) No really, it felt like a waste of three perfectly good weeks. But we know nothing is wasted in God's hands, even when we don't know what He is doing— other than teaching us some patience, building our character. And maybe He knew that was just what we needed. Certainly felt like an anticlimactic ending to us, but the One Who knows the end from the beginning wasn't surprised or caught off guard. Things like this show us how important it is to walk by faith and not by sight.

We celebrated Andrew's 1st birthday in Manaus, his native city! The poor guy was still pretty miserable from his cough and congestion, but was a trooper, and got to enjoy his birthday cake (after he sneezed on it first ☐). Such a precious bundle of joy he is to our family. He is just learning to walk more and more, learning to wave and say "Bye bye", and continuing to melt our hearts with his naughty grins and baby babble. We are thankful to report that before we left Brazil, the seeming allergic reactions he was having appeared to be pretty much gone, and he was able to wear shorts and short sleeves again without breaking out like he did. And here in the US he has had no problem like this either. Still don't know what it was but we are thankful for the relief!

Our Portuguese has come quite a ways since we first arrived in Brazil. But lately we both have felt like we aren't making much more progress in the language. And we feel like we are stopped just short of being able to freely minister in the language. Even in the increased immersion we had recently, including our three week trip with local missionaries that don't speak English, we still feel kind of stuck. We are trying to continue to press on and not be weary in well doing. It's been a challenge!

We are trying to continue immersing ourselves as much as we can in Portuguese, memorizing, listening to, and studying scripture in Portuguese, singing in Portuguese, etc., especially while we are locked down for this virus! ☐

It makes the timing for us being in the US seem a little inconvenient, to be gone from the country just as we are struggling with feeling like we are in a rut in the language. But the Lord knows what He's doing and why.

Joanna and Baby are continuing to do well. This week marks the beginning of 3rd trimester for them and we are so thankful to the Lord for the health and strength He has blessed with this whole time.

So, there's a bit on our last two months! It's an interesting time for us to be here on furlough, as we aren't able to even visit our own family right now, let alone anyone else! But you can't plan these things. We are laying low, trying to trust the Lord, keep in touch, and not go stir crazy!

We love you all! Thank you for your love and prayers. Take care, wash your hands, and trust in the Lord! :)

With love and air-hugs ☐,  
Ezra, Joanna, Andrew, and Baby Brainard