

February 21, 2010

We are in another season of transition in Moz, as more missionaries join us. With every new person or family, we must meet with various government officials to explain their plans, projects and benefits to Mozambique. It's time consuming, but it's worth it! These particular missionaries have already been in Mozambique for 14-17 years! They speak the languages here and carry tremendous favor with both the people and the officials. They have a ton of ministry and practical experience.

Our worship times have been refreshing and our fellowship is sweet. The love between us all is authentic. Each has come through seasons of intense hardship and trials of various kinds, and overcame. Funny how hard times mature saints and bond people. That's likely why James exhorts us to "Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance; that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." James 1:2-4 With such a body of tried and tested saints on board, I believe our ministry output will multiply radically this year.

The recent rains have taken the edge off the heat, revived our crops and supplied us with much needed water. Our electrical engineer is having trouble getting the proper supplies to take the electricity across the street to our clinic and school. We can't access the well there for water without electricity. So we patiently wait for Africa's timing to bless our attempts at progress. Unfortunate for me, waiting is not my strong suit.

In the states, we say, "it's raining cats and dogs!" Here, it's raining bugs and snakes. I don't know why they're more active in the rain. Perhaps their dens flood. We actually have mini rivers flowing through our property. Jacqui had a spitting cobra in her kitchen yesterday. Luis killed it, brave man that he is. Spitting cobras can spew for 9 feet. The venom blinds your eyes and their aim is spot on. So it's tricky getting close enough to kill them. We've killed five vipers in the last three weeks. In one way, they're good for us. There's nothing like facing off with spitting cobra to keep your heart clean and your walk with the Lord fresh and vital. No one knows when he will meet his Maker. But living in the African tropics does wonders for helping one keep short accounts with each other and the Lord!

The roof beams in both dorms and Jacqui's house have twisted and lifted the roofing tiles, which means it now rains in doors, as well. Grrr! Did I say something about patience? One day, we shall come forth pure as gold, but not today. I'm hissing mad, today. Just thought I should confess that before I meet the next snake.

Heide and I been in Zimbabwe for three days and just returned yesterday. We took BB to Zimbabwe (the girl with malaria and seizures who was living with us). The doctor there was in S. Africa, so we missed him entirely. But we got BB settled in and trained the household how to manage her seizures and medicine.

I'm planning on taking the next Bethel outreach on the road, because we can't house them adequately here. They will be perpetually wet anyway, so we might as well make an adventure of it! We could circle around to the earlier church plants in the south of Moz., as well as encourage and strengthen the ones here. I haven't visited the southern church plants in three years. It would be a good to check up on their progress. Okay, I'm rambling now. Do be praying for us for all of March. It's going to be an intense month!

Hebrews 13:2 says, "Do not be forgetful of hospitality, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it." Perhaps the only thing more precious than an angel is a saint (in God's eyes, anyway). So we do the hospitality thing a lot. Hospitality. That's a nice word for cooking, cleaning and doing lots of laundry. In 2008, I counted how many meals we cooked at our house that year. It was just under 44,000. Our kitchen has no stove, but we have two gas burners and one tin sink. And we can always cook on the ground over a campfire. Now, 44,000 meals does not include what we cook in the villages. It doesn't include the prison ministry mouths (about 130 of em') or the outreaches or the conferences. It's just our household and visitors. And it's often done without electricity or refrigeration.

There are no Coscos or Walmarts in Mozambique. But we do have a butcher, an egg farm, some street markets, and a Shoprite market, but it's all a 30 K drive from here. There's no one-stop shopping. There is so much work to do to simply provide a simple meal that I got perturbed over it all. Why can't we all just fast forever? But then I began to realize how much ministry happening around the table.

Ministry is really just a fancy word for service. We all like pulpit ministry, but kitchen ministry? Who aims for that call? Yet he who serves the least is greatest in the Kingdom. In Luke 12:37 we find King Jesus, after he has ascended to heaven, dressing himself to serve. It says that the Master, Jesus will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. How humble is that? The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:40. And the qualifications of the men chosen to wait on the tables of

widows in the Jerusalem church were this: they had to be „full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles then prayed and laid their hands on them, to wait on widows! What was the immediate result? The next verse says it all, “So the Word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” Acts 6:7. It,s the inside-outside-up-side-down Kingdom. Gotta love it!

I mention all this because it’s really easy to glorify pulpit ministry and pooh-pooh service. I also sometimes forget how easy it is to serve and please God: “If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.” Matthew 10:42.

I don’t know how many we’re feeding and serving now. There are too many to count. We’re working our way through 18 tons of corn and 1 ton of bean (which we grew on our farm last season). The really cool thing is, those we serve have caught the concept. Now, they are bringing their food and sharing with one another. But when they serve, wow! It’s really the widow’s mite. To see people who are barely clinging to life share so freely, it robs you of your very tears! We see the same fruit of faith in the Word: “And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God,s will.” 2 Cor. 8:1-5. We have never had to teach the poor about tithing, giving or sharing. They just know and they do it. What precious lessons they teach me.

We are hands-on here, because God has called us and you have helped to send us. We enjoy seeing the fruit of our labors, but it,s hard for you to see it from there. But do remember that our fruit is also your fruit. Several of the patients and, literally ALL of the prisoners have received Christ. The churches are well established, with totally local leadership. They are self-supporting and maturing in every way.

Happy serving the least of these,

Tracy

P.S. Both phone and Internet lines have been down about 80% of the time, so if you’re one of those that writes or phones us, be persistent.