



Memories of Malawi – Dr. Stephen Cramer

Mueli Bwanji! Greetings and peace to you from your brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. The phrase that echoes through Malawian worship is: “God is good all the time. All the time, God is good.”

When I arrived at St. Andrews Church at 8:30, the parking lot was full – all five places were taken. Hundreds of people had arrived. I am not sure how many were in worship, but I am sure it was more than 600.

There are two common modes of transportation in Malawi – walking and bicycles. That is one of the many reasons there is almost no obesity in the country.

Our group of six Presbyterian clergy from our area, was treated as royalty. Each of us preached at a different church, and there were always several hundred people in attendance. Great attention was made to make sure we were comfortable and welcome. The service began at 8:30. After a few hymns, the pastors and all the elders entered from the sacristy and sat up front. By 10:15, the Scriptures were read and soon thereafter I preached. The service ended right on time, three hours later at 11:30. There were five choirs – 100 members in the children’s choir, a youth choir, mixed choir, men’s choir and women’s choir.



When it came time for the offering, the pastors and elders all marched out to the offering baskets to place our offerings. Then everyone in attendance marched forward. Not everyone put something in the basket, but everyone came forward. At the church Meta was at, the elders stayed and counted the offering together with the pastor. The total was 8,000 kwacha, which sounds more impressive than it is. It is about \$60. When you consider Meta gave 1,000 kwacha (a little over \$7, or 1/8 of the total offering.)

Hospitality is at the core of the Malawian culture. People will kill their last chicken and feed it to a guest who enters their home. Their official national slogan is, "The Warm Heart of Africa." The only time when any of us felt in danger was when a pastor drove us very fast on the two lane roads filled with chicken, goats, pedestrians and bicyclists.

Poverty in Malawi is not because of a lack of work ethic. They are a hardworking people, but without electricity, running water, without good paved roads the economy must struggle. Only the privileged few have computers. Many have had little formal education.

In so many ways it was clear to us we were in a Third World Country, one of the seven poorest countries in the world. There is one MRI and three CT Scanners in the country. There is one cardiologist who flies in once a week from South Africa. At the Mulanje Mission Hospital there are up to 400 patients and one doctor. The water is so lethal to Americans that you cannot eat raw fresh fruits or vegetables. The rule of thumb is if it is not peeled or cooked, never eat it.



When I went to Malawi, I feared I would be depressed by the living conditions, the scourge of AIDS and the crushing poverty. Instead my heart was lifted. I was inspired by the joyous worship of God's people. The Malawians live the teaching of St. Paul, "Rejoice always, again I say rejoice."

God is good all the time, all the time God is good.