

April 10, 2007

So This is Easter

Fall has come. This is the most drizzly day we've had yet this year. Every one of us except Adam has a cold, so we're lying around with drippy noses listening to our drippy roof.

But it's actually rather nice. Today I baked granola and made applesauce. Neither of us has meetings, so we can stay home and catch up on some accounting paperwork and writing. And the kids are taking extra long naps.

It didn't feel much like Easter last weekend either. Again, it was rather chilly. The kids had a couple chocolate eggs, but no Easter baskets or bunnies.

We spent the weekend at a church conference several hours away. Most of our church, maybe seventeen people, went—everyone who could get away, and who could squeeze into the three vehicles owned by church members, including ours.

Our church was planted several years by Mxolisi (his English name is Welcome). The conference was held at the church he previously attended, and included members of several other churches that have since been planted out of the same original church. Being there helped me understand Mxolisi. I had always thought of him as a part of our community, when really living in our rural tribal area hours from his family is like a missionary trip for him too. The culture and language are the same, and some homes are similar, but there were also some very nice homes in the area of the conference. We stayed for the two nights of the conference with a well-off family in a fenced-in home much nicer than ours. They, like many others at the conference, spoke English fairly well also.

The "Sunday school" was impressive in its own way. Many children sat through hours and hours of church, but many would wander in and out. It rained much of the weekend, so often there were ten or more kids in a side room. When I went there with Phoebe and Zeke, usually I was the only adult, and always I was the only adult engaged with the kids. But amazingly, they didn't fight or get into much trouble—though it's hard to get into too much trouble in a room with nothing but a few chairs and tables.

They sat on my laps and tried teaching me Zulu from the few children's books we had packed. Phoebe sat for a good twenty minutes while some kids pet her blond hair and put it into a pony tail. Many of the boys did cartwheels and handsprings, and Zeke watched in awe. Soon he was joining in, throwing himself on the floor, rolling around in dirt, and laughing uproariously. All the kids thought he was great entertainment.

Still, seeing our little band of 17 fellow church-members amidst this crowd of a couple hundred made me thankful for these people, *our* church. I'm thankful for our lack of

sound system (the music all weekend was near deafening), and thankful for the general humility I see in these people.

My favorite moment came when a seventeen year-old young woman named Sli stood up to sing. She often leads worship at our church, but compared to the ladies who were shouting and clapping all over the stage for much of the conference, she's nothing flashy.

She stood up, bowed her head, closed her eyes, and let the music come from somewhere deep in her soul.

"What do the words mean?" I whispered to a woman near me.

The woman offered her rough translation. "It's like, 'I'll hold onto this dirty cross, this old cross. And someday trade it for a crown.'"

The melody was different, but the words seemed to match "The Old Rugged Cross," a hymn I remember as one of my father's favorites.

The I noticed one woman in the front row had stood and begun to sway to the music, completely unselfconscious. I recognized her as Nomusa, a woman from our church whose parents both died recently, leaving her alone with an unfaithful husband and several children.

It wasn't the first time I had been struck by Nomusa's ability to weep before God. Once Adam and I walked into a church service late and noticed Nomusa off to one side, kneeling, with sunlight pouring in through a window lighting up the lines of tears on her face. More than once she has stood before the church to deliver short testimonies. While I don't understand the details, I hear again and again, "God is great, brothers and sisters. God is kind, gracious, and good."

So Nomusa stood and danced, and Sli sang. I wished I could take the two on the road to lead worship in every church across the world. What a beautiful pair. Eventually others stood and joined the singing. Soon we were one mass of people, dancing and swaying, many weeping, and singing in Zulu, "I'll cling to that old rugged cross, and exchange it some day for a crown."

That right there was Easter for me.