

# **Devotions – November 25 – December 1, 2007**

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Tanzanian Reflections

This week's devotions were written upon return from our companion synod, the Eastern and Coastal Diocese (ECD) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) where she, Bishop Skrenes, and a delegation from the Northern Great Lakes Synod visited companion congregations, ECD institutions, and attended the consecration service of Bishop Alex Malasusa as presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

## **Sunday, November 25**

“Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” 1 Timothy 4:12

Bwana Yesu Asifewe! Praise our Lord Jesus Christ!

Often while in Tanzania, we heard these words as an opening statement before people spoke, giving all the glory to Christ. Through the words, actions, and attitudes of our African friends, they are able to show others their passion for the Lord Jesus. And it is contagious. All who visit the churches of our companion synod return home a changed person with a deeper, more passionate faith. Bwana Asifewe!

In this text, Paul speaks to Timothy about his personal and public life, knowing that others, both Christian and non believers, could learn more about Christ through his example.

*Let us pray: Help us in all we do so that our words and actions may be an example to others. Bwana Yesu Asifewe! AMEN*

## Monday, November 26

*“Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’”* Mark 9: 36-37

In Biblical times, children were the lowest status people in the household. Here Jesus makes it clear that when we care for those in need, we are showing our love to Jesus.

HIV AIDS is killing young, productive adults. Almost every family in Tanzania has had a death due to HIV AIDS. Tanzanians are infected at a rate that exceeds ten times the American HIV AIDS infection rate!

There are thousands of orphaned children. Many extended families try their best to care for these children. In some cases, the children are ostracized from the extended family because the parents converted to Christianity and the originating family is Muslim.

Many of our partner congregations in the Eastern and Coastal Diocese are in the planning phases of building orphanages in an effort to provide for these children a place to live and people to care for them.

***Let us pray: Dear Lord. We come to you in fervent prayer. Be with the orphaned. Show them your love through the people who care for them. Guide the people of the Eastern and Coastal Diocese as they plan for and build orphanages to care for the children who have lost parents for we are all your adopted children. AMEN***

**Tuesday, November 27**

*Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. Matthew 25: 34-40*

The people of Tanzania are afflicted with many health concerns. Malaria and HIV AIDS are literally killing a generation of young people.

The Eastern and Coastal Diocese operates seven dispensaries (Clinics) in an effort to offer health care to those who cannot travel to the city hospitals and clinics. While on our journey to Tanzania, we visited two such clinics, one at Mtoni, in the city of Dar es Salaam, the other clinic on the island of Zanzibar. These clinics were very different from each other, yet their mission is the same—to offer health care services to **all** people.

Zanzibar is an island whose population is 98% Muslim. This clinic sits within the compound of a large ELCT church. Across the street is a huge mosque. Regardless of religion, all people who enter this clinic receive care. Here you will find Christian physicians and nurses caring for their brothers and sisters in Christ, for Muslims, and for non believers.

Mtoni is located in a “storefront” in a very poor neighborhood. It is barely furnished. Its only microscope is dependent on sunlight and has no electrical source. The medicine cabinet is almost bare. Yet, there was a continual stream of people coming and going receiving care, Christians and Muslims alike.

We have a lot to learn from our brothers and sisters in the ECD. They are mission oriented and driven by the Word as they care for all of God’s people.

***Let us pray: Dear Lord, We offer praise and thanksgiving for the people of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. Continue to guide them as they offer health care to all people regardless of race or religion. Help us to learn from their example. Amen.***

## **Wednesday, November 28**

*All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3: 16 – 17*

“But in scripture it says...” was a phrase we often heard when in conversation with our Tanzanian friends. It didn’t take long to realize that the people in the churches in Tanzania first look to the Bible for teaching and advice in their daily lives.

Bible study is central to all of the committees, choirs, youth groups in the ECD churches. They begin each meeting or practice with an in-depth study of the scriptures. The Diocese office begins each day with devotions.

Whether it be church work or raising children; housework or at their place of employment, the Word of God guides their daily lives.

***Let us pray: Dear Lord, keep us ever steadfast in your Word. Remind us to turn to your Word to guide us in our daily lives. Amen.***

## Thursday, November 29

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. John 3:16*

Probably the best known Bible verse is John 3:16. It sums up the character of God, ‘that he loved so much he gave....’ He gave the best he had, his son.

Our African friends love to give gifts! They consider it an honor and a privilege to give. And they give their very best. It is humbling to be the recipient of so many gifts often from people we hardly know whose circumstances and living conditions are much less than ours.

Everywhere we went in our travels across the Eastern and Coastal Diocese, we were presented with gifts. There were gifts for us personally; gifts for companion congregations back home, gifts for families who hosted the Kijitonyama Choir. We could not have fit another sock in our suitcases to bring home!

***Let us pray: Heavenly Father. We thank you for giving the best gift of all—your son. Help us to learn about gift giving from our African friends and help us to learn to humbly receive the precious gifts from our friends and especially the gift of your Son. AMEN***

## **Friday, November 30**

*Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Psalm 100: 1-2*

The book of Psalms contains a wide variety of songs. There are songs about distress, songs of peace and war, songs of comfort, songs of fear and songs such as this one that encourage us to praise God with shouts and singing.

The African music is definitely a joyful noise! One cannot hear their singing and refrain from swaying and moving to the music. Yes, even this stoic Finn, begins to rock and dance when I hear the choirs of our partner congregations.

The Kijitonyama Choir graced our synod with their gift of music this spring. We heard from them songs of praise, songs of worship, and even songs about HIV AIDS. Choirs from every district of the ECD performed at Bishop Malasusa's consecration service. As we worshipped at ELCT churches, we sang hymns with our African friends. We sang together the familiar hymns, "Amazing Grace," "Faith of Our Fathers," the Africans in Swahili, we Americans in English. It didn't matter the language, we were together all praising God through song.

***Let us pray: Heavenly Father, whether we are in distress, needing comfort, or experiencing joy, help us to remember to come to you through the gift of music and song. AMEN.***

## **Saturday, December 1**

*Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament!  
Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his surpassing greatness!  
Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with  
tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with clanging  
cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that breathes praise the  
Lord! Praise the Lord! Psalm 150*

Each verse in this 'song' is longer than the previous, indicating increasing praise ending with a call to every living thing to praise the Lord.

Bwana Asifewe! Praise the Lord (in Swahili-Tanzania's national language).

Every morning at the Eastern and Coastal Diocese cathedral church, Azania Front begins its day with public devotions. This church is located on the coast downtown in the midst of many office buildings. Bishop Skrenes led the devotions one morning while in Dar es Salaam. These services include about 15 minutes of praise in song, about 15 minutes of devotion or message, and about 15 minutes in prayer and more singing.

Azania Front church was packed! There must have been at least 600 young people about 30-40 years old passionately singing and praying praising God. There was singing, and dancing, and prayer. They all intently listened to the message---All before going to their place of work.

***Let us pray: We praise you Lord! Let all that breathe praise you! We give you thanks for the faithful witness of the people of the Eastern and Coastal Diocese in Tanzania. May their witness and passion for your Word continue to be an example to those of us in the Northern Great Lakes Synod. Bwana Asifewe! AMEN.***