

Sunday, October 20 Notes

We Gather

Children's Time – Erika:

Good morning, I'm Erika and I'm here this morning with some friends from MCC. What are your names? Do you guys remember all those coins you collected in your church? Do you know where all those went? Well, lots of people around the world don't have water coming out of the tap or out of their fridges, it can be very hard to find water close by and water that is clean. And we need water for lots of different things, right?

Can you guess how many coins you collected this year? Your church collected \$634.44! And those coins went to our friends far away so that they could build wells near their homes, do you know what a well is? There are lots of kids and women who spend all day walking to wells that are far away to bring clean water back to their families. For example, just \$1 can save a woman in Ethiopia from walking 70 hours for water! And, there's a 13-year-old girl named Nanteya who lives in a village in Kenya who used to get water for her family every day, and it took 7 hours to bring home 20 litres of water! Now because of wells, sand dams, and other tools being built, kids like you have time to be kids and have fun, go to school, and they feel more healthy instead of drinking dirty water or walking far away. So thank you for all your help!

We Pray

Lighting the Peace Candle – Andy:

(Slide 1)

In my trip last month to Uganda we met with several MCC's Partners. This is Sam Eibu, he is the Executive Director for Action for Peace and Development. Sam has worked with MCC in various roles for decades. When he was in the US for orientation he visited some MCC Thrift Shops and volunteered for the day. "Peace is costly" was his first thought. There is a lot of effort that goes into raising the funds to support the work of MCC. It was one of my thoughts seeing his project as well. "Peace is costly". For Sam Peace is not a concept. He calls it a prerequisite for life.

I saw the peace he was teaching was transforming people, communities and the country. Before starting this program this region was occupied by a horrific rebel group called the Lord's resistance Army. They are largely sustained by kidnapping children and forcing them to be soldiers. Sam was one of the few folks who were able to meet with the LRA and negotiate peace. He is an absolute hero.

(Slide 2)

Sam started this project by sitting under a tree and offering anyone in the community could come and learn about peace. 2 people came, now years later there are 125 across 5 villages. This teaching is potent. On the left there is Susan. She lived with an abusive and unfaithful husband. She learned about peace from the program and knew her situation was not safe for her. Susan left her husband and went to stay with other members of the program. In time her husband realized the mistakes he was making. Susan told him he should join the program and learn about peace. He did, he learned about gender-based violence and new ways to handle conflict. He was able to significantly change his lifestyle and Susan felt able to move back to live with him. Susan is filled with joy and this program has changed her family's life.

The picture on the right is one of the program participants, while they learn about peace, they also provide training on conservation agriculture and how to care for animals well. The group puts a small amount of money into a savings group. The group then can decide what will help their community or individuals can borrow from it. He was able to buy a goat and give his first baby to another neighbour. He can plan for the future. From the savings circles the community bought bee hives. They provide honey, wax for candles and keep the elephants out of the fields.

(Slide 3)

This candle was made by the project. So as I light the peace candle I remember this project, the people. I remember Sam and am honoured to be able to work for peace with him. I remember Peace is costly. I remember peace can transform.

We Reflect on Scripture

(John 4:4-26)

Meditation – Andy:

(Slides 5-9)

In the arid and rural northeast of Uganda, not too unlike Samaria, we met a woman named Anna.

MCC has a partner working to provide farmers the training they need to not just survive but thrive as a community. The method for training empowers learners to become teachers and expand the knowledge throughout the whole community. MCC's partner trains 15 'Lead Farmers' who in turn are responsible to train 7 'Follower Farmers' each. The training method has gone well. The community has seen an increase of nearly 75% growth of food production using conservation agriculture methods or 'Farming God's Way' as they refer to it.

One Lead Farmer, Anna, stood out. We were able to visit her farm and hear more of her story. Through translation of the Project Leader we could speak with her as she sat sorting cowpeas under the weight of her pregnancy.

Anna was surprised and encouraged to hear that the money that had helped start the program in her village had in part come from Thrift Shops. She valued the connection to folks across the great water who were working hard to help their community.

She too had worked unbelievably hard this year. Her recent harvest was drying around the family home. This last season the police, in response to crime in the area, indiscriminately had rounded up every man in the village at the start of weeding season. This left Anna, like the woman in Samaria without a husband at home. She would either need to take another man or complete weeding and harvest without help. She chose not to take another man, something exceedingly rare.

Like the woman of Samaria, Anna walks long distances to collect water about 45 mins. She hopes to soon have a well in their community. The MCC Ugandan staff have been encouraging and empowering the community to use their savings from increased harvest to build a well together. The water they will draw up together will be living water.

It was the beginning of the dry season and as much as the land needed water, the season before they had more than they could handle. I spoke with one of the follower farmers Akori. He told me how he, like many others, had been a cattle thief. That was until he joined the farming

program. Like Isaiah dreamed of, he had semi-literally turned his spear into a pruning hook. Now he farms maize and beans with his wife. A large change for someone steeped in a culture emphasizing men's role as warrior and cattle herder. His one concern though is the flooding. Each year it is different and after he has planted his crop carefully, he can lose up to half of his fields to an overrun river. There is no crop insurance, each year is a gamble. Their cries have gone unheard by the local government. I asked the project leader about climate change's effects in the area. He confirmed what I feared, in recent years the river has become increasingly unpredictable.

I wished there was a simple solution. My only encouragement was that as MCC Thrift shops we were helping to mitigate climate change by reusing items.

Meditation – Erika:

(Slide 10)

These increasingly unpredictable weather patterns are challenges we at MCC have heard a lot about from our international partners, such as we just listened to in Uganda. A changing climate is impacting the mission of relief, development, and peacebuilding in the name of Christ, particularly in places that have contributed very little to the warming of the Earth. This is because the well-being of communities is strongly tied to their access to food, water, and other resources, and when weather patterns are unpredictable, already difficult social and economic situations are made even more challenging. To bring awareness of and encourage advocacy around these circumstances, MCC launched our Climate Action for Peace Campaign last year.

Part of the Campaign is addressing climate change adaptation. And when it comes to water, like I shared with the kids, MCC is working with local partners all over the world on creative solutions so that people have safe and ongoing access to clean water in their own communities. This includes training and resourcing locals to build wells and irrigation systems, which create lasting changes in a community now that women and girls no longer need to walk hours to collect water, and farmers can adapt to a changing climate so that their crops survive even when rain doesn't fall like it used to.

(Slide 11)

Two pictures I'd like to share with you. The first, on the left, is in Makiya, Ethiopia, where MCC's partner Afro Ethiopia Integrated Development is working to drill 15 wells. Ato, a man who lives there, says "access to clean water is the most serious challenge his community faces" because women and girls are collecting unsafe water in dangerous jungles. Now, the new water tap stand is 500 meters from his home. The second, on the right is in Kikwit, Congo, where three boreholes have been built by MCC's partner Community of Mennonite Brethren Churches in Congo. These boreholes deliver thousands of liters of clean and safe drinking water every day in a community that has struggled with water-borne illnesses for over 20 years and is trying to build community with people fleeing from conflicts in other regions. These are just a few of the many stories we could tell that have been made possible with the help of donations like yours. Over the last year, MCC has partnered with locals to provide over 46,000 people with improved access to clean water, so thank you again!

(Slide 12)

Before I pass it over to Becca, I wanted to share one short video about a really neat project which MCC is involved with, floating gardens in Bangladesh. It really speaks to how closely

food, water, and people's livelihoods are tied to a changing climate and how locals are adapting to climate change.

Meditation – Becca:

(Slide 13)

By this point in our shared reflection, you've heard from two of my seasoned MCC colleagues who have a clear understanding of how MCC impacts the world around us. As for me, I just started working at MCC this past spring. I serve as the Volunteer and Marketing Coordinator at the Village Green Thrift store. I am still learning and growing into the role, and learning about all of the work MCC does. Being as I am not an expert on the climate crisis, or an expert on MCC's global work, I think I'll stick to sharing about something that I do know! As the Volunteer Coordinator, I work with people. I may not yet know all the large-scale projects that are going on, but I know the impact that MCC has on the volunteers, the people I work alongside every day. I am encouraged and blessed to be part of a community that values working hard for a good cause, while still holding one another with kindness, patience and love.

Some of our volunteers have been donating their time to MCC for decades. I know we all have varied reasons for giving of our time. Some people were raised volunteering, and do it without thinking. Others feel some sense of obligation. Some of us do it for social reasons. I think many of us see it as a way to live out our shared faith in Christ. We help others, and through this practical offering of help, we demonstrate our love for others.

The scripture we read this morning, the woman at the well, was particularly relevant considering the story that Andy shared about Anna. Something I have been trying to do lately in scripture is consider who I might most relate with in the story. I think often times I assume incorrectly that I relate the most with whoever the "good guys" of the story may be. However, I have been trying to challenge those assumptions. When I think of the woman at the well, I want to see myself in her. I want to see how Christ's words to her may be still relevant for me.

Now, I am a 21st century woman who has instant water at my fingertips thanks to plumbing and infrastructure. I have never been put in the position where I've had to take another husband to make ends meet. I recognize that this story is not written to me specifically. And yet, I know we can all learn and grow from it. In Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert's book, "When Helping Hurts," they discuss strategies to ensure that poverty mitigation happens from a local community ownership standpoint. It is a very thought-provoking book. And yet, they also challenge our assumptions about what poverty could be. They do not minimize the painful reality that not having physical needs met is, but they do want to challenge North Americans on some of our assumptions. Are we ourselves impoverished in our own ways? Relationally? Spiritually? Do we have our own broken relationships with material possessions? The answer to these questions is yes. And so I think of Jesus, wonderful Jesus offering living water that will not run out, and I think yes. Whether we have water available instantly, or are trekking miles every day, that living water is still exactly what we all need.

And out of our acknowledgement of the things we don't have right all the time, that is where we learn to worship in Spirit and in Truth, as the scripture says. That is where God steps in and helps us to help ourselves and others. I think once again of all the wonderful volunteers I have the absolute privilege of working with. We are a large group at Village Green, about 120, and just like the rest of the world, none of us are perfect. We are all in need of Christ's living water. And yet, together, we do something marvelous. Our weaknesses are covered by God and

community, and we come together each week to do many small tasks that make huge impacts. These impacts affect us who do the work, and they ripple outward, touching our local community and communities around the world.

I understand that for many of us, volunteering isn't feasible in the seasons of life we are currently in. Whether you have small children, a full-time job, a bustling schedule, or you are dealing with health issues, I want to acknowledge that this may not be good timing for you. However, if you have some free time you would like to find use for, even just a couple of hours each week, I would love to invite you to consider getting involved in some way or another. It really is an incredible feeling to witness and be a part of the work that MCC is doing locally and abroad. We are happy to speak with anyone interested after the service.

May we all go forward from here today, knowing that the living water is ours in whatever way we need it to be, Thanks be to Jesus. Amen.