

A “Ministry Moment”

So much of life here can be time-consuming. At best, an opportunity to slow down and appreciate life. At worst, mind-numbingly tedious and frustrating. Every two weeks, an entire day is spent just running errands in Hagen. Here, an entire afternoon can be spent trying unsuccessfully to download a form or bit of software, only to be interrupted by yet another blackout. With no restaurants, take-out, or hamburger-helper in sight, our evening meals often require both chef and Sioux chef and still take an hour of preparation. For a Westerner who is used to life being “productive,” time seems to slip away at what can be an alarming rate.

And yet, in the midst of the tedium, there are moments, unexpected moments, when God opens a door and all involved are blessed. In the Lutz household, we call these “ministry moments.” We may laugh and tease about them, “Oh, Julie had a ‘ministry moment’ today.” *Wink Wink* Yet, inside we relish them. We need them. Because it is in these moments that we see glimpses of God at work in ways that we know have little to do with us. We were merely available.

I experienced one of these moments recently. Actually, ironically, it occurred within hours of finishing my last update (6/10/08). I was sitting in the teachers’ lounge of St. Paul’s Secondary School waiting for the Pimon meeting, writing to pass the time. To understand my frame of mind in this moment, one must realize that every trip up to Pausa is a full afternoon event for me. I must first catch a PMV to Wapenamanda. Then, I must wait until I can find a PMV that is traveling towards Mt. Hagen that can drop me off along the way. To have the best chance at this, my excursion must begin before noon. Even at the peak noontime, it can be an hour’s wait in Wapenamanda. I usually arrive at Pausa around 1pm and must wait as the teachers finish their school day and gather for the meeting, which, if all goes well, will begin around 2 or 3pm. Afterwards, I must again wait for the bus or open-air Dinah which will take the teachers and me back to Mambisanda. I consequently typically arrive home from Pausa around 5pm.

On this day, as per my routine, I was waiting, and waiting. Thus you can imagine my exasperation as I discovered that for the second week in a row the Pimon committee meeting was canceled. This week’s excuse: the school inspector was on campus this week and all the teachers were in a tizzy of preparation. I couldn’t have known. St. Paul’s has no phones, no Internet. If only I could have known that the meeting would be canceled. Now I was stuck. Thus, I waited some more, thoroughly frustrated that another afternoon had gone by with very little headway being made towards the cause of HIV education.

Irritable, I opened the book I had brought. Yet, in my moodiness, few of the words actually sank in. Where was that Dinah anyway? When were we going home? It was in that moment that one of the teachers whom I’ve come to know at Pausa sidled up to me. She asked what I was reading, and we began to mauswara (chit-chat), discussing the various books we had read recently. A nice distraction, but all I really wanted was to go home.

Then, without warning, her demeanor became more serious and subdued. “Linda, where exactly is the VCT clinic at Mambis?” she asked tentatively. I gave her the details, and with little prompting her story began to pour forth.

She had just recently discovered that her husband had had an affair. Several in fact. I won’t go into all the details on how she knew this, but the facts were pretty pointed and even more painful in that some of the affairs had occurred in their home, the home she shared with her husband and children. She was the mother of four. Two at boarding schools, and two little ones

yet at home with her husband. She was wounded. She was scared. What if she had HIV? What if he had brought it to their marriage bed? How would she deal with that? And what would become of her children? She had moved out to a little house on campus, no electricity, and returned daily to care for her two children still at home. She had hopes that she could go to the courts and get custody of the children, but was uncertain as to the outcome. All she knew was the pain in her heart when her youngest looked up at her with tears in his eyes saying, “If you run away, you won’t leave without us, will you?” Of course not. How could she? And yet all she wanted to do was run away, to get away from *him*. He had said that he loved her. She now felt it to be a lie. How could love hurt this bad? Hate. Anger swelled within her. She just wanted to hurt him. She wanted for him to feel the same amount of pain she felt.

I listened, amazed by her frankness and vulnerability, my own heart aching in time with hers. We talked— about the poison that hate feeds into our own hearts, about our own inability to forgive and the Spirit’s power to do what we can’t, about the relationship of love, commitment, and temptation, about the time that healing takes, about possible next steps and moving forward rather than looking back or living in fear. And then we talked to the One, the only one who could fix the pain inside. We prayed that God would begin to heal the hate, look after her children, and help her find a community of support in this difficult time.

After the prayer, we ruminated a bit more about our own human desire for revenge. Amazingly, my personal devotion time that morning had covered the end of Jonah, as he too struggled with a desire for God to smite his enemies. And yet, God calls us to the impossible task of compassion, forgiveness, and love. Impossible without God, that is. Not that we go back to the way things were, but that we move forward with a new hope and new life.

As we together recounted evidences of God’s love in the Bible, I noticed another teacher had joined us at the table. She soon joined in, confessing, “I am going to have to think more on this. What you say makes sense, but I struggle so much with holding grudges. And they are eating away at me.” In my own mind, I marveled, “What is this God? A two for one deal?”

Well, the truth is, it was a “three for one” deal. As I finally said my goodbyes and boarded the Dinah, I realized with new clarity how this encounter had ministered to my own soul. Gone was the disappointment, the petulance, the lack of trust. In that moment, I too had been reminded of my own inability to love, and yet God still loves and uses us to show His love to others.

If they even noticed, I’m sure the other teachers in the back of the Dinah figured that the tears in my eyes were due to the wind whipped across my face as we drove down the road back to Mambis. However, I knew the truth. These were the tears that come when you realize your life has touched upon something bigger than itself. Little drops of emotion that leak out when words cannot adequately express the depth of feeling. It *was* a ministry moment, but not me ministering to another. I was just the irritable, impatient youth and yet God still graciously opened a door. In one poignant moment, the love of Christ ministered to three. A ministry moment indeed. Thanks be to God.