

Westerholm's e-Mail News

Thursday, April 28, 2005

Friends and Family,

We are beginning to count down the days until we leave Mozambique for our furlough! We will soon be heading back to the States in order to visit with family and supporters for the next several months. Much of this month has been spent wrapping things up. Since we don't want to pay rent on two places that we are not using, we are closing up our apartment in Nampula and taking our things to Montepuez. Hopefully when we return in a few months we will be able to return directly to Montepuez!

On the first Sunday of each month, here in Nampula, the Igrejas de Cristo holds a "conference". This month, the Intxotxa church held the conference, so there was an especially large crowd on that Sunday. A conference usually includes preachers from other churches preaching, youth groups singing songs, and a meal shared afterwards. In the Makua culture it is very important to be a part of a group, so the conference is a way of expressing that the church is bigger than one congregation. It has been a blessing to see how the Makua churches view themselves as part of one large worldwide movement.

This month, I brought the sermon series I have been teaching on Genesis to a conclusion. The last sermon was a sort of review of all the previous sermons and it seemed like it went well. I was also excited when one of the church members was sharing with the church and he referenced something I had taught two months ago. It is good to know that God will continue to use our time there as a blessing even after we are gone. I was also relieved when on another occasion I asked the church again which was better, to give or to receive; this time they answered, "To give!" As in all things, we simply do our best and entrust the rest to God who is faithful.

Another interesting experience happened with the preacher at the Intxotxa church, Eduardo. Like many Mozambicans, Eduardo has two houses, one in the city and one where his machamba (field) is. He told me that his wife had already moved out of the house in the machamba and moved to a neighbor's house, due to the presence of an evil spirit. When I asked some more questions, he said that the house had been built on the "path of the spirits". After discussing it and looking at some situations in the Bible, we decided together to ask a group from the church to go to the machamba and pray. So, one afternoon we drove an hour outside of town to the machamba with five other people. We then reached a walking path that was impassable by car, so we got out and walked for about another hour to finally get to the machamba. I had let Eduardo do the planning, so I didn't really know what to expect. I personally don't have any experience with exorcisms, so I thought it would be better for them to be in charge. Once we arrived we sat down and ate boiled peanuts and chatted. A little while later they took out a song book and sang a hymn and then asked me to preach! It seemed like we were just having a normal "church service". After the preaching everyone said a prayer, but the prayers were all in Lomwe (a Makua dialect), so I didn't understand most of it. Afterwards they served watermelon and we walked back for an hour to the car. I am not sure what happened in the whole experience, but they seemed content. With the hour walk back to the car we had some good time to talk and to learn some things about the culture.

We are just beginning to really understand how the traditional religion is practiced by the Makua. There are two important people in Makua culture: the feiticeiro (nkwiri) and the curandeiro (nkulukhano). The feiticeiro is a sorcerer who often will cast black magic spells on people. Often he will do this for a certain amount of money; he will grind up roots in order to cast spells, or if he is a Muslim he will tear up parts of the Quran. Everyone agrees that feiticeiros are bad people who are up to no good. All feiticeiros are curandeiros as well, but not all curandeiros are feiticeiros. Curandeiros are traditional healers who are consulted by the sick but also people looking for jobs, etc. It is believed that certain illnesses have natural causes and can be treated at the hospital, but others are spiritual and can only be cured by a curandeiro. One person I know was told at the hospital after getting an x-ray that they needed to go to a curandeiro to seek treatment. Some curandeiros are even said to be able to cure AIDS; they are widely used even by church pastors. It is difficult to ascertain the exact nature of curandeiros because they vary. Some are merely herbalists, while others are involved in magic and consult spirits.

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I think at the root of many problems in Mozambican society is a worldview based on magic. When someone casts a spell, it must be done exactly right or it will not work. This type of thinking invades other aspects of life, so that churches tend toward legalism. If the doctrine and the order of worship are not done exactly right, it won't work and God will be displeased. In such a system there is no such thing as grace, because magic must be done perfectly to work. In presenting a message of God's grace, we are proclaiming something that is very counter cultural and foreign to the common way of thinking.

Please Pray For:

1. Our safe travel, back to the States with our teammates the Howells.
2. Our documents to be quickly processed.
3. Upcoming visits with our supporting churches and family.
4. Our teammates, the Roland's and Smiths, as they continue to work on the documents while we are in the States.
5. The Makua people to come to know God's grace.

Praise God For:

1. A refreshing team retreat.
2. Cultural insights gained this month.
3. Being able to renew our lease in Montepuez.
4. Evidences of God's work in the Intxotxa church.