

Kenya Presentation Sunday Meditations

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:1-13

Todd Knox

Kevin Milward

Mary Ray

Christian Choi

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Springfield, Illinois

1 Corinthians 2:1-13

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. <sup>2</sup> For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. <sup>3</sup> And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. <sup>4</sup> My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

<sup>6</sup> Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. <sup>7</sup> But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. <sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. <sup>9</sup> But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the human heart conceived,  
what God has prepared for those who love him”—

<sup>10</sup> these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup> For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. <sup>13</sup> And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.

Good morning. My name is Todd Knox, and I love the Lord! Hallelujah!

I want to thank you, the members of Westminster, for sending what we jokingly called Christian and his twelve disciples on this, our first international mission trip, to Kenya. It was nothing short of life changing.

I have been given a short period of time to talk, so I will make my comments brief. That's a joke for the mission trippers because nearly every one of the speakers we heard said the same thing, and then went on to speak way past their allotted time. One speaker went on for an hour and 23 minutes – just ask Tara, she timed him!

Have you ever been to the Grand Canyon? Our family had the opportunity to go there in 2013. I remember standing on the rim of that magnificent place thinking that despite the many photos and movies and stories I'd seen, even large-scale I-Max movies, they did not prepare me for the grandeur of actually being there. It was so much more amazing than I realized it could be.

I had the exact same feeling as we went on our safari in the Mara. The Mara is the protected part of the vast Serengeti savannah that extends from Tanzania into Kenya, and it is chock-full of God's greatest wonders. Miles and miles of amazing vistas, thousands of animals roaming the plains -- millions if you count the insects buzzing in the trees above our tents at the Fig Tree Lodge, where an overnight rain will raise the river by ten feet. Elephants at 2 o'clock! Giraffes at 9:00! Warthogs crossing the road! Lions and cheetahs and zebras and ostriches and cape buffalos and hyenas and hippos and rhinos and topis and wildebeests and wild dogs and gazelles and impalas and birds and mongooses and on and on and on. Here was God's creation as he created it! It was nothing short of wondrous to take it all in, and I'm sure nothing could have truly prepared me for the spectacle of being there in person.

Our list of animals seen wasn't limited to the Mara, though. Donkeys, goats, cows, dogs, and chickens were everywhere, sometimes in a herd or pulling a cart, sometimes just wandering around the villages we passed through. Goats eating the grass or the trash that builds up in these villages in which there isn't a trash can to be seen. It's not all pretty in Kenya.

There is poverty. The average annual salary in Kenya is 2.4 million Kenyan shillings, or about \$24,000 US dollars. That's the reported salary of professionals in Kenya. The reported unemployment rate is 9.31%. But those numbers don't take into account the millions of people who make a living growing food or vegetables in their yard and selling them in kiosks on the roads. They are fortunate if they make \$5 per day, often significantly less.

There are emotionally-charged issues in Kenya. We went to an orphanage in Nairobi that houses and educates orphans and children living in the streets. We went to a rescue center that girls walk miles to get to to avoid being sold off at age 8 or 9 to marry polygamous

older men of the Masai tribe for a dowry. Those same girls are subject to treatments to ensure their value, so horrendous that I won't describe them from this lectern.

But these same people, people living with issues we Americans and especially those in this congregation can't even imagine, people that have comparatively nothing, doing whatever they can to survive, these same people are among the happiest people I've ever met. Walk through a crowd of school-age kids, and they will surround you to shake your hand, give a fist pump, or exchange a high five. Get down on one knee and they will feel your whiskers, rub your palms, run their fingers through your hair, and play with your Apple Watch. Pick up and carry little Janey, hug her and feel her hugging you back, that will change your life.

Drive or walk along the bumpy dirt roads that most people living outside Nairobi have to travel on, give people a wave and a hearty "Jambo" or "Sasa!" for the kids, and they will smile and wave back with a joy not seen on this side of the Atlantic. Older men, who in the US would give you an entirely different kind of wave, change their hardened expressions completely just to return your greeting.

While we got to experience many things in Kenya, our stated purpose was to finish construction of a church building and attend its dedication service. We spent two days painting and putting up the walls of sheet metal on a church way out in the bush of Kenya, hours from Nairobi and quite a distance from even the nearest village. We learned that this new church was being built to accommodate 17 members of a congregation that met five kilometers away that needed a closer place to worship. We were shocked when, at the Sunday service, more than 300 people showed up to dedicate the building that this congregation helped pay for. There were so many people that some had to stand outside at the window and record the service on their phone so they could watch it later. They showed their appreciation by feeding us, killing a few valuable chickens to do so, and providing chai every hour or so while we worked, or so it seemed. And those 300 people? There were only a few cars parked in the yard across from the church, most of which were ours, so nearly everyone walked to church. Miles in many cases. That's what this new church meant to them.

The service was one of the most joyous experiences of my life. Even the parts of the service spoken in Swahili or Kikuyu were obviously filled with a joy that penetrated our inability to understand what was being said. Even the fact that the service lasted three and a half hours didn't bother me, since it was filled with worship and music and praise of our amazing God. Uh, don't get any ideas, though, Dr. Kieffer!

Joy. That's one of the two words that stood out to me on our journey. The Kenyan people have a joy that is so deeply rooted in them that it comes from their very being. Despite their lack of things that we take for granted here in the US, they are joyous. They are proud. They drive clean cars (those that have them), utilizing the myriad number of car washes found

every 100 yards or so in the villages, washing off the red soil that permeates everything in Kenya. They dress nicely and walk through the mud and trash with their heads held high.

For they are thankful for the things they do have. That brings me to the second word that has stood out for me on this trip – gratitude. The Kenyans we met truly appreciate all they have, even when it isn't much. They thank God for the meager life they have been given and truly believe what we sometimes say – God will provide.

The Bible is filled with passages regarding gratitude. A few of them are:

1 Thessalonians 5:18 -- Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Psalms 118:24 -- This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Colossians 3:16-17 -- Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

We hear these verses all the time, and while we understand them and appreciate them, we, in many cases, don't really live them. I know I am guilty of that. But my hope is that the very spirit of Kenya, the glory of God revealed in the savannah and the people, may that be what we bring home to you.

Joy and gratitude. Amen.

Jambo – Swahili for hello

There were several topics that I could speak on today, but the limited time; I will speak on a few. I really cannot do our experiences justice in this short period of time, but here goes

Our first day we went to an elephant orphan preserve. It is where infants and juvenile elephants are cared for until they reach maturity and get released. What is remarkable is that the care-takers actually stay near the elephants all the time. The love the care-takers have for the elephants is hard to explain.

Ecclesiastes 3:18-19 says, I also said to myself, “As for humans, GOD tests them so that they may see that they are like animals. Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return

The fate of the animals are important and intertwined with us. The care-takers understand and love the elephants. God moment... day 1

The next day we went to the church build driving a couple hours away. The roads were a trip (more after service). We arrived and were greeted by a woman coming towards us. She had tears of thanks and joy and **GOD** in her eyes. I think we all welled up; I know I did. God moment. While getting our work assignments, a gentleman walked up to us. We learned that he (Joseph) had donated the land for the church. You have to understand that land is everything. This gentleman had a GOD moment when he donated the land. Talking with him as best we could, it was evident that he had love for GOD and it was intoxicating. We heard folks exclaiming that it was a miracle as to how much we accomplished in half of a day. We got through so much because we worked along side the locals and took direction, not trying to instill our methods. God blessed us with this. You see, we had several meetings and a work day prior to going to Kenya. We discussed at length how to act and asked GOD for assistance.....and GOD answered. GOD helped us become servants.

Sunday was church dedication. 17 members, but over 200 folks in the church building and another 100 plus outside. GOD moment. The service was 3.5 hours. There were folks recording whatever they could from the outside...at times, you could only see an arm with a phone attached to it. This was a time that it really got to me that this was a huge deal and GOD made this possible. The love that the Kenyans showed for GOD was awe inspiring and humbling. I texted Leigh and told her that we just had 3.5 hours of a fun church service. When she responded, she said, “really really, really sarcastic?” I said really, really. Leigh in turn, said, “well, I wasn’t going to go to church, but now I have to”. That was a GOD moment 8000 miles away!

Another day was Comet Boys Home. The boys were not there, but the early childhood center was up and running. Wall dividers were knocked out to make a building larger, classroom furniture was painted and a “road was built”...ask me about that later. We got to play with the kids, as they were interested in us; as much as we were in them. That was when I realized how much the Kenyan kids are just like any kid and want to be happy. The full force of a GOD moment hit us several days later related to this home. Some of us went back to say “hi” and see how the furniture came out. We learned that Jessica, the early 20-something American teacher is actually a volunteer. A volunteer who needs to fund raise \$5,000-\$7,000 per year to stay. Think about that. Then it got even more remarkable. We learned that a young school-age girl was living with her. Jessica had “Kenyan adopted” her. By staying together, they became a de facto family. Jessica intends to re-up her Visa for another three years when her current one expires so she can later apply for citizenship. Jessica was and is touched by service and GOD.

I want to thank all of Westminster, my wife, my kids and GOD for blessing me on this trip. I also want to thank my fellow travelers, who made this so enjoyable and helped open my eyes and heart wider than I could imagine. Our harder work is now upon us. We need to continue our service at home.

This is a **very brief summary of some things**. We all have many more things we could talk about. The biggest take away is that the Kenyan people welcomed us with open arms and love. In many ways the Kenyan people seemed closer to GOD. You see...many Kenyans pray every morning to thank GOD that they

are still alive. Micah 6:8 from last week says, “GOD has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your GOD?”

Amen

Mary Ray

My name is Mary Ray, and I am a child of this congregation and I am grateful to stand before you and share my story of our Kenyan mission trip!

I told all who would listen that I considered this journey an opportunity to capture the feeling and spirit of the early Christians as described in the book of Acts! I wanted to witness that power of the Holy Spirit, refreshing, and truly setting each heart on fire with belief! My expectations exceeded beyond all measure!

The people of Kenya are joyful in ALL circumstances and readily shared their joy and enthusiasm with us in every encounter! Their spirit is genuine and contagious, and they BELIEVE that the Lord is their constant companion and ALL good comes from God! They praise the Lord continually... hungry, homeless, scarred... they smile and while beaming point to above saying, God is good and will provide with confidence!

Each day at the church worksite my Kenyan friends; Patrick, Joseph, Josphat, Francis, Geoge, Nancy, Samuel, Maggie, Morris, Edward, Jane and Peter to name a few, greeted us with a smile, an embrace and a salutation that the Lord is good! Patrick was the Pastor and each day he greeted me calling us by name. My hands were filthy as Patrick reached for mine. Patrick smiled and pushed up my sleeve so we could still touch... that touch I received touched my heart!

I was honored to be chosen to read Scripture at the church dedication. After I volunteered to accept this assignment, my heart sunk as I quickly found Christian to inquire... What language will the lesson be read in? English!!! Hallelujah!

Psalm 125 : 1, Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion,<sup>y</sup>  
which cannot be shaken<sup>w</sup> but endures forever.  
2. As the mountains surround Jerusalem,<sup>x</sup>  
so the Lord surrounds<sup>y</sup> his people  
both now and forevermore.

The Scripture stayed with me throughout our mission trip for truly the Kenyan people TRUST in the Lord always and their faith cannot be shaken and endures forever! Language was a slight barrier at times for me. my Swahili could use a lot of work but the language of love and touch never failed me or my Kenyan brothers and sisters!

After the church service which was so uplifting and powerful. I had a moment with the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery who directed the service. She was a tall woman, full of grace... many of us told her how uplifting it was to see a woman in a seat of honor and leadership at the service. Language was a barrier but not a deterrence to communicate feelings of Christian love. We ended up holding our hands and I told her how courageous I believed she was and how proud I was to see a woman in her position! She beamed as we had a truly holy moment as I expressed my gratitude to her and she expressed her thanks to



me for coming 10,000 miles to spread the good news in her words with my beautiful Scripture reading! We embraced and my heart was on fire!

Story number two of my healing touch came at the second workday at the school classroom build! I was feeling a little queasy and had a tremendous headache, so I was instructed by my vigilant doctoral staff, (who took such very good care of me), to sit quietly in the shade! I did not even venture to lunch that is how you tell it was serious with me! As I sat and closed my eyes... I looked up to see approximately 25 little people surrounding me! They were bright eyed and smiling ear to ear! I smiled back and reached out my hand... it was on! They began touching my hands, arms and cheeks, oohing and awing. They were loving it. Many had never seen a white person up closely! Then I bowed my head and they began to massage and run their fingers through my hair while singing and shouting with joy! The little people's hearts were on fire! After about 5 or more minutes the bell rang and they squealed and ran to class waving and smiling! I sat there for a few minutes and then stood up to discover my headache was gone and I felt fine! My young Kenyan friends had healed me with their delightful touch! The Scripture from Matthew 19:13-14, immediately came to mind!

<sup>13</sup> Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them.

<sup>14</sup> Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." <sup>15</sup> When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

The third story of healing touch came at the home that cared for my elderly Kenyan friends! We were given a tour of the site and the lady in charge Jane after a bit of Chai and treats showed us to the large room where we would try to fit our friends with reading glasses!

These elderly Kenyans like all others we smiling and greeted us warmly! I knelt beside many and most spoke very little English but again a warm clasp of each other's hands and a warm smile was met with joyful delight! Some of our friends we found could not see, had memory issues, could not read but all sat with smiles and squeals of delight as we sat with them and tried to fit them with reading glasses! One gentleman caught all of our eyes especially mine! He was tall and had legs that were twisted and deformed so to us it was miraculous that he could walk around! I knelt beside him and patted his hands and he reached to pat mine as well as to touch my face and with a big smile and twinkling eyes after a small pause... He pointed his index finger skyward to shout, "God is Good." All Good Things from Him!!!!!!!!! I continued kneeling and clasp his other hand with a tearful smile and in said "Yes my friend... God is Good!" Again, my Kenyan friends showing me the gift of the powerful Hearts on Fire for our Lord in EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE!

My heart is truly touched as I pray that the JOY, and the meaningful touch of the Kenyan family I now share may truly remind me to keep my heart on fire for the Lord to show his power through my touch as they showed me in each and every circumstance!

[John 15:10-12](#) <sup>10</sup>If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup>My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

Thanks be to God! Amen!

You heard three incredible testimonies of what God is doing in Kenya and how God molded us while being overseas. Rest of the team is looking forward to sharing their experiences and testimonies as well during the Kenya presentation following the service (at 11:15).

I want to make sure that we understand that here, too, in Springfield and in each our lives, God is calling us and actively working within, around, and through us. Let me remind us the focus text for this morning:

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the human heart conceived,  
what God has prepared for those who love him”—  
these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

When we were leaving for Kenya, we had various expectation of what God was going to unveil to us, yet none of us were prepared for what God had in store. It did not matter if it was one’s first time, second time, or fifth time being in Kenya, God revealed to us through the Holy Spirit a glimpse of what God is witnessing in humanity: the good, the bad, and the need. The urgency and the need of sharing God’s love with one another, to expound the gospel of the Good News, and to bring hope in God -which means having confident expectation of what God has promised through God’s faithfulness – to the world and to each person we encounter was pressed into my heart.

I bought my hat thinking I do not want to burn and having a life-time guarantee, I will be worry-free to use it in the wild. Well, this hat too came back home changed; its goal is not to simply cover me from the sun, but to remind me throughout its and my life-time of a time when I was in Kenya: faces, kindness, and most importantly many smiles on people’s faces which were shared with me during our time together in the wilderness called life.

Then I realized that we don’t need to look far for something to share the gifts of God’s faithfulness revealed to us in our lives. A photo of our beloved ones in our wallet or our cellphone home screens, a jewelry or item that has been passed on in the family, or even a scar or a limp in a walk; just like Jacob who wrestled with God, they can remind us to share about God with those around us. God has already revealed to us through the Spirit, even the depths of God, of how much God loves us. It is us that is responsible to carry the word to the world. Amen.