

Philip Bromiley - Back from Tanzania

Philip joined the Rooted in Jesus team to the Diocese of Mara and Masasi in July 2015

“So then, Tanzania... was it what you expected?” A question I have been asked a few times since returning. The truth is I carried very few expectations at all. I genuinely had no idea why God wanted me to visit or be part of a ‘Rooted in Jesus Junior’ team. All I knew was that when the opportunity came, there was very little reason to turn the offer down. I felt that God would reveal the purpose of me being there as I experienced it. And so it turned out.

Being obedient to the Lord is not always about hearing God’s set of detailed instructions for the future, and following those instructions as closely as possible, but rather it is about allowing ourselves to trust God as we step forward into the unknown. In that stepping forward, we humbly acknowledge that, as mad as it may seem, God is more than able to trust us to make the right decision on occasion without specific instruction.

Four of us made up the team: all of us trained teachers or ministers. Our job was to lead two four day conferences for Sunday school teachers in two different dioceses. Church life in Africa is very different to England. The Mothers Union is a vibrant, young, powerful organisation that impacts upon the whole of society. Sunday schools are well attended and play a key role for the growth of the church. The average Sunday school has between 80-150 children attending each week. People are poor, but church worship is rich.

Thirty-six people attended the first conference in Musoma in the Diocese of Mara. Another 35 or so people came to an adult conference that was running in parallel. The Diocese is on the shores on Lake Victoria, in the north of Tanzania, and is led by Bishop-elect Jacob, a tall, gracious and gentle man who was a constant presence around the Cathedral compound. Yes food and accommodation was a little basic, but this was more than compensated by the hospitality and enthusiasm shown by our hosts.

The first conference went well. One of our team members was a teacher from Kenya and so was able to translate for those who couldn’t speak Swahili. The Sunday school teachers left with a renewed sense of call to help their children become better followers of Jesus. Perhaps over 4000 children will have fired up teachers now as a result of our conference. Every evening of the conference we gathered in the Cathedral to worship and invite the Holy Spirit to shape the ministries to which we are all called.

One lady, badly crippled and reliant on a stick to walk with, had a very powerful experience of God. My prayer was that she might be healed and then throw her stick away, but God had something better in mind. Her prayer was that her estranged daughter might return home. As we sang a worship song at the end of a workshop, she saw a vision of angels and a dome of light over them in the room in which we were standing. They reassured her that her daughter would be fine. That evening she was given word that her daughter had returned.

We left Mara buoyed up with a sense of God’s blessing, but we had no idea that even more was to come our way. A flight from Mwanza to Dar es Salaam was followed by a nine hour bus journey to Masasi. The Diocese of Masasi is run by a tremendously godly and charismatic Bishop called James. It is an Anglo-Catholic Diocese on the border of Mozambique famous for Trevor Huddleston, one of its previous bishops. The forest is quite dense around the one hundred year old cathedral compound. Anglicans nuns specialising in hospitality looked after us and even cooked chip omelettes to make us feel at home.

The Conference was well attended and very well organised by the Mother’s Union. Sixty-two Sunday School teachers attended, including 15 from the Diocese of Mpwapwa. They travelled 1000 km, with two small babies, in a ten seater car to get the conference. The petrol money alone would have been a huge sacrifice for them. Each one represented a Deanery in the Diocese. Again, the teaching went very well and all were inspired to disciple children (perhaps 6-7000 represented?).

It was the worship in the evening that brought the greatest blessing for everyone though. Over the three evenings before the final day, it was as though God’s presence grew and grew and became ever more tangible in the Cathedral. The sight of nuns carrying people manifesting demons around the building to find a spare patch of



carpet/linoleum to lay them down on is a memory that will stay with me for a long time! Also the Bishop, dean and other clergy practising deliverance ministry to contain the situation was also slightly eye-opening. Whatever one's view on this, the fruit was there for all to see. People transformed and praising God, released from powers that they had been previously bound by.



The third evening was gentler. It was as if the cloud of the Lord's presence rested over us and many fell prostrate not wanting to move. I work with a definition of healing that expects God to touch us at the point of our deepest need. There was nobody left untouched. The experience was remarkable. Our team was left wondering what God was going to be doing in this Diocese with all these incredible people touched so deeply by the Holy Spirit.

Returning home via bus and three planes took thirty-six hours or so. Although I began the trip with little sense of expectation, it would be fair to say that had I had any expectations, they would have been utterly exceeded by the God of surprises, turning up with another agenda.

One small post-script: it was a blessing to see how much unity there was with in the Rooted in Jesus Junior Team and between us and the Bishops and clergy. Perhaps this unity played a key role in enabling such a blessing. *Psalm 133 - How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!..... For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.*



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