

One Day in the Bush

Yesterday we experienced the best/worst of Africa. Sounds like an oxymoron? It is. Africa simultaneously rips your heart out and stomps on it, while at that precise moment, in the exact location, the most glorious events EVER unfold! Let me TRY to describe it.

We went to the bush. The boonies. The edge of the earth. Our objective was to follow-up one of the men, David, whom we had trained last March. To see for ourselves. David was using the lessons we prepared on the MegaVoice players and Scriptpix and he had won 165 people – Maasai and pagan – to Christ.

But let me back up. Maybe you remember the story from nearly two years ago, about David.

Maasai David came to our very first fact-finding pilot class in Olondonyu Sambu. It was before all the tools to reach Maasai oral learners were even ready for distribution. All we had was a vision from God, recordings of the lessons on our computer, a few scraps of paper with Scriptpix drawings on them, an invitation from the church in Tanzania to come, and a lot of enthusiasm.

David was young, eager, and energetic. When we arrived the morning of the second day of training, David was drawing Scriptpix on cardboard from memory. Several new students arrived and he wanted to help them ‘catch up’ so they could join the class. It was awesome! As we climbed in the Land Rover for the trip home, he begged us to leave something, anything, so he could go to the villages to share about Jesus. We had absolutely nothing to give him, but we promised to return with the tools he needed. And with God’s help and YOURS, we did!

A year later, the MegaVoice players were loaded with our audio lessons and the New Testament, Scriptpix were translated, printed and ready to distribute in the Maasai language. In March 2011, John and I returned to Tanzania for leadership training in five locations throughout the Arusha and Manyara districts. And, yes, we went back to Olondonyo Sambu, as promised. David and 15 other Maasai



spent two days with us, learning to use the materials. John awarded them certificates of completion for the training.

When we left, he had a big smile on his face and a bag of teaching tools on his arm. He said he was going to the villages.

Yesterday we learned a lot about the villages he wanted so desperately to reach for Jesus. Here two tribes of people coexist. The Maasai, who are strictly pastoralists, and a ‘cousin’ tribe, the Wa-arusha, who not only keep cattle and goats but also farm. The Maasai follow a superstitious religion, which includes a basic god-concept (Enkai); however, the Wa-arusha are pagan. The Maasai live in round houses in a boma, the others live in square houses in a compound or group.



The Wa-arusha worship a stone which they place in the center of their compound. They believe it represents one of the stones the children of Israel carried across the Jordan River. They pour milk offerings on the stone so their ancestors can rise up and drink the milk. Many of them are demon possessed, with accompanying manifestations and fear. Nearly all of the people who are converted are women who previously were demoniacs. Visual evidence of the Scripture "He/her whom the Son sets free, is free indeed!" Upon experiencing deliverance and freedom, they become devout Christians. Faithful to the church, diligent in prayer, and in love with Jesus; but needy, oh so needy! They are taught that they must pray, obey God, trust Jesus, and fellowship with believers or the demons can return to the clean and "in order house" with seven more spirits, worse than the first. (Read Matthew 12:43-45. Ever wondered if this is true? Oh, yes, it is.... and horrific!)

A drought has devastated East Africa. Dry, dusty, powdery soil over a foot deep in some places, creeps into every crack and crevice of both clothing and body. These Maasai lands are disastrously over-grazed, striped of almost every tree that can be used for firewood, and grotesquely eroded with enormous crevices in the dry earth. It was surreal, like some 'Mars-scape' as far as the eye could see. There is little left for cattle to eat, but they have a few goats who will eat anything - including the few bushes, briars, thorns, boundary marking trees, and even plastic sacks blowing in the wind.



Words are inadequate to describe the conditions and plight of the women. Women are solely responsible (once they are bought as a bride) for all the work -- feeding and providing for the family. That is, they are obliged to build a house, find food, earn money, cook food, wash clothes, have babies, carry the baby on their back while working, tend the children, provide sexual gratification, and obey their husband without question. If they do not or cannot perform these functions they are beat mercilessly. A woman is without recourse. Without hope. From a man's



perspective, if she fails to work hard enough to keep the family fed, he has a right to be angry and beat her. The women are abused, oppressed, desperate, despondent, lonely.

The husbands job? Take the goats and cows out to find pasture and a watering hole somewhere. When he cannot find pasture, that too is the woman's problem. She must find, chop, and carry banana leas or something for the animals to eat. He can sell an animal and keep the money all for himself - or for alcohol, which is a major problem - or for whatever he chooses. At present, a road is being built

a few miles from the area and the women are so desperate for money to provide rice, beans, and corn flour for their family, they carry bags of gravel for miles on their backs or heads, to supply the road construction. (As seen in the picture above) Some of them set up small charcoal fires and cook rice near the construction, so the crews will buy a meal from them. From the money she earns, the husband is free to take as much as he likes.

Well, the 'worst' is over. Now the BEST.

The Maasai believers work together in groups of two or three. David and his colleagues walk through the powdery desert for almost two hours to this area. Normally they visit 'door-to-door' (although mostly there are no doors!) and talk with whomever they find at home – usually the women. This approach works best because the people are afraid and won't come to the church.



When four or five people show an interest (which frequently happens after deliverance), a small group is established to listen to the evangelism lessons on the MegaVoice. It is a novel experience listening to this small machine that speaks their own language. The group meets outside in a 'neutral place' -- one of their bomas or compounds. As Americans, we think about meeting in our home. But that

would be impossible since most Maasai 'homes' are very dark, without windows or electricity, and only large enough to sleep in.

Currently, there are about 7 small study groups functioning. The groups meet about twice a month for a couple of hours because the women cannot take more time away from their work. Each day they must be back at the boma before the cattle and goats come home or the husband will beat them. But the women are very responsive! Most of them were demoniacs and they have lived through abuse, oppression, tribulation. Now for the first time there are 'others,' the church of Jesus Christ, to encourage, support and care for them. They begin to ardently pray for their husbands' deliverance and salvation.

This church, as a body and building, started about 9 months ago. (Pictured at right.) It is sponsored by the congregation in Oldonyo Sambu. It is a pitiful structure made of poles and covered with a torn canvas roof and sun rotted rice bags. But, there are now about 25 people – mostly women – who gather in its partial shade to worship God.





We gave an offering to assist in getting a new canvas roof and new rice bags. If you would like to help, it would be greatly appreciated.

We had 13 people for the teaching. In fact, at the end of the first lesson, three women accepted Jesus Christ! We had the honor of praying for them. Isn't it great to plant seed, allow someone else to cultivate and water it, and arrive just in time for harvest? Of the 165 people in the small groups that David's team has started, some are part of this brand new

church and others go to church in Oldonyo Sambu.

Once the original bag that we provided for the materials had worn out, David stitched together a white canvas bag to carry his evangelism tools. (See photo below.)



David pointed across the arid, dusty hills and said, "We want to start another church – a new mission – in a more remote area just over there."

As we drove back to Arusha, dirty and smelly, I looked over the desert and realized they need far more than physical water. I thought, "If this is the 'mother church' what will the mission church look like?" Truly these humble Maasai brothers and sisters are taking the Gospel to the end of the earth.

Maasai Pastor Daniel and David standing in the pulpit of the new church.

I think this must be what Jesus meant when he said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

God Bless!

Ruth (and John!)