

## The Church Alive - A living Church for A Living Lord

We sang it. Blest be The Tie that Binds, our hearts in Christian love. Yes! And now I want to share with you some music out of Africa, songs that share the simple heart of our faith, the faith professed so wonderfully already this morning by the confirmands in their statements... the faith that guided the disciples in their witness to the world, that led people to plant this Church in this place 137 years ago, that faith that continues to guide us, inspire us, and call us to be witnesses for Christ, here, and yes, half a world away.

Listen for a moment to voices that sing the message of our faith...

Eko Eko Habamba, Eko Eko Habamba, Eko Habamba a Jesu...

There's no one, there's no one, like Jesus. There's no one, there's no one like Jesus - We've walked, and we've looked, and we've turned all around, but There's no one, no one like Jesus.

And - Yes - I do... we do .... Believe in Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me.

Jesus Christ, Lord of Life, may the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your faithful and loving people, be reflections of your truth, and light for our living this day and always. Amen.

Last Sunday morning as you worshipped here, I was flying over the continent of Africa... and out of the plane's window there was, from 30,000 feet up, a great darkness over all of Africa that I could see. Unlike America where lights sparkle from horizon to horizon during night flights, over Africa, only here and there could any light be seen. A glimmer of light here, a pin prick there, against the vast darkness.

Sometimes, sometimes, our faith, and the light of its promises, can seem something like that, even very much like that, a light almost lost in the darkness.

Some wonderful things are happening in Africa - in the lives of the children whose voices you heard, for example. They have heard and seen some examples of God's love in Christ at work in their lives. And they have become believers and followers who sing God' praise.

We hope that they saw some of this in the medical care, the medicines, and the Christian teaching we tried to share with them in Esikiwene, South Africa. We hope we helped to fan the flame of their faith a little brighter. They certainly did that for us.

Sometimes, sometimes, our world, even our brightly lit, 24/7 busy little corner of the world, even here, it can seem not unlike what I saw out the plane's window. Darkness. Our world is a world darkened with the pain and stain, and the sadness and sickness of sin. And the light of faith can seem dim.

Against the darkness that still shadows Africa, deepened now by the world oil crisis - for us gas prices mean pain, for many in Africa they mean starvation - And the pain in Africa is deepened daily because of AIDS and the behaviors that spread the disease.

Against the darkness – and every thing that causes the darkness, the light of faith, of Christian love, of compassion and care for the sick and the well, that light shines. In Africa. We hope we brightened the flame a bit.

Maybe we did. There was Tzebo, 22. A tall handsome young man whose father died of AIDS, and who cares for his mother who is dying of AIDS, and his two sisters and brother. And Tzebo teaches the Bible and Christian Behavior to the teenagers in the village, and he is being helped to go to college because he wants to become a preacher. He is a light of hope for his people.

And Samke, a 19 year old woman who was my interpreter as I tried to fit glasses for people and who led prayer in worship and hopes to become, with some college help, an electrical engineer. Lights in the darkness...

And - yes - light in our own kind of darkness. Our kind of darkness, where cancer kills too young, and where too many young children don't get the love and care they need. Where honest people lose their homes to less than honest lenders and financial CEO's. Where our leaders fail us, with no moral fiber, and our cities are falling apart, and to many of our families, too. And where we joke, is it a joke I heard, about the fact that the next President will be the one candidate whose mis-statements ( and they used to be called lies I think), and mistakes of judgment are least known. Not the most encouraging news.

Is there Light for us, in our darkness, is there? Yes... O yes. For sure. I saw it in Africa. Yes, in Esikewenie. But even more I see it in your lives. I see it here where I live. I see the the light of Christ at work in your lives.

In the young people you are raising, and you are helping your church to guide. In your support of mission, whether around the corner at Open Door, or a Habitat House this June in Pontiac. or at the Fort Street Soup Kitchen, or the Crane Centre in Uganda, or the Church in Xpujil, Mexico, or AIDS orphans in Honduras. Or your gifts of time in teaching, ushering, committee work, and faithful prayer and study.

And yes, Building to Share. Equipping your Church to serve more people more faithfully, more safely, in a place built to glorify God, and to help us enjoy anew the wonder of God's creation.

Darkness out there - yes, you know it. But we've been called by Christ to be his witnesses, to turn from darkness to light, and to share God's love, step by step by step, until every knee shall bend, and tongue confess, Christ as Lord.

We've been called out of darkness into the light, the light of eternal love, that shines from a cross, that we proclaim in our Baptism, and that we celebrate at a table - At a table where we remember the gift of God's love to us in Christ, and where, whenever we share these symbols of God's costly love with one another, we declare and demonstrate that love to the world.

Yes, there is darkness. But we know the light of God's love in the living Christ. And the darkness has not over come it. Because --- there's no one, there's no one, like Jesus. And I believe in Jesus Christ, my living Lord and my Savior. Amen.

David W. Robertson, Pastor