

On the Road with Bom (Good) Jesus
October 21, 2012 Mark 7:31-37
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The drive took 2.5 hours. Like Denver, Luanda, the capital city of the African nation of Angola, has its traffic problems! It was Friday morning, 9 days ago, our first full day on the trip, and we were headed out to a suburb of the city of 5 million residents. Though it was only a 25-mile trip at most, the thick traffic, constant construction zones, and plethora of pedestrians on the twisting streets made the trip an eternity after spending 18 of the past 36 hours in the air to arrive in Angola.

Now our destination wasn't a suburb like Highlands Ranch. The narrow two-lane road into the community had no curbs or drainage. It was a bumpy adventure with potholes and few signs of life along the way, other than short but massive baobab trees. As we arrived in the community we could not help but notice its impoverished condition: pigs and chickens and their young wandering here and there, squalid shanty shacks comprising the majority of the homes, and multiple rusting car bodies left to rest and rust where years ago they came to a final stop.

Garbage was spread here and there as it was a community with no infrastructure that we take for granted in our nation's cities and communities. Yet as the church bus we were riding in pulled into the dusty, modest church compound, we were greeted with the smiling faces and joyful voices of dozens of members of the local Methodist Church Choir – singing and swaying in rhythm with a warm welcome to the guests from America!

The name of the community of plenteous poverty and joyous people was Bom Jesus – Bom Jesus which means “Good Jesus.” Here we were on the road with Good Jesus in the community of 10-12,000 folks built on the Kwanza River and bearing his name! And here were several hundred folks with few of the world's goods welcoming their guests with great passion. We experienced Good Jesus in that community as we quickly moved into a two-hour outdoor event to celebrate a creative, bold partnership and vision called *Imagine No Malaria*.

Bishops spoke, choirs sang, a representative of the Angolan Health Department was welcomed, local guests were introduced, the Bible was read, and prayers were prayed. The gathering by the river to deliver and dedicate the insecticide-treated mosquito nets was the culmination of four years of or preparation, training, and partnership. And like all such good Methodist meetings of this magnitude, the morning concluded with a covered-dish meal! And as we did in the preceding program, we again experienced the presence of Good Jesus as we broke bread together, sharing an abundant feast prepared by the women of the Bom Jesus church community!

On the road with Bom Jesus in the community of Bom Jesus – worshipping, eating, and then for a day-and-a-half of distributing house-to-house, shanty-to-shanty,

hovel-to-hovel – some homes little more than a room or two made from whatever left-over construction materials could be found – we traveled with Good Jesus!

Our teams of 4-5 persons, including a translator took the nets to the families who had been registered. There was joy and gratitude as young mothers with 3, 4 or 5 youngsters received the gifts that will save the lives of their children from malaria-carrying mosquitoes. Just six years ago, a child died from malaria every 30 seconds in the sub-Saharan nations of Africa. Through the work of the Nothing But Nets campaign begun in 2006, that number has been cut in half. Now a child is lost to malaria only every 60 seconds....that is still over 1,400 a day...too many...

As its name *Imagine No Malaria* implies, the goal of the campaign we are launching and leading is to eradicate the deadly disease that is 100% preventable, treatable, and beatable. The Bom Jesus community was chosen for this project because it suffers from one of the highest incidents of disease in the area.

As we heard in today's scripture reading, Jesus was on the road in a healing campaign. He went from community to community making the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk. As we sang in our opening hymn, Jesus broke the power of canceled sin and set the prisoners free. He did not debate the cause of one's predicament, he declared the cure to one's pain.

To follow Jesus on this road is to share in his healing campaign, even in faraway places like Angola. We may or may not care for Obamacare, but we are all the beneficiaries of JESUSCARE. We all are included in the universal coverage for broken hearts, broken lives, and shattered dreams...When a 10-year-old girl is abducted and murdered, Jesus' heart is broken and his compassion covers the grief and tears of Jessica's Ridgeway's family and all who mourn her tragic death.

We are not only blessed to be the beneficiaries of JESUSCARE, but we are also blessed to share its coverage with others. There are no pre-existing conditions excluded: Unemployment? (covered) Divorce? (covered) Addiction? (covered) Mental illness? (covered) Incarceration? (covered) Grief? (covered), Closed-heart? (covered) Small heart? (covered), Broken heart? (covered) Pain? (covered) Sin? (covered). And best of all, the premium has been paid in full! There are no deductibles, no exclusions, and no cancellations with JESUSCARE!

The Great Physician is the creator, provider, and guarantor of this universal coverage. Whether you live in Angola or Arvada or Aurora, this plan is available today through Bom Jesus – Good Jesus- the Great Physician.

To be on the road with Good Jesus means not only sharing health and wholeness issues, but also worship. Dr. Jesus is concerned about bodies and physical well-being, but also our souls and spiritual well-being. Our two-hour time of celebrating the *Imagine No Malaria* ministry in Bom Jesus was only a prelude to the wonderful weekly worship experiences members of our mission team shared in congregations around the capital

city. Our subsequent conversations confirmed we each experienced similar powerful worship services in whatever setting we were a week ago today!

When it was it was 2:30 a.m. in Denver last Sunday, the first choir began processing down the long aisle of the Catumbela UM in northern Luanda. While you were sleeping in Colorado, our 9:30 a.m. service was commencing with not 1 or 2, but 3 choirs taking almost 15 minutes to march in with a beat and rhythm that might be best be described as “*aerobic choir*.” The Young Women’s Choir, the Adult Choir, and Men’s Choir – accompanied by drums and shakers and handclapping - had the room rocking with energy as they entered in perfect formation.

Though the service was in Portuguese, there many things in common with our typical worship here – the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, announcements, a scripture reading, a message, and congregational hymns.

There were a couple of notable differences, however! They did not have an offering – before you get too excited, let me tell you, they had two offerings! One was the regular offering, and the second was a thanksgiving offering. Everyone who had a birthday or some other joy to be thankful made a second gift to God! Now let me tell you, when the offerings were made, no plates were passed. The ushers stood at the front with large woven baskets and every worshiper came forward to make his or her gift. Everyone! Can you imagine that? Our Finance Committee perhaps can! It took at least 10-15 minutes for the offerings! People who couldn’t tithe yet were prayed for! (I think Finance Committee would like that, too!)

No wonder the service took two-and-a-half hours! Not only that, but when the guest preacher preached, he required an interpreter, which doubled the length of the sermon! Now I know of some of my messages here may need some interpretation, too, but nobody got up and left early because of the length of the service or the interpreter’s occasional inability to translate from Texan to Portuguese!

Though there were four doors into the sanctuary, every single worshiper – all 800 of them – came out the same door to greet and shake the guest preacher’s hand! And every member of the three choirs came out the door to greet the pastor. Bom Jesus – Good Jesus – has a way of showing up when his people gather in his name for praise and prayer!

And I know from some of you that last Sunday in this room, Good Jesus was here, too! Here in the baptisms of infants, the *Jesus Loves Me* by the Children’s Chimes, and in the dance offering by a pair of gifted and graceful youth, and in the meaningful message by Linda, and in the grand and glorious instrumental and vocal music by all the choirs. God was glorified in our music and worship last Sunday in Denver and in Luanda, is today, and will be every time we gather and worship in Jesus’ name!

To be on the road with Bom Jesus means another important thing: sharing a passion for intellectual and mental growth and development. As Jesus is concerned about

our bodies and healing, our souls and spiritual well-being, he also cares about our minds and mental well-being. As Jesus journeyed across Judea, he cast out evil spirits that impaired human beings and prevented their functioning in fully healthy ways.

We are blessed to have persons on our staff and in our congregation who are trained and credentialed to treat and encourage persons with issues of anxiety, fear, confusion, and stress which may prevent their growing and functioning as whole persons created in the image of God. We have many who teach at all levels

On the road with Bom Jesus we were blessed to spend a half-day at the Methodist University of Angola – a new school just five years old – already with 8,000 students in 18 fields of study on two campuses and having graduated its first class this year. I brought a brochure and a flag from the university. Unfortunately the brochure is in Portuguese and the *Universidade Metodista de Angola* flag lost its pole when the security agent at the Angola airport scanned my carry-on and perceived the ten-inch long metal staff might double as a weapon onboard the Airbus 330 flight to Brussels!

Jesus said we are to love God with our minds. Our commitment to provide study – whether in a kindergarten or university, a Sunday School class, a Bible study, a Trinity Academy session - helps us to do just that.

One more thing: when you make a commitment to journey with Jesus, you never know where it may take you! When you love God with your strength, soul, and mind, you may even end up in the national spotlight. In the mid-1950's, a young Methodist missionary from Colorado named Burl Kreps went to Angola. Among other things, he coached a group of young Angolan students to play basketball and led them to several successful seasons.

One of the young players was the son of a Methodist minister. That Methodist basketball player grew up and just a month ago was sworn in as the new president of the Republic of Angola! One of the members of our mission delegation was a retired Methodist minister from Colorado Springs by the name of Burl Kreps. When the president of Angola learned that the now 81-year old former basketball coach was in Luanda, he invited Burl to come and visit. Not only did Burl get to go the presidential palace to reconnect with his former player and have his picture made with Preside Jose Eduardo Dos Santos, he also was interviewed on national television!

And in that lengthy interview through a translator, Burl Kreps shared not only his long-ago coach-player relationship with the president, but also why he and his companions had come to Angola in the first place... What the good Jesus' friends called Methodists are doing in Angola and other countries of Africa to save the lives of children. He got to tell the good news that the Methodist people have a vision... a vision called No More Malaria... a dream to beat and defeat the deadly disease... and a commitment to make it happen...

Good stuff... crazy stuff...even life-saving stuff can happen when you are traveling on the road of life with good Jesus!