MALAWI MISSION PARTNER COMMUNIQUE

By Missionary John Holtz April 2019

Don't laugh.

Ok, maybe you did already. Perhaps if you looked at the picture to the right before you started reading, you wondered what it was; and maybe you had a bit of a smirk or a smidgeon of a chuckle. That's ok! :)

Maybe we didn't get the lion's share of drawing talent when the Lord handed out artsy kinds of gifts.

But we tried.

At our most recent Professional Development Course[1], three pastors in the group teamed up with me to draw an image of an ancient Roman coin.

The old coin pictures an ox standing in front of an altar and a plow. The altar symbolizes a sacrificial death; the plow symbolizes a lifetime of service. Underneath the picture are the words…

Ready for either.

We are studying the lives of the 12 disciples. My, oh, my, how the Lord transformed these men of varying personalities, gifts, strengths, and weaknesses.

God shaped them and molded them; He equipped them for a lifetime of service or sacrifice or both.

Take an example of each: James and John.

James was murdered by King Herod. The evil King had him put to death by the sword (Acts 12:2).

By the way, tradition says that most of the others were also martyrs, suffering horrible, painful, excruciating deaths.

Flayed.
Stoned.
Crucified.
Sawed in two.[2]

The ox on the altar.

On the other hand, John was banished to an island[3] and served Christ with his long life. But because of his faith in Jesus, "the one whom Jesus loved" still had his share of suffering.

A long lifetime of service.
Alone.
Abandoned.
Deserted.
Cut off.

The ox pulling the plow.

Different paths for each, but each was called by the same One: Jesus Christ. "*Come Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."*[4]

He called. They followed.

And Christ equipped each disciple for a life under the cross.

Ready for either.

So, what kind of people does God call to service and sacrifice even today?

That was the recurring question of the day. Actually, that very question was before us for two full days at a place called Fisherman's Rest.

Eight of us studied the lives of the 12 disciples. As we did so, we also considered our own lives of sanctification. We, too, have been called by Christ to follow him. We are called, not only to learn *of* Him, but learn *from* Him. Called to serve Him with our gifts and abilities, our talents and strengths.

You, too, my dear Mission Partners.
Wait, what's that I hear? You're saying, *"But we are just common, ordinary people!?"*

I'm glad you mentioned that. So were "the 12."

And so are we here in Malawi. Pastors, Evangelists, Missionaries. Wives and kids.

Common.
Ordinary.
Unexceptional.

The kind of people that our Lord loves to use. Also take note of your family members and congregation. Common folk with an array of personalities!

- Some quiet, others loud.
- Some gentle, others boisterous.
- Some taking things slowly, others acting quickly.
- Some good with the crowds, others preferring the individual.
- Some zealous and intense, others calm and reserved.
- Some coming from a past that would make you blush, others have been on the sanctified, "narrow" road their whole lives.

All fishers of men. All serving the Lord…

Blantyre Pastors Group

Under the cross.

But isn't life under the cross over the top with pain and suffering?
Rev. Daniel M. Deutchlander, in *Grace Abounds*, helps answer that good but sometimes frightening question:

"So it is just as Jesus said: ours must be lives lived under the cross, not just lives that could be, should be, might be, or sometimes are under the cross. A life under the cross, a life of self-denial for the sake of Jesus and His Word, is a life in which I struggle against the inborn and deeply rooted inclination of my sinful flesh to put self first; I seek to put the Word of God and the best interest of those I am able to serve before my wants and self-interest, whether that's convenient or not, easy or not…[5]

Rarely is it convenient. Rarely is it easy.

Come to think of it, is it ever?

And yet it is the life to which Jesus has called us: *"Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men."*

Young male lion we saw in a Game Reserve near Fisherman's Rest. It's roaring reminded us of the passage in 1 Peter 5:8.

Such kind of fishing is not easy work. The devil, like a roaring lion is out to devour us; our own sinful flesh is constantly battling our new self in Christ; the world confronts us with temptations all around.

All three combine to make our life under the cross burdensome and tiresome. Guilt weighs heavy; shame even heavier. But Jesus has an answer for that too:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."[6]

So what do we get when we combine Matthew 4:19 and Matthew 11:28?

Fisherman's Rest.

It's not only where we were, it's who we are and what we've received.

Ah, the tremendous gift and transforming power of forgiveness of sins! Refreshes even the weariest of fishermen; strengthens even the weakest of heart.

The Blantyre Pastors group found such gift and power as we heed the call to the altar or to the plow.

Studying at Fishermen's Rest

Ready for either.

Sincerely,

John Holtz
Your Malawi Mission Partner

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1. The current Professional Development Course is about Sanctification. It is entitled, Come Follow Me...
    a. You Common, Ordinary men,
    b. With the strengths I've give you,
    c. To an uncommon, extraordinary life.
2. Also see Hebrews 11.
3. Revelation 1:9ff
4. Matthew 4:19
5. Grace Abounds, page 491.
6. Matthew 11:28