

Bwana asifiwe.....Praise the Lord.
You say “amen”

Would you pray with me please...tuombe:

In the Gospel of John, Jesus is always confusing people
He talks on a spiritual level, while his hearers think on a concrete physical level.

It happened with Nicodemus..
Remember Jesus starts talking about being born again.
And Nicodemus starts stressing about how a full grown adult could ever squeeze back into its mother’s womb to be born again.

It happened to the Samaritan woman at the well.
Jesus is talking about giving her living water;
Water that will last forever.
And she says “give me this water”
Holding out her bucket
Wondering how she will make a bucket full of water last forever.

It happens again in our Gospel lesson for today.
Jesus tells the crowd that to be his followers they must eat his flesh and drink his blood.
And many of them were not only dumbfounded, but also more than a little grossed-out.
The thought of cannibalism was more than they could handle
And the text says that many of them stopped following him from that point on.....

Jesus starts with the concrete and physical,
But then he always moves to the spiritual.
We have been in Chapter 6, the Bread of Life Chapter of John
For weeks now.
And do you remember how this all started?
Jesus first got physical.
He fed the 5,000.
He filled their bellies.
Maslow says that we need to have our basic physical needs met before we can
Begin to see and understand our emotional and spiritual needs.

Jesus fed their bellies first. He started with concrete hunger.
And THEN he moved to their spiritual needs.
But some people were not able to take that leap with him.
So they turned away and went looking for other ways to have their needs met.

I wonder how often we do that?

How often do we turn to other things to meet our needs?

We know from the Gospel lessons that Peter didn't always get it right.

But in this passage, he is right on the mark.

after seeing that many had turned away,
Jesus asks the disciples, "and do you also wish to go away?"

and with a profound level of understanding, Peter says "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the word of eternal life"

in other words, Peter acknowledges that there is no where else to turn.

That no one has the power to meet all our needs like Jesus does.

Now, we may be struck by Peter's wisdom,

But do we really believe it?

Do we really live it out?

Or do we turn to actually turn to other things to meet our needs more often than not?

whether it's using our busy schedules to avoid dealing with our issues.

Or whether it's shopping and buying new shiny things to make ourselves feel better.

Or whether it's using alcohol or drugs to calm our nerves and take the edge off.

So many things, so many distractions in our daily lives,

How often are we turning to them to meet our needs rather than God?

One of the things that struck us during our time in Tanzania

is how focused people are on Jesus.

They talk about Jesus. They pray constantly to Jesus. They have conversations with their neighbors about Jesus.

One of the joys of our trip was watching each of our group members "get it" at different times.

Each night we would have a debriefing session...we called it GRIPPING.

GRIP is an acronym it stands for:

Gratitude

Regret

Inspiration

And purpose..how did we want God to use us the next day.

We had some very deep conversations and out of those conversations came many meaningful insights and inspirations.

Our young adults were particularly taken by the faith and drive of Irente's young adults.

These young adults were a close-knit group who met together not only to meet their spiritual needs, (they had an amazing acapella choir who writes their own music)

But they also met together to meet more concrete needs.

They met together to learn trades, some where learning to be builders and some welders

Through their connection to Christ and to one another they worked hard to better their lives and find income generating ways to support their families as well as the ministry of the church.

One of our young adults continued to be amazed by the level of commitment of these young adults.

She said that in America young adults don't want to do anything. We don't know any skills. We don't use our gifts to the fullest. We don't want to go to church and give to God.

Another young adult, after seeing how the people there gave so sacrificially of their money and their goods, that she felt guilty about the way she has looked at giving to the church and hoped to change that in the future.

One of the highlights of our Sunday worship came after the service, when we all went out onto the lawn and the non-cash offerings were converted.

You see, some people in the parish live a cashless existence.

They live high in the mountains and work the land.

They grow their own crops or live off the fruits and resources that grow wild.

But even those people were expected to bring an offering to God.

And that's exactly what they did.

There were large sticks of sugar cane.

There were bunches of bananas and carrots.

There were crocheted baby booties.

And one by one these items were held up, bidden on by other members,

And then converted into cash to be used for ministry.

Peter got it when he said "Lord to whom shall we go?"

When he said, "Jesus, you're it. You are the one we need"

Over and over again, we saw how our partner congregation got it too

Perhaps the lack of material things freed them up to understand more deeply their dependence on God.

In that way, we saw how their poverty led way to a spiritual wealth

And conversely, we were able to see how too often our wealth ends up distracting us and leading us to spiritual poverty.

In the coming weeks and months, you will hear more about our trip.

Please know that this trip was your trip.

Although we understand that you will not be able to fully understand what we experienced and how it felt,

The eight of us are committed to finding ways to share our partners stories with you, So that you can begin to know them as more than just a name.

We will share their faces, their joys and struggles, their hopes and dreams.

During the two weeks, we talked much about how Jesus connects us to one another.

It was very clear to both Irete members and LCR members that this was not a meeting of our own design.

God has brought us together through the cross of Christ.

God has a purpose for our partnership.

Somehow together we will be stronger than we would be alone.

It will be our challenge as a congregation and as a Tanzania Partnership Team to discern and implement a plan of action that will continue to draw us together with our partners

And will multiply our mission and increase our faith.

Our partners have much to teach us about faith.

Much to teach us about really turning our lives over to Christ.

May we be open to what God has to teach us through our partners

And may we learn to truly say "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" Amen