

2010 Global Mission Lenten Series

Reflection for the Third Week in Lent

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Botswana

"What is the kingdom of God like?"

What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches. And again he said, "To what shall I compare the Kingdom of God? It is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened." (Luke 13:18-21)

It is easy to get discouraged when we look at things and they seem overwhelming. We would like for the world to be a 'perfect place to live and work.' And when it isn't, we want to fix it and make it perfect as fast as possible. Botswana is far from a perfect world; it has one of the highest rates of HIV/AIDS in the world. When looking at a problem of this magnitude it seems an impossible physical and spiritual mountain to climb. That is when it's time to remember Jesus' words regarding the kingdom of God.

In the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus speaks to our weak faith and expands our understanding of the realm. The beginnings of God's kingdom in some places are often small, but still it is the way of the kingdom that it grows inexorably toward its intended fullness, more majestic than we could imagine when we begin with our small seeds and steps. This is crucial to remember as missionaries: we are not in control or in charge of God's work. Likewise, we are reminded time and again that our timing for solutions is not necessarily God's timing. In Botswana, the children left orphaned by HIV/AIDS (Orphans and Vulnerable Children - OVC) are legion. According to UNAIDS, by the year 2010 it is estimated that 35% of all children in Botswana will be orphaned.

We have asked ourselves, how does one go about addressing a problem of this magnitude? Again reflecting on the parable of the mustard seed, we hope, pray and then act as if a seed will grow into a tree. Centers for the OVC-serving children ages 3-6 yrs, operated by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Botswana, are like planted seeds that grow. The centers provide children with a caring, welcoming, faith-based environment. The children receive nutritious meals, clothing, positive social interaction and a Faith-Based Pre-K education. After they move on to primary school, the children are followed by the staff to ensure they transition to the next level. The children's caretakers, often extended family members, receive support, teaching, counseling and supplemental care packages.

"It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches." Not just any marginal tree, but one which provides support for wildlife.

It is the goal of the Lutheran Church in Botswana that the OVC Centers provide the foundation for the children to become healthy physically, mentally and spiritually, to become responsible adults. In Francistown, some of the children who have gone through the program have reached young adulthood. One young man graduated in nursing and has his first job in the hospital emergency room. Another works at the center part-time as a tutor. He is a car mechanic. Another young woman, who helps her two younger brothers through encouragement and by example, started her studies at the University of Botswana to become an architect. She considers the church and staff members at the OVC Center her parents.

“It is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.”

It is hard to bake bread. You have to assemble the correct ingredients and have the right conditions. It takes perseverance, patience and time.

When we get discouraged, we remember these kingdom images from Jesus. Mustard seeds become big healthy trees. Flour mixed with yeast and other ingredients becomes bread. Children become God-filled adults. Praise be to God!