

Dedication Sunday, August 12, 2007, Limuru Home for Girls

Sermon: "Finding a Place Called Home"

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 126

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:13-16

Epistle: 1 Peter 4:7-11

By the Reverend Tom Cramer

Limuru, Kenya

## Greeting

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Muriega! Bwana asifiwe!

Mr. Moderator, Leaders of the Presbytery of Limuru, and especially *all the members of the Women's Guild* who had the inspiration to build this Home for Girls, please receive greetings from the Presbytery of Los Ranchos and the mission teams that are present in this place. We are honored to share this worship service with you, and we feel your warm welcome as a sign of God's grace in our lives.

**Let us pray:** May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

## Accompanying the Poor

The Dutch priest, Henri Nouwen, who has spent time among the economically poor in Latin America, writes:

**"The poor who walk along the roads and through the deserts and rough places of this world call me to humility. . . Often I look up into the clouds and daydream about a better world. But my dreams will never bear fruit unless I keep turning my eyes again and again back to the earth and to all those people walking their long fatiguing walks and inviting me to accompany them."**

I find in these words both a challenge to, and a description of, myself and other Christians who dream about a better world.

### **All Human Pain and All Human Joy is Connected**

I grew up in Southern California with every advantage a child could be given. I had a mother and father who loved the Lord and loved children; in fact, they had eight of us! I was educated at some of America's finest schools and was coached in athletics by Christian coaches who asked me if I heard Christ knocking on the door to my heart. I had Sunday school teachers who taught me the about the heroes of our faith, about Abraham and Sarah, about Ruth and Moses. But perhaps the most important thing about my childhood is that my parents taught me that all human pain and all human joy is connected.

The tears of an orphan child are no different than my daughter's tears. The wounded heart of someone who has been betrayed by a friend is no different if they live in Kenya or America. The sense of emptiness and loss in one's home after the death of one's spouse is the same for all who have pledged their love and bodies to a bride or a groom.

### **We are All Rich and Poor**

All human pain is connected. All human need is connected. But we have so structured our world to believe that some are rich and some are poor, some are in need and others have it all together.

The truth about the Kingdom of God, as Jesus speaks about it, is that we are all rich **and** poor. Some of us may build walls of pride around ourselves so that we don't have to face our need. Some of us just keep busy so that we don't have to ask the big questions of life about who we are or where we're going. Others of us are told that we are inferior and must accept a certain station of life that we will never be prepared to

climb out of. The stories we tell ourselves become a prison that keep us from life as God intended it to be.

### **Partnership Helps us Face our Own Poverty**

So the first thing we learn from each other as we enter into partnership is to reject any story that is not God's story. The wonderful benefit of being together in ministry from such different places and cultures is that we come face-to-face with our own poverty. We learn that we all need to be developed and we all need to be transformed.

There is no way that we can imagine what it is like to be an orphan girl on the streets of Limuru. We don't know what it's like to go days without food or to cry night after night without anyone to dry our tears. We don't know what it's like to walk barefoot on cold winter streets looking for a place to lay our heads.

But our sisters and brothers of Limuru connect us with that reality, not as something that can't be changed or that leads to despair, but as something to overcome as a demonstration of God's power to redeem even the most tragic of circumstances.

### **A House is Not a Home**

As we seek to build a Home for Girls together, we come face-to-face with our own poverty. We can have a roof over our heads, but still no place to belong. We may have roomfuls furniture and big kitchen, but no motivation to get up in the morning. We can have a mansion on a hill, but no one to share it with, no warmth and no human touch.

From the very beginning as partners from Los Ranchos and Limuru we knew we would learn from each other. In fact, we agreed from the start that we both had much to give and much to receive. So along the way we have submitted ourselves to each other's leadership. Sometimes

we have needed to talk through the night to come to an understanding of each other, but in the speaking and listening, we have seen more clearly what God wants for his children.

Building a home is much different than building a house. A house is a place built of stone or mortar. A home is a place made from love and kindness, faith and hope.

### **An Example of Something We've Learned**

One example of something we have learned from our sisters and brothers from Limuru is to praise to God for even the smallest gifts of each day. You stop to give thanks to God for bringing us from here to there in our vans, for giving us some tea to drink in the morning and some bread to eat, and for the strength to meet together. You've taught us to sing our way out of the cold and dreariness of a Limuru winter. Indeed, you've taught us that children of God can praise their way out of almost any situation or struggle.

The Apostle Paul says in Romans 2:2, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will."

The people of Limuru have been instruments to change our minds about what God can do through people of faith. It is easy to believe that we have no power over the way things are and we can't play a major role in the suffering of this world. But coming together with you makes us realize that there are other options to the way we think about our circumstances, options of hope and courage.

### **A Day of Partnership**

The other day, our teams from California went to the Presbyterian College. Excuse me, as of Friday it is the Presbyterian University or East Africa, Amen?!

We were working side-by-side with our Limuru brothers and sisters, sorting two shipping containers full of orphanage supplies and medical equipment. Just to give those of you who weren't there an idea of how many supplies two shipping containers holds, the items filled the entire dining hall of the university with medicines and medical equipment **alone**. Never mind that we also shipped three lorries-full of linens, clothes, toys and school supplies for the Limuru Home for Girls.

We must have looked like an ant colony that had found its way into a kitchen filled with leftover sweets. We never stopped lifting, never stopped moving until the final medicines were put in their place, until the final box of school supplies and beddings were loaded onto the lorries and headed to their final destinations.

No one will forget that day. The ancient Egyptians may have built the pyramids as tombs for their **dead** kings and queens, but the real wonder of the world is the children of God reaching out across the oceans and across the continents to clothe, heal, and redeem all families of the world. The pyramids are a place for the dead; together, the children of God are building homes for the living.

### **Emily's Story**

Something happened that day that I think offers a word picture of how God works in our lives. My 14-year-old daughter, Emily, was in the dining commons sorting through medicines with the doctors and medical personnel. Like the rest of us, she had just flown in from summer in California, where it is sunny and warm every day, to winter

in Limuru, where we find it just a bit cold and damp; well, to be honest with you, terribly cold and damp!!!

Wind was blowing through the dining hall because the doors had to be left open for all the boxes of medical supplies and equipment to pass through. As Emily was sorting, she must have become so cold it caught the attention of one of our sisters from Limuru. The woman came over to Emily, took off a shawl that was wrapped around her own shoulders, and placed it over Emily's head, making a little tent of heat. Then she hugged Emily and began rubbing her head and shoulders and back to make warmth from the friction of her moving hands.

Those of us who were going in and out and saw her in the corner thought it was a little strange to see someone at the end of the room hiding in her own little tent, but we were too busy to make much of it. Later that night at our devotions, Emily told our team that the woman had seen her shivering in the corner, so she walked over to her and without telling Emily what she was going to do, placed the shawl over Emily's head.

But here's the part that got to me. The way my daughter spoke of that moment later on was in terms of adoption, that she had been adopted by this woman, who even later that afternoon introduced Emily as her "daughter." To have been noticed in a crowded room, to have been seen shivering as others passed hurriedly by, was to find warmth in a foreign place, to find a hug of welcome in a foreign land.

### **Interpretation**

The pyramids of Egypt have nothing on the girls homes or dispensaries of Kenya, or anyplace for that matter, where followers of Jesus Christ desire to build a kingdom not out of stones but out of hugs, and smiles, and real help for people in need. The Kingdom of God is not

for dead kings and queens laid to rest in pyramids, but for Kenyans and Americans, and for all the children of the world who need to be warmed by the grace and love of Jesus Christ.

The saying is sure that “the ground is level at the foot of the cross,” so whether we’re children of America, Brazil, China, or Kenya, we need someone to throw a shawl over our heads and tell us we are loved, not because of anything we deserve, but because we’re cold and shivering and in need of a Savior.

### Closing

Today, receive that shawl. Receive that touch from God, for in the end, every tear will be wiped away and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away”—God is making all things new (Revelation 21:4).

Heaven is not a someplace you go when you die. The disciple John, writing from Island of Patmos, makes this clear in the *Book of Revelation* when he writes, “Now the dwelling place of God is with men and women, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be *with* them and he will be their God” (Revelation 21:3).

Heaven is a restored earth, clothed by God’s grace. It begins here and now. It’s a home for girls in Limuru Presbytery where those who shiver in the cold will find a roof over their head and a place to call home.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted,” says the Lord. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. . . Blessed are the merciful for they shall be shown mercy . . . Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 5: 4, 6, 7, 1).

May God add his blessing to his word. Amen and Amen.