

Pray for Kenya 2022/2 26th. March

[This Prayer Letter is especially dedicated to those of you who have stayed the course with us in the decades of ministry in Kenya.]

Dear Brethren,

After a wait of more than 2 years I was able to visit Kenya again from 24th. February to 17th. March. It was a very full three weeks as I did not want to squander the opportunity afforded. My specific objective was to visit Christians and contacts that I have known for decades, and the Lord graciously helped me to do this. I suppose this is part of the legacy of having studied the history of the work in Kenya for more than the past year in order to write the book. I wanted to encourage them, and be encouraged by them. One of the blessings of long life is to meet again those one has not seen for many a year and to rejoice together in how faithful and merciful the Lord has been.

Trinity Baptist Church, Nairobi

'Retirement' in Kenya has its own set of struggles. It had always been the practice that those who worked in towns would relocate to the rural area from where their wider family hails. So it was a priority when working to build a 'house back home' in which to live upon retirement. The concern for the Christian will be whether there is a good church in which to worship and serve. The retirement age was 55 because the populace was so youthful. Not many have had sufficient savings to be able to live on a pension without doing something to generate income. So people would continue to seek work as a consultant or set up a business. However, we long that older brethren will stay on and devote themselves to the life of the church in a way they had not been able when working. What a blessing to see brethren age, mature, and have a firm trust in the Lord to the very end. For this reason I was invited to lead a live-streaming workshop on the subject of 'Living Faithfully for Jesus in Your Old Age'.

So a number of brethren are considering what to do in terms of location for the rest of their lives. A couple of families want to give themselves to service in the church. Others are knowing the restrictions old age puts upon us in the form of memory loss. Sister *Monica*, whom I have known for 40 years, has a big problem of forgetfulness. But, in God's providence, it meant that I had my first ever opportunity to talk with her husband about the gospel!



Monica

Of course, difficulties can beset families of any age.



Oldest couple



Sister *Ruth* had been working in West Africa as a doctor, contracted covid-19, and on arrival back in Kenya had acute kidney failure. It has been a very long road to recovery. One son had been laid off as a pilot, and another suffered a heart attack. How quickly one's 'fortunes' can be reversed, but in it all they give thanks to God for the invaluable spiritual lessons they have learned through such trials.

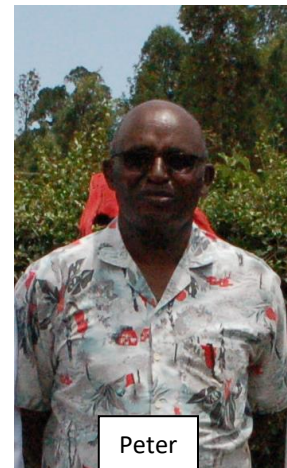
Miathene, Meru

Meru was the first place I went to in Kenya in 1968 to teach in Miathene Secondary School. We were able to spend a weekend here. About 30 years ago a local church was established.



One of the Elders of the church is *Paul Kianji* with whom I taught from the beginning. He and his wife were later converted through Bible studies we held in the area, and I again stayed in 'my room' in their house.

Peter Mukuccia had been one of my students in 1970 with whom I had been close. He chose to become a Methodist minister but I believe continues to cling to the gospel of grace. He rose to being a 'bishop' before retirement. He came to our Sunday worship and it was so encouraging to renew fellowship. The church in Miathene has been through many leadership struggles over the years, so it was good to visit the older



brothers and sisters had had been so faithful despite the problems.

M'Ichengi is probably around 80 years old and still very active although we wonder having suffered from serious ulcers. Many years ago I remember preaching on the 21:28-32) and after he came the first son, but is now a he has been to this day. He faithful stalwarts in the



80 years old and still very how he keeps going ulcers. Many years ago I two sons (Matthew to tell me he had been follower of Christ, which has been one of those church.

Rendille

We first met with Rendille people in Nairobi 25 years ago and started visiting the area from where they come in north Kenya in 1998. I have visited the area at least 25 times over the years and have got to know many people. Although interest has been shown, we have seen

few conversions. As this could well have been my last time there I wanted to talk to such contacts and to beseech them to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation.

Sokoteey was the first place in Rendille where we started Sunday worship about 20 years ago. *Lkupes* attached himself to us and professed faith, a seemingly costly thing for him to do. He occupies the position as 'the guardian of traditions in the village' yet told a gathering of leading men that he has forsaken traditions for Christ. One thing that had brought me favour was that when I met them they had been childless for a number of years but now (through prayer?) they have a number of children, the first being named 'Underhill' of course. After a few years they have seemed empty words and he now has a problem with alcohol. We met him obviously inebriated but it was my opportunity to plead with him with the utmost seriousness to abandon his drink before he destroys himself and ends up in hell. When he said he would give up right now, I told him he could not, and only Jesus could give him the ability. His wife said that when she saw me arrive, unannounced, she cried with joy as if her mother had come. May the Lord have mercy on them.

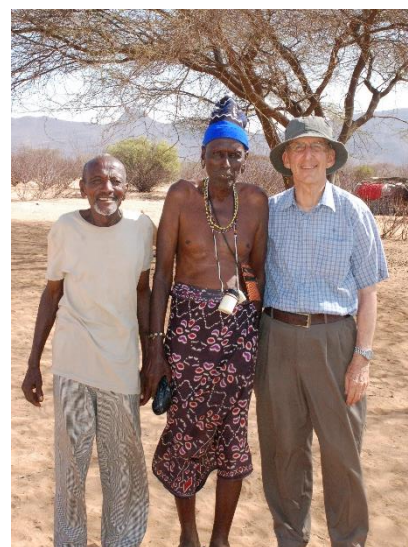


Leparkerei

In the same village we met up with *Leparkerei*, a totally different sort of man, respectful, even regal, and measured. Our close ties formed when one of his sons was bitten by a puff adder and I went to collect him from where he was looking after the animals to bring him home to be cared for by his mother. Previously another son had died from such a snake bite. I sought to plead with him to turn to Christ away from the vain traditions inherited from his fathers. Though a totally

uneducated man he gave a very reasoned defence of what we call African Traditional Religion (ATR). 'This is what we have always done, and God has blessed us. It has been a time of biting drought but recently we had some little rain that provided relief for our animals and some leafy shade under the trees (how thankful to God for small mercies).' He told me he could not leave the traditions because of fear of rejection by the community. But he agreed that if God himself told him to leave them he would. My response was, 'God has just spoken to you through me!' May the Lord open his eyes.

At the village of Lekuchula I met up with *Limongoi* with whom I have been talking since 1998. We called him the rich man, with so many animals, camels, cows, donkeys, sheep and goats. They have all gone with the first-born son and he is 'alone'. I asked him what he thinks I have been teaching him these past 20 years. Remember such are totally uneducated. He replied that I have been telling him to be righteous. Everywhere isn't this the response, one of salvation by works? Of course I replied that I have been bringing the message about Christ because none of us can attain that righteousness. I again urged him to leave his traditions for Christ, but he had the usual defence that we have received these from our forefathers. It was so heart-warming to hear evangelist Nadesol (left) also weigh in and plead with him to do what he has done in turning his back on useless things.



Space does not allow me to tell you of Lasantan and Leibor, and of two ladies Ntito and Nduruba; of Leeba and Timo at Nahgaan village; all of whom who have made some sort of profession of Christ. I write 'some sort' advisedly, as the tell-tale sign of tradition is always found above the entrance to the hut, a leafy branch that proclaims the sooriyo sacrifice has been performed. It is universal. When challenged we are told, it was put there by the village leaders. It is so costly to stand against traditions, but it will come by God's powerful grace.

But I do want to tell you about Eysimardana and his wife Mbaso. They are the first traditional couple that we know of to really leave the traditions. When it was clear that our brother Eysimardana was to pass from this world he was taken back to his village of Nebeey in charge of his first-born son. He died in January and was buried next to the hut in the village. We went to visit the widow, now dwelling amongst pagans some miles away from our meeting place. We advised her to return to live amongst her fellow Christians. She said she will do so when the village moves (as it does regularly). She finds this fitting as this is where her husband is buried. But what about the traditions performed to honour the grave of the deceased? She does not do them. I was told of Eysimardana's last words, that I should take care of the grandson, Dibo, who had stayed with them. This is what I wrote when I heard of his passing to glory.

On Monday (10/1) Eysimirdana passed from this life into eternity. You almost definitely do not know him and you don't even recognize such a name. Probably few of his own Rendille people, apart from his clan members, have heard of him. So why should I draw your attention to this? Two reasons:

(1) He was a believer, one of the very few traditional men from the Rendille people who professed Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour. What had it cost him to make this profession? Everything. The Rendille of north Kenya have many traditions which are held essential to observe if one is to remain in the community. They live in circles of easily moveable huts and to fail to keep traditions such as sooriyo means expulsion from the circle when it moves. But in a community ordered society this is unthinkable. But it is what Eysimirdana did. So he had to leave his Nebeey clan and come to live in the church plot and be supported by his fellow Christians. Like his Saviour he was rejected of men. But also like his Saviour he was a beloved son of God. So much so, on Monday he was taken to glory. "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." Eysimirdana owned next to nothing, and had no education, but he had the most precious thing of all, eternal salvation with Christ.

(2) As regards the world he was completely insignificant. There were just a small handful of people around his burial site and he is already forgotten by almost all. Jesus told of two men who died. He tells of a rich man who died and was buried and we probably should imagine a fitting send off to one who had been "clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day". Then there was Lazarus, a poor man, covered with sores, whose hope was just to receive something that fell from the rich man's table as he lay outside his gate, and for the dogs to lick his sores. Jesus says he died but does not mention a burial, only that he had the far greater blessing of being taken to Abraham's side. No one saw it happen with Eysimirdana, but by faith we know it to be true. Praise the Lord! Better to be an Eysimirdana than the richest man on earth.

Many contacts of about 20 years ago continue to serve the Lord. Godana and Nadesol have been serving as evangelists in Korr all this time. They have been joined by Ogom and recently by Silamo who spent a couple of decades in Nairobi. Two others have their own independent ministries but were initially converted through TBC: Boniface In Sakadala, and Stephen in Lontolio.

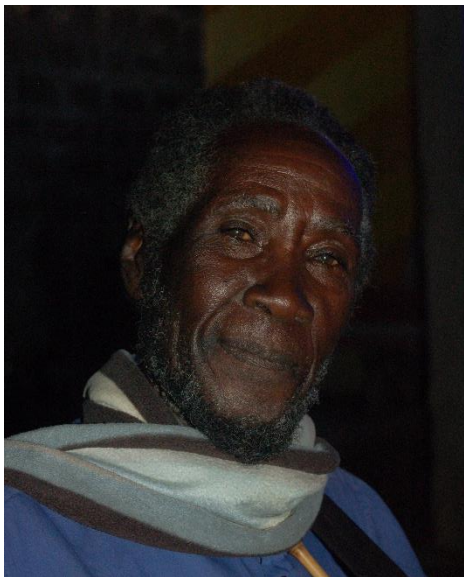


Eysimardana & Mbaso outside their hut in the premises of TBC Korr in 2017

Others



There were a few brethren not part of the ministry of TBC that I was able to meet, having known them before TBC even was thought of! (1) *Stevenson & Bilha Ngatia*. Stevenson was one of the first Christians I met on coming to Kenya in 1968. What an encouragement he was to me at that time, a young man in a new country. He spent his life in coffee research, and spiritually his background is the East African Revival. On the Sunday I preached in TBC he came together with his son and daughter-in-law.



(2) *Benson Kariuki*. Benson also became a Christian in 1975. At that time he knew no English and I was learning Kiswahili. I would go to visit him armed with a Swahili Bible. If I did not know a word in Swahili I would think of where it is in the English Bible then look up how it is translated into Kiswahili. In God's providence, dear Benson has had a very hard life, yet once again I found him full of the joy of the Lord. Early on he lost his left arm to cancer. His wife left him with the children. His brothers turned against him and dispossessed him. He is now basically destitute depending on the little the Government gives to the aged monthly. He just wanted a little cash from me so he could buy some chickens and make a little more money from them. What a privilege to know such a saint who is so loved by the Lord.

(2) *David & Shipprah Kuria*. What overwhelmed me was that ministering to David was a ministry that multiplied, for he has 10 children. All his many sons are church elders, or prospective ones. David was converted in Thika in 1975, with a trade union background in the local cloth mills. He wanted to train for the ministry under me, but sadly the ministry in Thika abruptly terminated and we went our separate ways. He devoured the literature I gave him and grew into a mature, serious minded Christian leader.



Trinity Pastors' College (TPC)

The initial reason for going at this time was to teach in the TPC, where over 4 days I taught them about Preaching. One can teach all the principles and give plenty of examples, but I feel that preaching is best taught by example. I trust that my two sermons on the Sunday, where they were present, fleshed out in practice what I taught them.

Four started the studies in January.

- (1) Alphonse Maneno is a trainee pastor from Kiatuni, a church we helped to plant 30 years ago and which is now independently registered.
- (2) David Chemolok is from Chepkinagh, Pokot, and has trained as a teacher. He is a son of the pastor there, Andrew Chemolok.
- (3) William Siwanyang is from Kapkewa, Pokot. It is so encouraging to have these two from Pokot, an answer to prayer.
- (4) Martin Kimiti is from TBCN. Please pray that these men will be filled with the Spirit to preach the word truthfully and in converting power.



Alphonse David William Martin

Once again, thank you for your fellowship in the gospel, and your prayers for the kingdom of God in Kenya.

In the service of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Keith Underhill

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