

Malawi

2013

July 20

There are areas of Malawi that might well fall into the category of “uttermost part of the earth” mentioned in the first chapter of Acts. Today is July 14, and Marty and I have just arrived home from worshipping in a community that the villagers told us was called Frank. It really is not very far from Blantyre where we are staying for the summer (actually, it is winter here).

We drove down the highway for about forty minutes and then turned onto an unpaved road going through tea plantations. The scenery is breath-taking; the road is bone-jarring. It always amazes me that brother Muthowa, my good friend and translator, can navigate through the countless intersections and turns to our destination, because there are no road signs. Eventually the way we were going became so narrow that the tall grass was sweeping both sides of the vehicle. The path had become so narrow that if two bicycles met one would have to stop to let the other one go by. Then we came to a little clearing where there was a house. Brother Muthowa said we should park at the house and walk the rest of the way. I am not sure about the distance, but it took us twenty-five minutes to walk some pretty rugged terrain to the meeting house.



We walked up a hill, back down, and up another to reach the place of assembly.

The entire walk was difficult, but we would have been ashamed to complain. I have a rough-tote box in which I carry Bibles, song books, and grape

juice as a service for brethren who would like to buy these things. The box weighs about 70 lbs. Usually two men will carry it from the back of the truck into the church building, but that was impossible here. A brother



When we had walked to the top of the first hill we could see the meeting house on top of the next hill.

from the congregation said, “It is not a problem”. He picked the box up, put it on his head, and walked the entire way with it. Another brother carried a second box which was not quite as heavy (maybe 40 lbs.) also on his head.

The setting was beautiful. We could see for miles in every direction. I have no idea where everyone came from. The building was of modest size and could have seated seventy or eighty people, but the crowd was so large we had services outside. Everyone just sat on the ground.

After worship we were treated to the hospitality of the brethren, rice, chicken, and cooked cabbage. There was nseema if we wanted some also. We visited for a while, and then we began our walk back to the truck and the drive home.

The largeness of heart and the generosity of our brethren in Malawi is very touching. First though, I must point out that everyone I have met in the church is poor. Most of the brethren I have met are subsistence farmers, growing their own fruits and vegetables and raising a few chickens and goats. Their cash income comes from selling some of their produce in a marketplace or along side the road. The average family probably has a cash income of less than \$50 per month.

Whenever I go someplace to preach someone in the congregation invites us to their home for a meal. It is never anything fancy, but it is what they have, and they are willing to share. There usually are not enough chairs for all, but they insist that Marty and I each have a chair. The Mrs. and the children will sit outside on the ground, because even if there were enough chairs the room would not be big enough for everyone. (I have lived in homes with walk-in closets bigger than the average living room or eating area of my brethrens' homes here). There are no wide screen televisions, wiis, or home entertainment centers. They would not know what to do with them anyway since they live without electricity. The meal consists of nseema (a soft corn meal bread—hard to describe. It is sort of like stiff grits), chicken, and some cooked greens. When they are able there will be rice. If they have a spoon or fork, they make sure Marty and I get one. Everyone generally eats with their hands.

The studies I conduct through the week are long days for everyone. I drive a long way to get to them, and the brethren walk or ride bicycles a long way to meet me. They appreciate the sacrifice that I have made to have these

these things in the market, and I know that this is a sacrifice for them. But I cannot rob them of the joy that they have in being able to do this. The words of Jesus have application here, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20:35. By mutually sharing with one another what we are able



to contribute we develop a mutual respect for each other. Each of these families are genuinely thrilled that we have become a part of their lives. In the end it will be Marty and I who take more from this summer experience because like the widow of Mark 12 the Malawian brethren will have given more.



studies with them, and they want to pay me what they can. One man may bring three or four eggs, another may bring a bag of potatoes. They know I can afford to buy



Sometimes you get the eggs . . .

Sometimes you get the whole chicken!