

Our Work for the Lord in Southern Africa -- June 2016

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TRAVELLING TO ZIMBABWE

We left Durban on Monday, May 30th, stopping for a few hours to see Aaron and Rebeckah Mtembu. Aaron was a well-respected, effective preacher in Soweto for many years, but has retired to a small town in the Orange Free State. We spent the night with Alan and Sylvia Fox in Johannesburg. It was wonderful to see how well Alan has recovered from his brain aneurism. On Tuesday we went to our old house to collect the camper which our renters kindly allowed to remain under its place in the carport. It is amazing how much can go wrong with a vehicle when it just sits! It took me a whole day, just to get it to start, and another two days to get it ready for Zimbabwe. On Friday we drove up to James and Debbie Buchanan's place, leaving there at 5 am on Sunday morning June 5th in order to arrive at Colleen Bawn, Zimbabwe about an hour late for worship, due to customs officials hassling people at the border – but the brethren waited for us.

The first question the brethren there asked was if I had grape juice and bread for the Lord's Supper. I was amazed because they are not in a rural area; they should easily be able to source grape juice and flour for bread. We generally carry grape juice with us, but did not have any bread. "Well, we guess we will just skip that part!" The sisters said they did not know how to make it themselves so Linda gave one of them a lesson on the spot, "baking" it in a pot over a gas stove. "The Five Acts of Worship" has become one of my most common lessons preached in Zimbabwe.

However, I do want to praise these brethren for two things: they are working hard to build a place to meet, and they invited brethren from a neighbouring congregation to attend, and fed them from their own pockets.



TSHOLOTSHO (about 120 miles north of Bulawayo)



The following week Solomon Chikomba kindly took us to two congregations he works with: Tshayamathole ("hit the calves") and Sikhale ("we are crying").

Above: Congregation at Tshayamathole



Men's class at Sikhale under a Marula tree

The names of these congregations sum up the biggest problem they face: lack of training in the word of God. You must “hit the calves” to train them, and “we are crying” because there is such a lot of work to be done, but the men and the resources are too few. Solomon and his father-in-law, Mountbatten Brewer, struggle to maintain their vehicles and source the money for petrol to visit these brethren. The brethren

themselves struggle to comprehend the Scriptures due to poor education, and the younger men who have education have mostly left the villages to look for work in the cities or neighbouring countries.

BULAWAYO

Due to a schedule change, I was available for a weekend meeting in Bulawayo, June 10-12. Despite the short notice, several of the brethren at the Hillside congregation made the effort to attend Bible studies on holiness, based on some of the lessons in our workbook.

NEAR GWERU (100 mi. E of Bulawayo)

June 13-17 we visited two congregations near Gweru: Mangwande and Hokho.

These congregations were started by Enoch Ncube (on the left), a man we highly respect for his knowledge of the Scripture, his perseverance in preaching, and his good-heartedness in the many orphans and disadvantaged people he and his wife have taken into their home and treated as their own. Enoch is now 86 years old and still energetically preaching. When we left Mangwande, he took the young man in the orange shirt to live with him. Mangwande is the place that wasn't having the Lord's Supper last year when we visited them. However, it



Inside the building at Mangwande

seems they really did repent and are doing well in this area. These brethren are trying to hold on despite discouragement: many brethren left when the drought relief ended. However, they also lack teaching since Enoch seldom has the bus fare to visit them. (They are about 40 miles away from Enoch's home.)

Linda was particularly impressed by the ladies at Hokho (Enoch's village). There were some Seventh Day Adventist visitors and, when the topic of worship on the Sabbath came up in class, the ladies did an excellent job of answering the questions posed by those of the SDA.

NEAR PLUMTREE (60 miles W of Bulawayo), June 18-19.



Stanley Sithole, a preacher in Bulawayo, specifically asked us to go to the congregation of Matingje because it is basically made up of one man and several ladies, and he thought they would be encouraged by lessons from another lady. Stanley and three young Christian men from Bulawayo accompanied us from Bulawayo, but unfortunately there was no woman to interpret for Linda. My heart really went out to Linda and these women and so I decided to teach a lesson specifically to them. After struggling initially, I was able to present the lesson

simply enough that the women could hear the word of God and respond to questions about what they had heard. This is different to the way they are generally taught – more like a sermon than a Bible study. After the lesson Stanley said, “My eyes have been opened.” Perhaps it was a good thing there was no interpreter after all! The tree in this picture is called something like gqwagqwa, which aptly describes the sound made when the fruit is chewed. In English, the tree is called, “African chewing gum.” I used this tree as an illustration to teach from John 15. “I am the vine and you are the branches.”

BACK TO TSHOLOTSHO

I was supposed to spend the week of June 20-27 at two congregations near Masvingo, but I decided not to go there when the brethren were not “upfront” about the arrangements and what they expected from us in the way of monetary assistance. One week before the meeting was due to start, they asked for far more than I had budgeted. This change of plan enabled Solomon to contact the brethren at Lupande, a new congregation near Sikhale, and we were able to have some good studies with them on basic principles. Only one lady at the congregation had a Bible, but Solomon was expecting Bibles to arrive in 2 weeks.

VENDA, Northern South Africa

The schedule change also gave Linda and I more time in South Africa, and we enjoyed reconnecting with congregations we had not seen in years. I preached at Makhado on Sunday the 26th. Linda and I taught all day Tuesday at Masia. Linda taught Thursday afternoon at Tshiozwe and I taught that evening. Last Saturday and Sunday we were with the brethren at Soshanguwe, near Pretoria. Now we are camping in Nylstroom, preparing to pick up Heather Caudill, a young lady from the USA and take her on our next trip to Zimbabwe which starts in a few days, Lord willing. Tensions in Zimbabwe due to economic hardship have escalated some in the past 2 weeks, resulting in some disturbances, but we doubt they will spread to the areas we plan to visit. Please pray that the problems the people face can be resolved peacefully. The brethren will keep us informed, and we do have some contingency plans for work in South Africa if our Zimbabwe plans fall through. We are missing our Durban brethren, but we give thanks to the Lord and to you for enabling us to also do this work. Les Maydell