

Africa Journal – Robin Rees

June 28, 2009

Home – Nixa, MO

Our Africa trip is coming up fast. Lord willing, in less than three weeks we'll be leaving. I've struggled with many fears and feelings over the past year. Is it faith or foolishness that takes us on this journey? I trust it is faith...I pray it is faith.

Lord, help me to be your bond servant. Help me to follow and obey and leave everything else to you. Help my girls to know I love them...and that you love them. Selfishly I ask that you bring me back to them and protect them while we're gone.

Be our guide. Be our protector. Be our provider and may all we do glorify you!

July 5, 2009

Home – Nixa, MO

Closer still to Africa. One of the fears I'm fighting is the fear of not coming home. Two Airbus jets have crashed in the last six weeks and, of course, we are on an Airbus. Then of course, who knows what we'll encounter in Africa (I know, I know....God knows!).

I was struggling with these fears a few days back and God gently reminded me that He loves my girls...but He also loves the little girls in Zambia. He doesn't love them more, but He does love them the same. He reminded me that my girls will be fine for a while without me and maybe my touch, my song, my love can brighten a little girl's day far away. That little girl is special too. That little girl needs to be held and rocked and sang to too. That little girl is loved by God...and maybe I'll get to hold her for Him, sing to her for Him, rock her for Him, and love her for Him.

I still fight the fear. I still ask God every day to bring me home to my girls. I'm working on and praying that my worry will decrease even as we get closer to going.

Lord, I thank you for my girls. They are precious gifts. I do pray that I will get to be their mommy for many years to come. Please bring us home safe.

Please use us in Africa. Each time I see a child, help me to love them like I love my girls. Let me be your arms and your smile and your touch to each little girl (and boy) I meet. Help me to bring comfort and joy to each one I encounter.

Thank you Lord, I love you.

Amen

July 17, 2009

Home – Nixa, MO

The house is quiet. The bags are packed. The Will is done...tomorrow we're off to Africa.

Tonight I'm calm. There must be hundreds praying for us because "calm" doesn't describe me on a

“normal” day – let alone the night before we are to fly to Africa!

I'm thankful! Thankful to God for this amazing opportunity. Thankful to those who helped make this trip possible. Thankful for the many prayers that, Lord willing, will be used to carry us to Africa and back home safely.

I'm ready....I think :)

July 18, 2009

10:56 AM Chicago Airport

Wow! We're off! I'm on the plane in Chicago waiting to take off for Dulles, Washington. I've been studying for the breakout sessions we're working on for the pastors/wives conference and God really spoke to me with one particular verse.

Philippians 1:12

But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.”

O please God let it be. So many things have brought me to this moment, specifically Chris' diagnosis. Would I be headed to Africa today if he had never contracted AIDS? I honestly doubt it. Please let “the things which have happened to me” to “turn out for the furtherance of the Gospel.” I know you promise to work good in all things. Please let that good be the furtherance of your Gospel.

July 19, 2009

7:55 pm Baptist Guest House – Johannesburg (Joburg), South Africa

We're here! The flight was a good flight just really long. I've slept two hours since yesterday at 3 am (and only slept four hours the night before that). Mercy – NOW I'm tired!

Joburg is neat - no problems at the airport - 10 min. drive to baptist guest home then, of all things, we walked (in the dark) to McDonald's (2 blocks away). I never would have guessed that tonight I'd be walking around, in the dark, in South Africa, eating at a McDonald's!

Impressions: everything is in English and so far everyone speaks English. Organized country – very different to some of the other countries we have traveled to :)

July 20, 2009

10 am – Joburg Airport – headed to Livingston

I slept like a baby last night. Bed @ 8 pm – Awake @ 3 am – then slept a few more hours. I feel like I've already adjusted to the time changes...we'll see how the day progresses.

I've enjoyed Joburg: we felt safe to walk in a group at night, the area we were in was very clean, everyone we met was very friendly and accommodating. It was also very quiet at night. We saw evidence of big industry. The Airport was very impressive. The ladies are beautiful and the men look distinguished, classic, intelligent. South African Airlines is awesome! It was very clean, they served great food, the captain came on to update us often on everything from weather conditions to the food

choices at the next meal/snack service. I feel like we are seeing the wealth of Africa right now.

I'm excited for our next adventure. I'm missing the girls but I know they are in good hands. Chris is doing well. When we left he was very tired and basically felt awful. He was having lots of pain in his chest – he seems much better now (Thank you Jesus!).

Thank you Jesus for our good safe trip! Thank you so much for a good night sleep. Please continue to hedge us behind and before us and lay your hand upon us. Help us to relax and enjoy our days of rest and adjustment before the scheduled pastors/wives conference – prepare our hearts and our words for the conferences. Prepare the way and the hearts of those coming. We love you Lord – help us to share your love everywhere we go.

July 21, 2009 – WOW!

Our Lodge (name changed), Livingston Zambia

We had a great flight from Joburg. It was so good to see Wes & Laurie Wilcox (our Missionary partners for this trip) at the airport in Livingston! We are so blessed to be working with them! We also got to meet meet our ACTS team guides (Tapst, Steven, and Andrew) and “meet” our transportation for the rest of our journey – Big Blue! What a bus! Words can't quite describe big blue!

Our lodging is fine (not gated like I'm used to in foreign countries so I'm a little wary) – we went to the market to shop and then to The Funky Monkey for pizza! It tasted great! They cooked in a big brick oven in the back.

Overnight was a test. It was my first time to sleep under a mosquito net. I was a bit grossed out at first because I knew the sheets were probably cleaner than the net! I got over it (somewhat), slept from about 10 pm – 11:30 pm – then was awake and couldn't go back to sleep. I gave up at 1:30 and took NyQuil! At 5:53 am we woke to Chris' Dad, Carl knocking on our door – we were supposed to head out at 6 am – oops! Somehow we had missed our alarm.

After much scrambling, by 6:09 am (not bad I'd say) we were on “big blue” heading to our Botswana, Chobe Park, Safari Day. On the trip we learned that big blue had 150 liters of gas stolen during the night. The ACTS guys think some of the security at our lodge was in on it. Not the best feeling in the world.

OK – On with our trip to Botswana....It was an uneventful drive...until we saw 7 elephants right on the side of the road- Amazing! Wait...the elephants were after the boarder...

The boarder was a little different for me. About ½ a mile from where we have to go through customs there are huge semis lined up and down both sides of the road. They were waiting to cross on the ferry into Botswana. Wes & Lori said they could wait for weeks to cross. The ferry only takes one truck across at a time.

When we finally parked and got out there were many men asking to trade Zimbabwe money for Zambia money (Zimbabwe money is worthless). I've been in similar situations before but something about this felt different, more uncomfortable – maybe because it was all men, no women were around at all.

Then we stood in line, to get a form to stand in line, to get the stamp to leave Zambia.

Now...the ferry adventure begins. Long story short, we were charged to ride the ferry and no one else was charged. It soon became a question of "Which side of the river do you want to be on?". So, Wes paid and we crossed.

Beauty – the Zambezi River is what we crossed and where we crossed, four countries come together; Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Namibia.

After we crossed and walked off the ferry we walked on a road, maybe ½ a mile, in between countries. Yet another strange situation for me. We were not in Zambia anymore but we had not officially entered Botswana. I noticed on our walk some huge elephant poop droppings. I had to wonder how close the elephants were that had left those droppings! When we made it to the Botswana entry point we stood in more lines, for more paperwork, for more stamps...then something new. We had to "step on the mat" before we could walk into Botswana. I think it was supposed to sanitize our feet but it sure didn't look very clean to me :)

Then...we wait – the Thembe River Cruise group that was to pick us up had gone to the Zimbabwe border instead of the Zambia border to pick us up. Once they arrived we piled into two open air land rovers and set out on our adventure!

NOW we get to the elephants!

Before we ever reached the park we saw seven elephants together on the side of the road – amazing! When we arrived at the park they reminded us to be quiet on our safari because: 1) We would scare the animals away if we were loud and 2) They explained that the truck we were in looked like one big (uneatable) thing...if we are loud or make sudden movements then the animals will realize that we aren't just one big thing but...several little (eatable) things...that is when you have problems! Oh yeah...and they reminded us that there would be no bathrooms!

I'm not sure how to describe everything we saw in the Chobe Park. I was amazed that I was never really afraid. We saw so many animals so close!

*Baboons – full family units with showoff teens

*Elephants, Elephants, Elephants! Eating, swimming, even a baby bull elephant that charges us 2 x – it was VERY cute but I'm sure glad he was little!

*Giraffes (they sure do drink funny!)

*Hippos – herds of more than 30! Full family units, we even saw two male hippos fighting big time! We thought it was best not to get too close!

Both the land safari and the river safari were amazing!

Then back to the Botswana border...back to the Zambia border...back to the hotel...off to a nice sit down dinner @ Rhaposidy's...OH! And to the gas station for some diet cokes....:thank you Jim Lauderdale for keeping me stocked with diet coke for the whole trip!!!) woohooo!!!

Tomorrow is our rest day/shop day/ Victoria Falls day. I'm very excited but very tired. I pray I can sleep so I can have an awesome day tomorrow!

Thank you Jesus for safety and for an incredible day!

July 22, 2009 pm
Our Lodge – Livingston Zambia

Another amazing day! This day, thankfully, was more restful. Most of our team slept great last night – including me. We thank Jesus for good rest!

Breakfast and orientation this morning. I learned that in Zambia the left hand is “dirty” and the right hand is “clean”. You shake with the right hand, eat with it, hand things with it – everything with the right hand! We all laughed at my brother-in-law Geoff who is left handed. :)

After orientation it was off to the market – then lunch – then...what we'd all been waiting for...Victoria Falls! It was just a 15 min. drive. Then a short walk to the falls. To say “amazing” doesn't even capture an inch of the massive falls and we only saw the 1/10 of the falls that was on the Zambia side!

I really think heaven must look like this place. Power, beauty, double rainbows in full circles around the bridge we were on. As I stood back and watched people go through the rainbows I thought...”maybe this is a little like what the gates of heaven will look like.” I could suddenly picture the pearly gates on the end of the bridge surrounded by the mist from the falls and encircled by the two rainbows! I immediately thought of the song “How Beautiful Heaven Must Be”. What I saw was more beautiful than anything I'd ever seen before and I was moved to tears. I know heaven will be 10xs more beautiful and I was so reminded how my imagination can never do it justice.

Oh yeah... baboons were everywhere! Just walking on the path with us as we toured the falls. Wes and Laurie had warned us not to take out any food while we were at the falls because the baboons would be all over us (not a pleasant thought). Imagine my dismay when I looked over at one point and saw my dad eating a breakfast bar! Thankfully no baboons had attacked and I reminded him “gently” that he was NOT supposed to have any food out! :)

After we were done at the falls I visited the market right at the entrance to the falls. PK and I decided we'd walk through the market. It did not take us long to become uneasy. All of the booth workers were men, approaching us, asking questions, pushing us, all at the same time. It was very different than the market we were at earlier and we decided we were done!

We went back to “big blue”. Andrew and Tapst were in the truck and PK and I walked to the wrong side of the bus by accident. Immediately our guides jumped out of the bus to “redirect” us by showing us a magazine with pictures of the falls. It felt very much like they were either trying to protect us, or trying to keep us from seeing something we shouldn't see...or maybe both. I was totally fine with being “redirected”. I was also fine with hitting the road.

We all made it safely back on the bus. On the way back to the lodge big blue came to a sudden stop. When we looked out to see why we were stopping we saw at least eight full grown elephants on the side of the road. They were so close to the bus and it was amazing!

There were two things today that made me uncomfortable. One was the market at the falls and the encounter by big blue, second involved some gentleman looking for one of our team members who they thought might be willing to enter into a “business deal” with them. They apparently went to the desk at the lodge, described the team member and they directed them to his room! Mercy! I'm looking forward to hitting the road in the morning and leaving for Choma.

Wes and Laurie are going to leave early with the team member the “business men” were looking for.

I'm having a hard time going to sleep. I just don't feel safe.

Lord, please bend your ear to us and protect us. It is so easy to pretend like we aren't in Africa...but then something happens that reminds me how uncertain things can be here. Protect us, go behind and before and lay your hand upon us. Hedge us – destroy our enemies and build up our brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us be your light. Let us shine bright. Let our light be strong and do not let it be extinguished. The darkness is around – I will not be afraid for you are my provider and protector. Strengthen and protect us! Thank you! Amen!

Here are the verses God gave me to remember and hold to during the night. Psalm 139: 11-12 If I say surely the darkness shall fall on me, even the night shall be light about me. Even the darkness is not darkness to you, the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

July 23, 2009 – 12:20 pm
Choma Zambia – Kozo Lodge

We made it through the night with no major events. I'm thankful that God used His word to calm me and give me a good night's rest.

The road to Choma was very interesting, bumpy and dusty! The trip took about 4.5 hours. We did, due to a detour get to go by “the bush”. We saw many little villages with huts. Mostly farming families. Their lives must be very hard. I have to remind myself that more than water, more than food, they need Jesus. I just want to give them all I have on me.

I'm looking forward to our first service to open the pastors/wives conference tonight! I'm praying that we will really connect to the people and that we will be able to provide valuable training and will be able to show Christ's love to them in a way they can take back to others.

Thank you God for this amazing opportunity. Help me to see all I'm supposed to see, to feel all you want me to feel, to go where you want me to go, to say what you want me to say.

July 24, 2009
Choma Zambia

I'm very happy with Kozo Lodge (just the fence and guard makes me feel much better!). As happy as I am with where we are staying it doesn't even compare to how excited I am after meeting and worshipping with the African pastors and their wives. “Magical” (in a heavenly way) is the only way I know how to describe it!

Yesterday, while my family was practicing some of the songs we would be singing, some of the pastors and their wives started arriving at the camp. We asked them if they wanted to sing with us. It was beautiful, spontaneous, joy filled, glorious, heavenly worship! I began to cry, tears are in my eyes now as I remember it. Jesus showed me just a glimpse of what Heaven will look and sound like!

Now Dad is preaching and preaching well. The interpreter is doing well. Dad is expending himself – they are understanding – God is working!

July 24 Continued – During First Discussion Group

We had fun playing the get to know you games during our first small group time with the pastors wives. It was so much fun to get to know each other better.

Two ladies shared during our discussion time about Dad's sermon on “The Altar and the Anvil”. One shared how she needs to lay on the altar those who are mean to her. Another lady shared how she needs to lay on the altar the same thing.

During our prayer time *Angie* asked for prayer for her mother who is ill. *Jayme* asked for prayer because she is going for a “review” on Monday. Her “review” is where she will get the results of her recent HIV test. *Rachael* asked for prayer because her spiritual husband comes and lays with her at night. (I was at a complete loss on this one so I asked *Lilly* to pray for *Rachael*.) *Lilly* asked for prayer for her church. That they would see spiritual growth and not be stuck where they are at. Mom asked for prayer for safe travel on the way home. I asked for prayer for Chris.

7-24

I gave my brief testimony to the ladies today. When I give my testimony, and tell my story in the states it sets me apart from others. They accept and love me but we become a bit of a curiosity. When I shared my story here...it just made me their friend.

Here is what I shared through the interpreter (the dashes are my planned pauses :) :

My name is Robin - I grew up - learning about Jesus - in God's word - from my parents. I learned that Jesus - is God's son. - I learned that He never sinned. - I learned that He died – on the cross – for me and for all. - I learned that He was buried – and that He rose again. - I learned about my sin – and when I was a child – I knew I sinned – and I knew – I needed Jesus. I asked Jesus to forgive me – and to be in charge of my life. - I asked Jesus to change me.

Psalm 139 tells me – When no one else understands – God does. - When no one else knows what is going on. - God does

Now – on good days – and bad – I have Jesus. When I'm blessed with my children – and I am filled with joy – I have Jesus. And – When we learned – my husband Chris had AIDS – and I was filled with sorrow – I had Jesus. When I am afraid – I have Jesus. - When I do not understand – I have Jesus. - Everyday – I have Jesus. - Because I have Jesus – I have comfort – peace – joy – and hope.

7-24 (note)

It is interesting with some, there is much head knowledge but the heart knowledge is not so deep. Abuse seems to be a big problem even among the pastors and their wives.

7-24 9:15 pm

Kozo Lodge – Choma Zambia

OK – I think I'm ready to write about *Rachael* (the lady who spoke of the spiritual husband that lays with her at night.) I spoke to Laurie (our missionary) and she said that it is definitely a demon. I'm praying for *Rachael* and her baby. I'm praying...*God, please protect Rachael's baby and let him grow up in Your love and care. Please rid Rachael of this demon. In Jesus name, Satan, leave Rachael,*

Demons be gone. Holy Spirit, wrestle that demon and claim Rachael as your own.

**July 25,
Kozo Lodge – Choma Zambia (night)**

Interesting, good day. We've gotten to know some better.

Jayne & Nadine – classy ladies but they vie for position and are very competitive. I've noticed this with other ladies as well.

Olitah, Pasmore's wife - (Pasmore is the interpreter). Olitah wears a camouflage head wrap. She is quiet and tall and thin. The more you get to know her the more she becomes your friend. I love her and I love her smile.

Precious and her son Obed – they are both very quiet. I think she only speaks Tonga. She listens and is very attentive. Very unassuming. Obed (1 yr) is quiet and attentive like his mama. He doesn't seem to demand attention.

Pricilla, Maxwell, and Baby Blu – Priscilla is one I was drawn to from the start. She is beautiful. Her spirit is beautiful. Baby Blu is beautiful. Maxwell is a good husband. He helps with Baby Blu. He seems more gentle with his son than some of the other men are with theirs. Priscilla shared her story today. Her second baby died and she was very sick herself. God healed Priscilla but she still asked God why she suffered so. Then God sent “the white man” (Wes Wilcox) and he told her about Jesus and she accepted Him.

I'd like to write Priscilla – I will ask for her address tomorrow. Before I even left I prayed that God would give me a friend in Africa, someone whose heart would be bound with my heart. God answered this prayer with Priscilla.

One more tonight...

Betty. Betty is quiet but well spoken. She is one that can quietly blend in with others so I was surprised when she volunteered to share her story during testimony time. She shared of much sickness. Losing her husband, then her baby. I'm guessing they both had AIDS. She was sick as well and learned she was HIV+. She started going to church and accepted Jesus. At that time she was brewing beer to support her family. She kept going to church and God spoke to her heart that she should stop selling and brewing beer. So she stopped. Her children begged her to start again so they would have money for food again but she did not. I was sad she didn't tell how God had provided...maybe she is still waiting for Him to provide...

Prayer requests from our time together today:

Christy – her mother having health issues

Jayne – going for HIV review Monday

Rachael – spiritual husband who lays with her

Lilly – the spiritual growth of her church

Betty shared during small group that her new husband is abusive and that his children do not respect her. She is considering divorce. My hurts for *Betty*. I told her I would pray for her. They left the conference early. I will see her again in heaven one day.

July 25, 2009

Choma – Evening Service

Chris and I shared our story during service tonight. It was an almost surreal experience. Here we have been with these beautiful people for several days, yet the men did not know about Chris being HIV+. I read before we left home that even though HIV is a pandemic in the area we are in, those with it are still very much shunned. When someone here finds out they are HIV+, and they tell others, they are usually rejected by all. Family, friends, church, all. I couldn't help but wonder what they would think of us. I've even felt some fear over the fact that they would all know. What would they do? Would our work be increased or decreased?

Please God, use our story, our lives, our love, our honesty, our pain, our joy to share YOUR gospel!

July 26, 2009

Choma – Morning Service

Pasmore shared this morning through an interpreter. He shared that through our team they had learned one thing...to love those who are HIV+. He said that many times in their churches, when they learn someone is positive, no one except maybe the pastor and the deacon will sit next to that person or will even be by them at all. He said that our team had shown them that it is good to love the “positive”.

WOW! Again God took me back to the verse He gave me in the Chicago Airport at the very beginning of our trip. Philippians 1:12 “But I want you to know, brethren, that the things that happened to me, have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.”

This gospel that Chris and our team shows, is the gospel of love – Jesus loves us! We should love ALL others – HIV+, HIV- , ALL people!

For me, what Pasmore shared seemed to be the full reason for our trip. It seemed to be a very big “good” that God had worked out thorough our “bad”. I'm beyond words, I'm thankful, I'm amazed. What a journey the past twelve years have been for Chris and I (and for those who love us). What an amazing gift to get to see with our own eyes and hear with our own ears how “the things that happened to me, have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.” Wow! God is so good!

July 27, 2009

Gwembe, Zambia – Wes & Lauri Wilcox's home

It was hard to leave our new friends yesterday. When I said goodbye to Priscilla, she asked if I would be back and I said, “No”. She looked so sad. I wish I had told her “maybe, we will see what God will bring.” I'm looking forward to writing her as soon as we get back to the states.

Today we shopped on our way to Gwembe (where Wes & Laurie live). I thoroughly enjoyed our shopping trip!

Wes and Lauri's house is beautiful...the road to get there was something else altogether! At one point Tapst had to climb on top of big blue – as it was moving – to hold a telephone cable up. I thought we were going to snap the line for sure!

At Wes and Lauri's we had a great lunch of burgers on the grill, then Wes took us out for a walk

through the bush! Other than meeting my friend, Priscilla, the walk is one of my favorite things. We passed probably ten or more villages. The families seemed afraid of us as we approached but as soon as we waved and smiled they exuberantly did the same back to us! Snakes were the only thing I feared...thankfully we never saw any!

The bush, the villages, the people, the children, were all beautiful. Wes said that many who were at the conference live in villages like the ones we passed. Maxwell and Priscilla live in a village like these. I have a new appreciation for the villages in the bush. If I was poor and in Africa, I think I'd prefer a village in the bush to living in a large city. The village life is very different from mine – very hard compared to mine, but they were all neat and orderly. I saw no trash. They had nice gardens, chickens, goats, turkeys, cows, corn, yes – they may live in mud huts with thatched roofs and dirt floors but they have their life in their villages figured out and they do it well. They live in tight knit family groups, they love and protect their children – it is different than what I expected. I have much respect for the women in Zambia. However, I do not really understand the many of the men here...

The men at the conference in Zambia were good men, good daddies, good husbands. But in contrast, some of the wives shared of abuse. Most fathers would never consider holding their children (this is a cultural thing but so hard to see). Husbands don't sit with their wives, many don't even speak to their wives much at all. Often, they don't even go to the same church.

It was encouraging as the conference progressed to see some of the men pick up on how my Dad introduced my mom as “my lovely wife”. Once, Pasmore even introduced his wife, Olita in the same way. She jumped up so fast and danced around – she was so pleased to be acknowledged and even more pleased to be called “lovely”!

7-29-09

Lusaka Baptist Guest House

I'm so sorry I didn't journal yesterday. I blogged...but didn't journal.

We have traveled far in the past 48 hours. We had a great meal at Wes & Laruie's two nights ago. They had mattresses for all of us – I was very thankful we didn't have to sleep right on the floor! Lauri was up bright and early making all of us biscuits and gravy! We also had apple butter – it was soooo good!

It was a sad farewell when we left Wes & Laurie's at 7:15 am and headed to Lusaka. It was a long five hour drive. We were very happy to see the Baptist Guest House in Lusaka! We didn't receive the warmest welcome from *Martha* at the guest house – leave it to the Baptist American to be the first one NOT to be hospitable on this trip!

We are sharing a nice, clean, basic suite with Mom & Dad. The hot shower was awesome! After we cleaned up and had lunch, we headed out with IMB Missionary, Troy Lewis to ECR (Expanded Church Response). ECR is an interdenominational NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) responding to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in this area. They have many active programs and partner with many other organizations. They have over 1300 trained caregivers reaching many, many people. The caregivers are all volunteer and each have about 15 families (25 children) on their client load. ECR also supports many community schools, orphanages, and others working with vulnerable children. The focus in Zambia is to seek to keep the children with a relative/guardian in their community if at all possible. Then, ECR comes along the guardian with support so that the children can stay in a home.

After ECR we went shopping at Manda Hill. It was very modernized and western. We enjoyed the "Shoprite" grocery store and picking up a few Zambian cookies and tea (5 Rose Tea is what Stephen recommended to us!).

Today was very good but draining. We started out at 9 am and went to Messiah Community School. It was very interesting and enlightening. They only have 6 orphans living on site (they have integrated them back into their villages to live in homes with guardians). They have over 350 total students. Some come in the morning and some in the afternoon. They have 6 teachers for all 350 students and about 4 class rooms. They feed the children one meal a day of porridge. If they run out of food the children stop coming so the porridge is important. The teachers are not paid. The community schools (like Messiah) are where the poorer children go because there are no fees. The government schools are called "basic" schools. They are supposed to be free but there are many fees, uniform costs, ect that still prevent many of the children from going to school.

Another thing I learned is that if families send their children to school, they often send the boys and keep the girls at home to help with the housework and the babies.

The second school we went to was quite something to get to. We had to leave one of the cars AND three people at the top of the hill because the road was almost impassable with HUGE potholes. The neighborhood was pretty rough. I was glad I wasn't left at the top of the hill to wait.

This school did not look as established as Messiah. The director's office was the nicest place in the school. I just had to wonder how much of the funds were actually passed onto the children. The ladies at this school did have an IGA (income generating activity). The funds helped support and provide for the caregivers and teachers affiliated with the school. They were selling handmade items and I bought a beautiful outfit for Molly and Mom got me a doily.

From there we went to another spot – I can't even remember the name...but they were selling items to support the caregivers in the area. They had very nice Khaki Shirts and pants and very nice and colorful men's shirts (we made dad buy it). They also had very cool, beautifully colored crocheted bags. They were crocheted out of plastic bags (like Wal-Mart bags). They were all different colors and sizes. I bought a nice, lined big one for 80,000 Kwachas (about \$16).

About 3 pm we went back to a more modern area and ate lunch. Dad was able to get online on his phone so I got to Skype the girls. I've been amazed at how little I've actually worried about them but it was still so good to hear their voices! I'm so thankful for Chris' Mom, Martha, they are in very good hands!

From lunch we split up into two groups. One went shopping in the local market (PK picked me up an awesome chetaga!). The group I was with went to Mathew 25 Ministries. This was a true orphanage where one lady (with some help off and on) took care of 11 girls full time. These 11 girls had no guardians or family at all to take them in. The same lady also has a larger ministry in supporting over 100 orphaned and vulnerable children in her area.

We were able to meet 9 of the girls. They were beautiful, happy, giggling girls. The youngest was two and the oldest was 14. I looked at them and saw my Molly and Alli. One girl, Miriam (7 years) captured my heart with her smile and her deep, loving eyes. If Zambia was open for international adoption she would have been very hard to leave.

We also visited two “Clients” today. These were clients of the Messiah Ministry. We didn't know where we were going and we just stopped alongside the road. It looked like a small, low end market. We walked past where they were selling items and quickly came to a small, dark hut. Three women were sitting on mats outside, gathered around the door. One looked young, she was the daughter. One was sick – her left eye was disfigured and she appeared blind out of that eye (the Messiah pastor said she had been beaten by her husband and had suffered brain trauma. She had a tube out of the back of her head that drained the excess fluid into her stomach.) The third lady sat in the doorway. She was a client as well. My reaction as we approached surprised and disappointed me. They did not look well and the closer I got the more I noticed the smell. I'm not sure what it was but it was not welcoming. AIDS doesn't scare me but TB, Cholera, Malaria, CMV does. I experienced a struggle I did not think I would experience. How close do I get? Do I shake their hands? Even if they are not a risk to me, what about Chris? I knew what I had to do, and after a while of visiting (and watching Sheila dive right in with no fear) I swallowed my fear and approached each lady. The moment my hand contacted the first ladies hand my fear seeped away. We were just two ladies from very separate worlds, sharing the human touch, skin to skin. As my fear waned my compassion grew. My life is so easy. My heart welled up in my chest and I fought the tears. I did not want these ladies to feel my pity. I wanted them to feel my love, to feel my respect. I greeted each with a handshake, along with the sign of respect (my left hand to my right forearm as we shake).

We sang Amazing Grace before we left. It was slow. I felt my heart welling up again as I fought the emotions that threatened to take over. It seemed like we were singing at their funeral, only they were still alive to hear it. I left not knowing what to feel. My desire to help is large but my knowledge on how to do it effectively is so small.

After this incredible day we went back to the guest house for our last evening meal in Zambia. We are packed and ready to load up at 4 am in the morning. When we leave the guest house at 4 am Thursday morning, we will have 42 hours of total travel time ahead of us...*God be with us. Protect and keep us. Help our pilots to do well, our plane to be sound and help our trip to go quickly. You have brought us save thus far...now I ask for you to take us home safely. Back to my girls. Back to my life. But please Lord, help me to be forever changed.*

Amen

My verse for tomorrow...

John 1:14

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

YOU are what we need. You are what they need. We need light – and that light comes only from you. Help Priscilla, Maxwell, baby Blue and their other child, Help Miriam

OH – I forgot – Total side note. I was outside tonight as we were all saying our goodbyes to Troy and Tracey Lewis. We were all visiting after our farewell prayer and all of the sudden I sucked a mosquito down my throat! YUCK! I've make it this entire trip without one mosquito bite! NOW, the night before we head out, I suck in a mosquito! Gross! I'm hoping the juices inside of me will kill whatever I just swallowed!

7-30-09

Joburg , South Africa Airport

3:15 AM came early this morning. We loaded big blue at 4am and were off to the Lusaka Airport. When we arrived at 4:45am the front doors were open but the airport wasn't actually open yet. We noticed about seven others sitting – waiting, I thought, for a flight. The longer we stood in line waiting for the baggage check, the more I became convinced that they were not flying that day, they were just trying to get warm. At least two of the ladies had babies. My heart hurt for them. Several had blankets and they shared with those next to them. It is such a different life than mine. Why? Why do I have all and the have nothing? Or...is that accurate? I don't know, I'm at a loss. *God – help me to know how to help.*

The South African Airlines flight from Lusaka to Joburg was uneventful, now we sit, sipping our coffee, charging our MP3 players and thinking about lunch and home. We are already a world away from the poverty – even in the JoBerg airport. Maybe a world away does not have to do with distance but with difference; the difference between much and little, the difference between plenty and need, the difference between wealth and poverty. A world away but not a universe apart. I can surly do something. Not just something that will ease my conscience, but something that will ease their burden. Something that will make a difference.