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## Buon Aprile!

That means, "Happy April!" We hope this newsletter finds you well. April is, maybe, my favorite month. Spring is here, the weather starts to get better, and we get to celebrate both Rebecca's birthday and our anniversary. We hope and pray that you all are enjoying the very best of life and that God is blessing you all richly.

Here's what we've been up to the last few weeks.

## Not All Growth Is Numerical

Pictured below is Tomaso, but you can call him Tommy. He is a member of the church at Pistoia who was baptized around three years ago now. He is married to Silvia, who grew up in the church at Pistoia. Silvia's mother is a very faithful member of the church, but her father is not. Silvia has two brothers, one of whom is a member, but the other is not (though he comes to worship every Sunday). But, back to Tomaso. As I said he was baptized about three years ago. He is becoming a good friend, but what is most exciting, and why I mention him this month, is he is developing into a true leader of the church at Pistoia.

When Tomaso was baptized he came to worship every week, but, like many new converts, was shy to lead in worship. Then, one Sunday he got up and led a prayer for the Lord's Supper. Last year he started to preach, and now he preaches about once a month.

From about September I have tried to focus lessons on leadership and have talked about how we need to develop leaders in the church. I taught a lesson a few months ago about elders and how it should be our goal to have elders in the church at Pistoia. Since then, Tomaso has really shined. He is steps up any time there is a need. In the picture below he is leading singing. He has not done that much, but last week our song leader was sick and could not come to worship. Tomaso did not hesitate, he said, "I'll do it," got a song book, chose some songs, and led the service.

I am hoping, in the next couple of weeks, to have lunch with Tomaso and Gianluca, his brother-in-law. Gianluca, who has been a Christian much longer than Tomaso, is more of a quiet, behind the scenes kind of guy. He is a plumber and works hard keeping the building going, especially the heating system. His wife is not a Christian, but last week she came to worship for the first time since we have been involved with Pistoia. She has also started sharing some thoughts about the Bible on a group chat that we have. When we have our lunch I want to talk to them about how they can continue to develop as leaders and some of the things we need to do for them to be elders in the future. I don't know how far off that is, but I do think they could both do the job (though, obviously, Gianluca's wife would need to be a Christian). If that happens they would be the first elders in the history of the congregation.

Please pray that we can make that happen.



Tomaso leading singing

## Lessons with Chinese Students

Our Chinese visitors continue to come to worship every Sunday. We've gotten down to about six that come every week. The past few Sundays we have not been able to have our lessons after worship, but hope to get them going again this coming Sunday. Recently, someone shared with me the World Video Bible School's Chinese Bible lessons. I have shared them with the group and have gotten positive feedback from them. They seem to be enjoying the lessons. We are still trying to set up a Gospel meeting that they can invite their non-Christian friends to, but we have not been able to make that happen yet. Please pray that these lessons touch their hearts and that we can share more with their community.

## Another Opportunity?

Last week I went to the city of Montecatini Terme, which is the next town over from Pistoia. If you find Florence on the map, going due east you will find Prato, then Pistoia, then Montecatini Terme. It is a smaller town, of about 20,000 people, but there is a large tourism industry there (there are many spas as a result of the hot springs in the city). There are several hotels in the city that are empty. While I was there I saw a hotel that had a lot of people from Africa and east Asia in it. I went in to ask about it and found that it is being used to house about fifty refugees. There is another around the corner that is also housing refugees, but these seem to be families, whereas the first seems to be mostly men.

I am going back on Friday of this week to see if I can set up Bible studies. It seems like there are at least a hundred refugees in these two hotels and, perhaps, they will have an interest in the Gospel. I am assuming there are more that I have not seen. Please pray that I will be able to set up studies there, and that they will bear fruit.

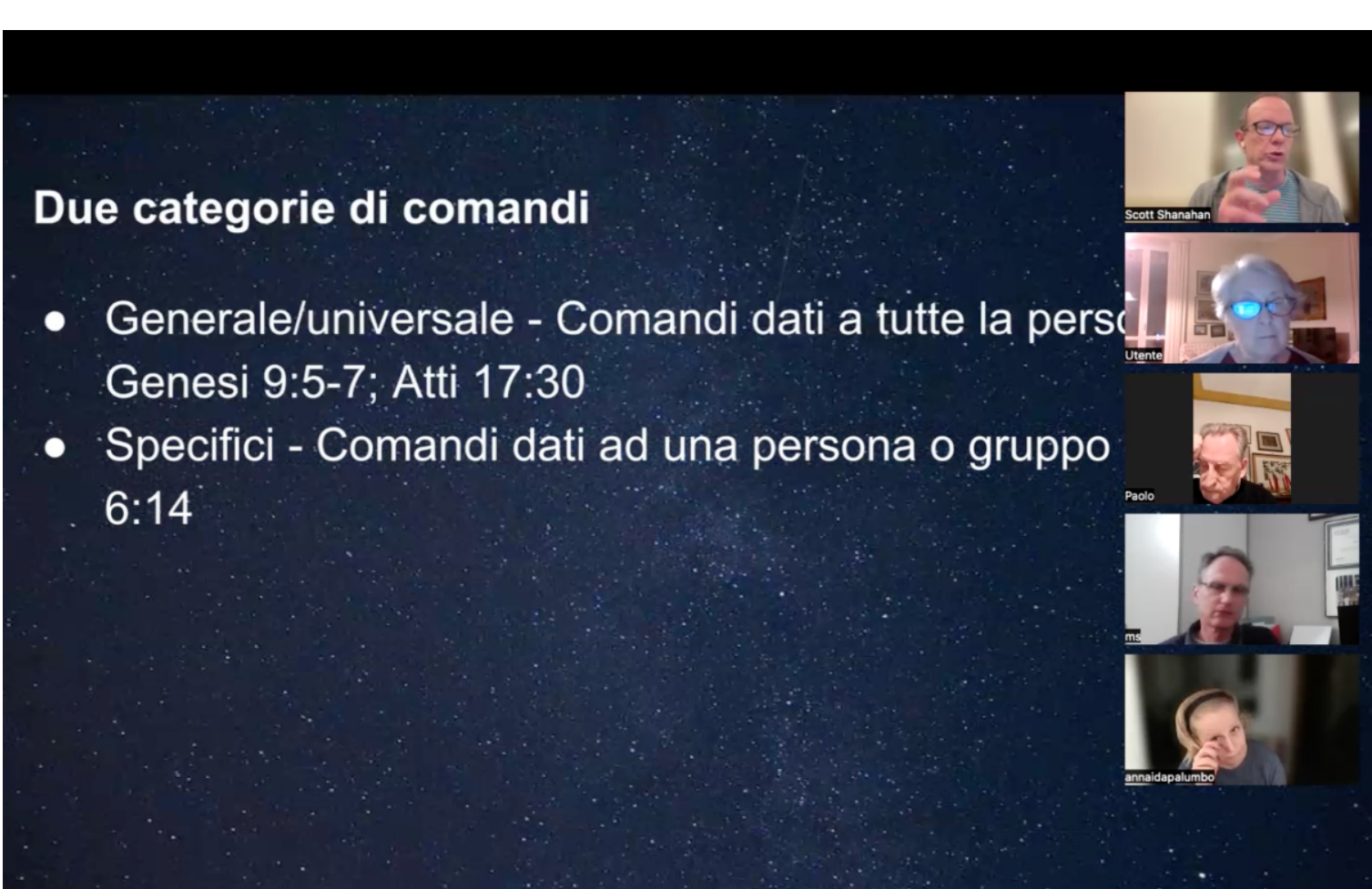


The hotel where I found the refugees.

## Other Studies

All of our normal studies continue to go well. We have studies most days of the week. On Mondays I am still teaching the Milano class online. For the past few months we have been studying "How to study the Bible." I have had more people interested in this class than any other I remember teaching. The students have been very attentive and have all given me positive feedback. We are now learning about commands, examples and necessary inference as a hermeneutic (Bible study method). I think for many of the students, this is the first time they've ever heard about this. In the next couple of weeks we will also study the roll of silence in Bible study.

One of the main problems churches in Italy have is a lack of Bible knowledge. People know, for example, that we do not use instrumental music in worship, but they do not know why. They know that we do not have spiritual fellowship with denominations, but do not know why we preach one church. In these lessons, rather than spoon feeding the students answers to these questions I'm trying to teach them how to find the answers on their own. I have been recording the classes, and hope to publish them for other congregations. Please pray that the lessons will have an effect. We want to grow numerically, we want to develop leaders, but we also need to grow in our Bible knowledge.



Milano class. At this point we were talking about general/universal commands and specific commands.

## Zoo Trip

Ever since Violet's new friends have been coming to worship at Pistoia she has asked if we could organize a trip to the zoo with them. (There is a very small zoo in Pistoia). We've been there a couple of times and it is a great way to be disappointed. But, she likes it so she has been begging to go there with them. Then she asked if we could invite her school friend Ahafia from Ukraine and her friend Adalena from the Florence congregation. This was interesting since Violet generally prefers one on one time with friends, not groups. We invited them to come along, but, unfortunately, Adalena could not come. Ahafia and her father, Sasha, came with us. Sasha and I wind up spending a lot of time together as Ahafia and Violet like to go places together and we usually have to take them.

In the end, the zoo trip ended up being our family, the Edwards family, Sasha and Ahafia. It was a lot of fun, but the important thing was this was Ahafia and Sasha's first time to be around Christians other than us. The Edwards girls did a great job of making sure she was included in the conversations.

We hope that as a result Ahafia will want to spend more time with the Edwards and maybe one day she and her family will come and worship with us.



Violet is the one with her eyes closed.

## Personal Stuff

Only one big thing happening in the lives of the Shanahans right now, which is that Violet hurt her elbow last week and it is still bothering her.

She was walking in our house and banged it on this large, antique safe we have in the main room of the house. It didn't bother her at first, but then she was complaining about it as the day went on. She can move it, but it hurts to do so, so on Thursday morning I took her to the emergency room at the children's hospital in town (we are blessed to have the top children's hospital in Italy, a fifteen minute drive from our house. We are also blessed to never have had to go there before). They looked at it and said it didn't seem like she had a break, but they took an x-ray to be sure.

As of yesterday it was still hurting her so we took her to our pediatrician to see what she thought. She said it would not really be possible for the ligaments to be damaged the way Violet described hurting it and can't really think of what the problem is. But, she ordered an MRI, which we will go get tomorrow. There's no swelling, redness or bruise which is good, but she has been complaining of pain for over a week, and still can't move it without it hurting.

So please, pray for her that it will get better soon.

Thanks for all you do for us!  
The Shanahans



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