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First Things First Malawi Newsletter #32

Updated as at 7th May 2011

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Malawi #32

Dearest family and friends that we will see soon!

Life without Limits. It's a book I'm reading by Nick Vujicic. He's the guy you see without limbs on all those Youtube videos. It's amazing to me that I even utter one word of complaint after watching this guy. I mean he can't even scratch his chin if he wants to. But he's snorkels and surfs. Why do we put so many limits on ourselves?

Ed went to Stellenbosch University for his study leave in South Africa. Ed wanted to learn more about preaching social justice to a middle class congregation. I went to visit Ed for a week during his studies. So many impressions. The Johannesburg airport just about did me in with all the stuff, stuff and more stuff. I've forgotten how much stuff is available. Trinkets, and food, and colour and noise, my senses were given a good materialistic blast. I landed in Cape Town and Ed rented a car to pick me up from the airport. I saw him way down the hall, he looked so good to me, so familiar and solid and loving.

It was amidst all that stuff in the airport that I located the guy without limbs. Isn't that weird? Of all the things and gadgets and crap that is available I found a book about a guy who is making the most of life without his limbs.

Sunday morning in Cape Town we walked to Gardens Presbyterian Church where a real old guy was preaching. We like old guys but we didn't expect him to be so full of "piss and vinegar." His eyes bulged out as he preached and he sort of rocked back and forth on the balls of his feet, and his hands and fingers jutted into the air emphasizing points he was trying to make. The whole service was really Presbyterian; organ music, choir, hymns and then this non Presbyterian preacher got up to preach. He preached from Jeremiah 12 and basically said, "Cheer up the worst is yet to come!" Israel would be carted off to Babylon and so all of the hardships that Jeremiah had experienced previously were nothing to what was to come. The good news was that God had been faithful in the past and would be faithful in the future. This was indeed good news to us as we try to navigate our own future path in Canada. Where will we be? Where will we live? How will we reintegrate? "Cheer up the worst is yet to come!" God will be there.

We walked through the Community Garden filled with trees, plants and flowers from all over the world. A little garden of Eden just to enjoy; to drink in all the colours and beauty. There was a music festival going on at the same time so we listened to some live music and felt peaceful and joyful. From there we made our way to St. George's Cathedral where Bishop Desmond Tutu led his now famous congregation. They have a very innovative way of doing church here. In this massive cathedral they have taken one of their large basement rooms and converted it into a café and memory center. You can enter the St. George's café from the side street and you walk right into a large remembering of the famous peace march which began from this church on Sept. 13, 1989. There are large photos of the march, a video presentation, and different paraphernalia to remember that segregation was alive and well when this peace march happened. More than 30,000 South Africans marched from St. George's Cathedral to the Grand Parade to protest against the violence of the apartheid regime. The march was like a spark which ignited flames across South Africa igniting similar marches across the country. It also had pictures of Nelson Mandela's release four months after this historic peace march. It was a wonderful trip down justice lane. This part of the church was central to the march, central to the dismantling of apartheid. The remarkable images of resistance made a deep impression on us. The exhibition gave us an opportunity to recall and perhaps experience something of the "terrible beauty" of that day. "Tutu and others were clear that their heavenly citizenship had very real ramifications for how they lived and who they obeyed, for Jesus' kingdom is about the real world, here and now, and its transformation into the image of justice and peace God dreams for us. That day, people got a glimpse of what the future could look like." Rev. Frank Chikane

When we went out for supper that night it seemed that economic apartheid was alive and well. We could only see White people eating out and Black people serving them. There is a lot of money in Cape Town. We saw many Mercedes, BMW's and even a Ferrari dealership. But as you go out of Cape Town you drive by kilometers of shacks, corrugated cardboard, sheet metal and boarded houses. It seems like an endless amount of people living in a huge wasteland of brick a brack. These are the notorious Cape Flats where poverty and violence are still the order of the day. There is yet much to be done and many who have not yet tasted freedom. Ed suggested that maybe we go to the Cape Flats to minister there. Too far away from Judah.

On our last day we also went on our first ever wine tasting tours. How can you be in Stellenbosch and not go on a wine tasting tour right? The first one was close by and very posh, we stood around sipping wine, where everything was White, glossy and high class.

The second winery was recommended by Ed's professor because it was really doing kingdom work. The owner had started a trust for his workers and for the people who had lived on the farm for some time. One third of the profits from the winery were being put into this trust. When we got to Solms Delta we were greeted by all Black staff, people who had lived and worked on the farm for decades. We perused the small museum that they had put together about the people on the farm. The account of how they use to pay the workers in wine, soon making them alcoholics and unable or unwilling to leave the farm left me shaky. The owner Mark Solms believed that the way he was doing the farming made his wine taste better. He believed that wineries had to rethink the wine-making traditions and address the pressing social and economic problems facing South Africa today. He said that the history of South Africa was not over yet and that they were still able to write and live a better history. I think he was right because one of the wines we tasted won a five star rating. It was exciting that anything, even wine making can be done in a fair and profitable manner if that is part of the goal.

We were also in Stellenbosch the same time as the Film Festival. One of the films we saw was called, "White Boy Black Nanny." It was a documentary about a man who left South Africa as a boy and returned as a man to locate his Black nanny to say thank you. It was very powerful and sad. The family had been given the nanny when she was sixteen and had immigrated to England ten years later not even knowing her last name. The film journeyed with the now adult boy in a quest to find the nanny that had loved and nurtured him in his early years. All human beings involved; with such different life stories.

When we came home from our holidays we were told that the computer had been stolen. I couldn't believe it. This computer was brought over to Malawi last July during an exposure tour by my friend Lecia. Four months later we brought it to a computer shop to get the virus protection updated. Later that night the computer employee phoned Ed at home and asked him if he had taken the computer back with him. Ed said, "why would I do that I brought it in to get virus protection?" The computer employee said he couldn't locate the computer. Someone coming into the computer store must have stolen it. The owner of the computer store is a member of our congregation and two months later they replaced that computer with a new computer that he got from South Africa. It was that replaced computer that was now stolen. The kids had a get together and at the end of the night someone walked out with the computer and the ipod that had been playing the music all night but had been shut off to mark the end of the party.

The next day we went to the police station to report the theft. The report cost us \$50.00. We also put an ad in the paper with an enticing reward and Kiera and Jacob questioned our different neighbours who had come to the party. The police office was a joke. The ceiling is rotten, stained by rodent excrement and coming down all over the place. They have a chart on the wall that reads, "Thieves, Drunkards and Tricksters." They have no police cars so Ed had to drive them places to question the "suspects." When they informed us that someone in Mulanje had a black HP computer Ed had to give two detectives money to take the minibus to apprehend the suspect. Since the suspect was nowhere to be found they apprehended his little brother in hopes that the older brother would turn himself in. No such luck, so he was released. Ed was kind of relieved because he wouldn't want anyone ending up in Chichiri prison even if they deserved it.

Ed loves his bible study at the prison and the prison choir. He is working diligently on getting the prison choir recorded so they can share their music. There is also interest in having the bible study shelter completed by a Korean Presbyterian church. They are calling this shelter "the prison chapel." Ed had one of the inmates draw up plans but now there seems to be a willing donor. Yeah!

We visited Livingstonia Synod and had a great visit with Rev. Steven Botha and his wife Linda. Steven and Linda were such fun hosts and we had lots of good laughs and conversations about our faith. It still struck us as absurd how much they believe in witchcraft as real and powerful. Even though they are both well educated they told us tales of their nieces who were transported out of their bodies, flying to different places and made to drink human blood. Ed continued to assure them that nothing was as powerful as the love of God.

It was great to sleep in the Old Stone House, and see the old church built by the first settlers. A community of 15,000 people live on and around the plateau and the only 15klm road to get up there is rather torturous and takes about an hour. They have pendants on top of the plateau that read, "I survived the road!" On top of the plateau there is a hospital and schools and even a University. Three recently graduated doctors from Scotland were at church telling us that when they feel confident they call themselves doctors but when they don't know what they are doing they revert back to calling themselves medical interns. One of the doctors had some things that he needed to get to a member of our congregation at St. Michael's so we became the deliverer of goods.

Holy Week has come and gone. I went to Monday's service because it was in English. Ed went Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. Ed said in the service on Friday the prayer was longer then the sermon and got louder and louder so at the end the preacher was yelling the prayer at the top of his lungs. Just in case God is deaf I guess. I hate it when they do that. I feel overwhelmed and can't concentrate on anything. The music was great, rousing choruses, lots of clapping and dancing. Ed preached twice on Easter Sunday and did communion at three services. The communion is done very formally, lots of pomp and circumstance, silver trays with little glasses, white napkins ceremoniously folded over the bread. The communion wine is strong and burns your throat a little on the way down. Being at St. Michaels, with the stained glass windows and the history of the place made me tingle all over. The evening service was low

key, the communion being served just when the sun was going down, all the little candlelight bulbs a glowing, it was calming and holy and I felt content.

We had a hodge podge of people over for Easter which was fun. Two peace corps volunteers, one Fullbright scholarship girl, a Student Without Border volunteer, a German volunteer, a friend of Jacob's from England and three Malawians and their children. And of course we had our girls, which still seems so special. We had a great game of volleyball, sang around the piano and did lots of "Christ is Risen, He is Risen Indeed, Hallelujah, Amens!" I think even the people of Jewish faith, atheists, and Hindu among us were swept up in the excitement of the resurrection. The older I get the more excited I become about Easter and all that it means. I didn't buy any chocolate because I couldn't find any fairly traded chocolate, not even at the Chocolate shop in Johannesburg airport!

We had a good connection with Jennie and Luke for a change, even though the call dropped after about twenty minutes and we could not reconnect. Judah was sleeping but Luke brought the computer upstairs so I could catch a glimpse of my grandson sleeping on his parent's bed. He looked so content and peaceful. Happy Easter little Judah. Christ is Risen!

I don't know how you guys let Harper get a majority! Ahhgghh....It's definitely time for us to go back to Canada and get politically active. You have probably read in the paper that our Malawian president has deported the British High Commissioner from Malawi. The more power our Mutharika has got the more autocratic and bullying he has become. Harper was already a bully without his majority. The gap between the rich and the poor in Canada is also growing in leaps and bounds. As long as we can pay our mortgage and protect our investments and give a pittance back to the poor we feel secure. We are not taking care of the poor, and according to the Old Testament prophets God cries out for justice. We are the ones, working in God's will to deliver this justice.

We are gearing up to go back to Canada. Please pray for us. Pray for wisdom, discernment, and guidance to see where we can best serve when we are back in Canada. Kiera leaves May 4th to France to work on a farm and to improve her French speaking skills. Elleana leaves to South Africa the same day as us on June 15th. She will be attending the World Midwifery conference there. We will be back in Canada on June 16th. It is hard to believe. In so many ways it seems like we just got here. That first drive from the airport is still indelibly printed on our minds. Debbie and Mike Burns (the missionaries that have come to replace us) were over this afternoon and talking of their many plans for their time in Malawi. It is hard not to be a little jealous that they are staying and we are leaving. At the same time we know that it is time for us to go.

Well dear family and friends. Soon we will be drinking fairly traded coffee together. Soon we will be driving past MacDonalds. Soon we will eat strawberries. Soon I will hug my mom. Soon I will hold my grandson and kiss his head. Soon and very soon I will say goodbye to Malawi. Soon I will no longer speak Chichewa or say, "sure sure." How can that be?

Remember to lift us up in your prayers.

"Be careful how you live your life, you may be the only bible some people will ever read." Yikes! Good thing it's not all up to us. Love Jackie xoxoxo

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First Things First

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Our church

Warm weather is finally here!

Those attending the Bible Study during Lent took time to reflect on the life of Christ as portrayed in Franco Zeffirelli's movie 'Jesus of Nazareth'.

Others attended the various special services held in the days leading up to Easter. As noted in the last newsletter we were honoured by a visit from the Moderator of the 136th General Assembly, Rev. Dr. Herb Gale and his wife on the 3rd April. In addition to celebrating communion we also hosted a roast beef lunch over at the Legion. (Pictures of this are on the website). Palm Sunday saw the children parading with palm fronds shouting Hosanna! During Holy Week there were a variety of services to attend both here at First and other churches in our area. Our Easter celebration included something entirely different. Everyone was given a small chocolate bar so we could all partake when McKenna Smith had her first taste of chocolate in over a year. Of course our choir continues to delight and inspire us and music from "Celebrate" an Easter Cantata did just that on Easter Sunday.

Our Mission Team held their annual Lenten 'mug' campaign to raise funds to help to cover gas expenses for the Cariboo mission in BC. I believe they raised close to \$800. Which will be greatly appreciated. The Team also welcomed Rev. Lara Scholey as guest speaker to our Mission Sunday on 1st May. The areas our Mission Team is involved in were beautifully displayed for us to examine in the hall. Pictures of the school in Mozambique, Samaritan's Purse Shoe boxes, the Cariboo Mission and others help us to see what a difference we make in places near and far.

Our Building Committee has been hard at work and we are now in the construction phase, or will be shortly. I think everyone will be pleased when we finally have two bathrooms, one of which will be handicapped accessible.

May promises to be a busy month for many. The

annual Cemetery clean up on the 7th May, Mother's Day on the 8th and then a Garage Sale on the 14th. We are also gearing up for the Delivered Take-out Luncheon on 10th June.

For our monthly calendar

<http://www.penetangchurch.com/calendar.pdf>

Our community

We have had lots of activity in the way of clean-up both in Penetanguishene and Midland. Community gardens and Farmer's Markets will be reopening soon too. Summer really is on everyone's mind.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada

the following are some of the links from the church website <http://www.presbyterian.ca/>

- ★ PCCConnect Daily
<http://www.presbyterian.ca/pconnect/daily>
- ★ PCC Online Resources
<http://www.presbyterian.ca/resources/online>

With his upcoming visit on 3rd April you might like to follow the blog of the Moderator of the 136th General Assembly - <http://presbyterian.ca/moderator/>

for more links and updated information visit our own website at <http://www.penetangchurch.com/>

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