Tales of the Mzungu

Season 2 - Worship Edition

My Shepherd will supply my need, Jehovah is his name

In pastures fresh he makes me feed, Beside the living stream

He brings my wandering spirit back when I forsake His ways

And leads me for his mercy sake in paths of truth and grace…

Covid 2020. Not many are harder hit than the poor in Uganda, many dependent on tourism that couldn't come. But God was faithful and somehow, they made it through. An unexpected order for the ebony woodcutter from a tourist hoping to make a visit soon after Covid. A gift of 50 euros from a friend. A little here and a little there and somehow, by the grace of God, they made it through.

After 2 years wait, our journey back to Uganda finally began. As with every year, I waited excitedly for whom God would send. My name is Michael. I am a water boy for Christ. This year, God sent me another water engineer, a plumber, a mechanic, and for the first time, an adult Christian – Emma, along with my son, the film editor and his friend the cameraman. What adventures we would have!

Our tasks this year (See the Tales of the Mzungu series, posted separately) included a gravity membrane filter for babies Uganda (Thanks iRun folks!), a solar pump and turbidity reduction at Island Mission (Thanks Drew and Cathy!) and a stormwater collection tank for a family to be named later. Along the way, we added a mucking-out of the water pond in a small community, and a visit to one of the deepest slums on the shores of Lake Victoria. (Sounds like a Christmas list!)

Our journey begins at Entebbe Airport, site of the first wonder of the trip. I had initially planned to deliver a sermon in Kampala. Scheduled to arrive at Midnight Saturday, it seemed tough, but doable. About a week out, storm clouds loomed. The German news reported that the Ugandan government was implementing a new policy. Not only did you need a PCR test 72 hours before, you also needed a PCR test after your arrival at the airport and you wouldn't be released until you had the results. Waits were expected to be 7 hours. I'm a brave boy, but a 17-hour flight, customs, then a 7 hour wait at the airport and still teach a couple hours later would have been beyond my capabilities. We warned the pastor that I might not make it.

We reached the airport in Entebbe…

And it didn't happen. "Show your yellow fever, show your Covid vaccine plus your PCR test." We went right through. Probably the fastest processing I've ever experienced.

Off to the new Spring of Miracles Church in Massaja. They had been kicked out of their prior location, because the landlord got better rent from someone else. They were faithfully waiting for the funds to build their own church. Because of the lockdown, they had been broadcasting their service on YouTube.

We arrived at 9 for a 9:30 service, me all nervous as usual. "What's the order of service? Why's no one here? 9:30 passed. 10:00. 10:30. I was counting on the afternoon to get SIM cards for the team and the two services together are a goodly 4 hours long. Finally, we learn the reason, their landlord turned the power off, although they had paid for it. No power, no YouTube, no musical accompaniment. A little before 11, they gave up and started the service, praying and singing acapella. As quiet as I've ever heard a Ugandan church. One of the main characteristics of the Ugandan church is the overuse of the microphone. Full volume; microphone down the throat to ensure that anyone within two miles can hear the unintelligible sounds of the service.

Still no pastor. Are they expecting me to jump in and start something? Around about 11, the pastor rushes in. "OK, let's get things started!" he shouted joyfully. Just then, I heard the sound of a loud motorcycle outside the tent. But the noise didn't stop. Why would someone leave his motorcycle running? To disrupt the service? But no one seemed worried about it.

So slowly I began to perceive that it wasn't a motorcycle, it was a generator! They'd brought a generator so they could broadcast! But the noise was so loud, the microphones couldn't compensate for it. So double the noise, double the fun. I don't know if anyone watching the service got anything out of it, but they gave them the full load. I taught on "O for a Thousand Tongue to Sing!" (a variation of the German O das Ich Tausend Zungen Hätte). One line had always fascinated me – He breaks the power of cancelled sin. How many of us have beat ourselves up over sins Christ has already paid for and forgiven us for? It would be interesting to hear if the broadcast reached anyone…

The next Sunday was prepared for Nyanzi, the church that had adopted me a few years before. As our work took us to Zinga Island on Lake Victoria, Saturday morning was the latest we could leave to get off the island in time. We were part of a long-term planning to supply the 22 communities in the Island chain with clean water. The representative of our partner organization from Ghana would be arriving Friday and we'd be meeting with local officials to explain their responsibilities before investing in their community. God had other plans for Sunday…

First, our Ghanaian representative had to delay his flight till Saturday. Then the big news, the regional commissioner had taken an interest in the project, but he could only make Saturday at 11:00. Again, I warned the church, I might not make it. That evening at supper our host asked, “Why have you never offered to preach for us? We hear about you going here, going there, but never offer to teach us. Why not? Aren’t we good enough to hear your words” “Why, gosh, ma’am, you’ve never asked. I wasn’t intending to offend anyone.” “Well, why don’t you teach us this Sunday? It’s the first Sunday we’ve been able to have service in almost two years!” I do understand, but I promised to teach elsewhere and that’s not a promise easily broken. “Consider it…”.

Saturday comes. We start with a private meeting with the regional commissioner (a Christian, as it turns out.) Now we’re at 12:30. The local commissioners arrive. “You mean you’re not just giving us the devices? You expect us to raise 30% and pay for maintenance?” “We can’t very well send someone from Germany any time there’s a problem. We’ll help you, of course, but you need to take responsibility for the device. That can’t be us.” More discussion. Lunch at 14:30. At 18:00, the meeting breaks up. “Let’s go to the radio station. I need to endorse you for the people, announced the commissioner.” 20:00 and the radio interview was done. There’d be no crossing Lake Victoria this night. God chose Zinga.

Sunday morning, the first Pentecostal service I’d been to in Uganda. I thought their regular services were lively. This was another category altogether. 3.5 hours of singing and dancing. The worship leader led a strange cross between jazzercise and Cab Calloway. Jumping and dancing and turning and clapping. “Put your hands to your toes. Wiggle your fingers and lift them slowly with a woaaaaah! Then to the left! Then to the right! Now the center!” 1 Chronicles 13:8 says that .”..David and all Israel played before God

with all their might...” when the ark was returned. This church took that verse quite seriously. A truly spirit-filled service.

Diana had promised me we’d be done by 13:00. Less that half an hour left for my sermon. They gave me 20 minutes. I took 25 (with translation). I sang *My Shepherd Will Supply my Need*, a song that has stuck with me these last two years. It a variation on the 23rd Psalm about even in the deepest times, God is faithful. The last verse has always touched me deeply. “O may Thy house be my abode, and all my works be praise. There would I find a sheltered rest when others go and come. No more a stranger or a guest, but like a child at home”. And indeed so it is with those who are in Christ. In the end, we’ll find a sheltered rest. And not only a place where we can live. A place where we won’t be a stranger passing through. Not even a guest in the house of the King, but we’ll be called His children and heaven will be our home. What a blessing! Amen!

The Water Boy for WeDev Water/ Mission:Uganda