

‘Bones and Elephants’

Just under twenty years ago, along with a group from the Wimbledon Circuit, I worked for a few weeks in Kenya on what we called the ‘Baby Simba Project’ in connection with a charity known as the **Rafiki Trust** – the word ‘rafiki’ actually meaning ‘friend’. Our group was mostly based at a local school in **Meru**, which is about 100 miles to the north-east of Nairobi, but for short periods many of us stayed with families.

I remember particularly the time I spent with my opposite number, the minister of Kanisa Methodist Church, **Rev Peter Maina Kariuki**, who was also the superintendent of the Meru Circuit. It was only for one night (in his manse), but there were a number of things that were indelibly imprinted on my mind as a result. I’m now re-reading my journal for Friday 12th August 2005, and the following is an edited summary:

‘The journey to the manse is broken by a stop at another village for meat and vegetables. It is quite dark by now, but there are crowds of people about. No street lights, of course, and just a succession of tin shacks lit dimly by oil lamps, candles and paraffin stoves. Peter orders some ribs (beef) from a butcher’s shop and though it looks a huge quantity I feel I should pay. It’s about 2 kilos and costs me 60/-, which is about 50 p. The butcher takes out a huge machete and, even though it’s pitch black and he can only see by the feeble light of an oil lamp, chops up the meat with huge, sweeping blows that make short work of the bones. I am aghast, because the blade whistles down within an inch of his fingers.

‘We arrive at the manse, which is basic to say the least, and chat about our work and respective lifestyles whilst he cooks supper. Peter is a very interesting character. He was not always a Methodist, having been a pastor in an independent evangelical church, before which he was – among other things – a boxer! Being the tactful person I am, I asked him what weight he fought at (he is short and rather stout now); he says “featherweight”, and I am glad the light is so dim that he cannot see the contorted expression on my face as I try not to snigger. He admits to having “put on a little weight since entering the ministry”, which is the mother of all understatements. Still, I can sympathise!

‘By 11.15 pm we’re ready to eat. This is not a moment too soon for me, since I’ve been up since 5.30 am. I’m not too keen on the maize bread (**ugali**) but have two or three pieces to go with my stew. Peter kindly leaves the meaty bits for me and piles the fatty, grisly chunks on his own plate, together with the bones. He eats an enormous supper (including all of the bones) and expresses surprise at my small appetite (I am telling the truth, here) – but I have *never* seen anyone eat a meal, bones and all, before. This is obviously not a new thing for Peter, as his teeth are quite worn down in places. “We EAT in Kenya!”, he announces, but I suspect that this is the first proper meal he’s had today. And, by the way, there is no breakfast – only cups of tea.



‘Peter and I go on chatting until nearly one o’clock. He rigs up a mosquito net specially for me, I collapse on the bed and am asleep instantly. About 3.00 am I have to pay a visit to the little boys’



room (a corrugated shack thirty yards away at the bottom of the garden not of the flushing variety), and on my way back find Peter outside the back door with his torch and wearing a concerned look. Apparently, elephants sometimes pass this way in the night and (being the African kind, rather than the docile Indian variety) have been known to attack people. We are, after all, deep in the country. So, with a rueful smile and an apology for disturbing him, I say “**lala salama**” (which I was taught is Kimeru for “Goodnight”), go back to bed, and dream of elephants.’

I could write much more, but it was fascinating to look through the journal of that trip to Kenya all those years ago, and to reflect upon the huge differences in the ways that Methodists live and work – and the similarities, too. The circuits that Peter and I looked after were roughly the same in terms of the number of churches; we both saw our roles as leading worship, caring for our people and stimulating local mission; as superintendents we agreed that members looked to us to think strategically and to encourage the best use of human and material resources across the circuit.

Of course, we noted the differences too. Peter, for example, who received his stipend monthly, not quarterly like me, hadn’t been paid for three months! He usually took one service each Sunday – not because of the lack of demand, but simply because the distances between his church made anything else almost impossible. Methodist bishops in Kenya (yes!) are *elected* for four years and eligible for re-election only once. The contrast in material resources was only too apparent, but, as Peter said repeatedly – our work (meaning his and mine) all goes on “by the grace of God”.

Happy memories, and a privilege to sit with a brother in Christ and a ‘fellow worker in God’s kingdom’, knowing that Christ’s ministry is being continued in a hundred different ways, in every country on the face of this earth, and that – ‘by the grace of God’ – people everywhere on this planet, in their own individual situations, are being made aware of the presence and love of God.

Every blessing to you all,

Barrie Tabraham

Resources/Good News

Covid-19 Vaccinations

People aged 65 and over as well as priority groups are being urged to get a top-up booster vaccine against Covid. Those who are eligible can book via the NHS website, on the NHS app, or by calling 119. [Covid-19 Vaccination](#)

Woking Car Show – Sunday 24 September, 11am to 4pm

Woking Town Centre is gearing up to host the Trident Honda Woking Car Show. This free family event on Sunday 24 September is a spectacular showcase of 70 locally owned and loved Classic, American and Custom cars. Come and wander around these marvellous motors at your leisure between 11am and 4pm. [Woking Car Show](#)