

For Thursday, September 24, 2009

Thursday, the final full day of our tour, began with a wonderful Bible Study and time of fellowship at St. Paul's, Cambria. About 50-60 people attended and enjoyed one another's presence, as we worshipped and studied scripture with a theme of creation. The dean of Gloucester Cathedral, Nick Bury, was our facilitator on this day. After our time at St. Paul's we drove up Highway 1 to All Saints-Santa Lucia campground in Big Sur, taking in the beautiful coastline; which was only partially visible, since there was a lot of fog. There was much quoting of the gospel of John: "blessed are those who do not see and who still believe"! At the campground Rachel Mueller was waiting for us with a lovely lunch under the redwoods. We then made our way to Mission House for one final team meeting and Eucharist, then moving onto my house for a final celebratory dinner on our deck – still embraced by more fog than we would have liked! The hospitality was wonderful just as it was all week; thank you to everyone for your warm welcome along the way and the gift of your presence.

Thursday's theme, to be filled with the wonders and beauty of creation in which we are so blessed to live, took an unexpected turn just after Bible Study. Earlier in the morning, Bishop Gerard received word that Sadiki had died; the 12 year old boy I briefly encountered on a rural road in Western Tanganyika, who had such a profound effect on me, and indeed has had a profound effect on people in all our dioceses. I apologize to St. Paul's and all our SLO deanery guests, but as I received this news, I was quite overcome, and rightly, was ushered to my car. Bishop Gerard shared the news with the rest of the team and after some tearful hugs, we began our journey north – in quite a different frame of mind than the one for which we had so cleverly organized on the itinerary. While we still await particulars of Sadiki's death, we know he died about the time the teams were arriving and was buried by the time we received the news. While Sadiki had epilepsy and this was being treated, he was also malnourished and suffered all the usual ailments of extreme poverty. If we can discover more details of his death, I will share them. However, the truth is many, many children like Sadiki die every day in the developing world. Indeed, as I, and I know many of you, mourn his loss, most children who die like this will not have had such an outpouring of love and grief as Sadiki. They will not have had the widespread impact Sadiki has had because the world looks past them and the gift of their presence is often unnoticed. Indeed, what we would have missed if Christ had not placed such a haunting compassion on our hearts last spring! We must pray for the many children like Sadiki in our world, and seek to make a difference in their lives – as we gratefully receive the difference they make in ours. We must remain sensitive and never harden to the harsh reality of so much suffering in the world. We must weep – and act.

Needless to say, I wept off and on all day Thursday (and still do so!), comforted by lots of hugs, hand-holding and prayer. I was so grateful for Gerard's presiding at the Eucharist that afternoon, Michael's offering of a commendation with a photo of Sadiki next to the altar, and all our prayers gathered up in a holy time of worship, praise, unity, and comfort. I speak on behalf of the teams gathered, when I say that our final conversation was inclusive in its reflection of the fullness of God's creation, and not just our lovely coastline, but of *all* that has its redemption in Christ: life, death, resurrection, beauty, ugliness and pain, abundant joy and love, grief and sorrow, things we understand and things we do not,

ease and challenge. God was very gracious, and also instructive, to have the arrival of this news while we were all in one place, for this partnership is not just about knitting together the parts of ourselves where we agree and are happy, but the realities of life that are harsh and where we grieve deeply. Indeed, this is life in the body of Christ, knit together across continents.

I do not think, therefore, that the events or encounters of this week have been by chance. Nothing in this partnership seems to me to have been by chance: rather we have been open to a very graceful flight of the Holy Spirit through our lives that has manifest in a deeper understanding of one another and of our contexts, but even more precious, a profound experience of the presence of Jesus, and the bond of grace that makes us one. Truly, by the end of Thursday, we were no longer three teams, but just one.

And now,

*Give rest, O Christ, to your servant Sadiki with your saints,
Where sorrow and pain are no more,
Neither sighing, but life everlasting.*

And at the grave we shall make our song: Alleluia, Alleluia!



Submitted by Mary Gray-Reeves, Bishop, El Camino Real