

February 3, 2007

Topsy-turvydom

As an example, take the fact that we just learned that our old house will now be unoccupied for another three months. But now it's too late. We've already moved.

I keep having to laugh at the irony. For those of you following our home saga, you may remember how we came to Africa, fell in love with our quirky old house on the organic farm, then found we suddenly have to leave. We're left with only our very last choice for housing. But by the time we get there, we find it surpasses every other option we thought was better. The God who orchestrated this is funny.

And that same God has turned over so many things in our life here. We went back to the U.S. over Christmas and told people how much we treasured our church, with the bilingual pastor Mxolisi. Then we come back to find Mxolisi has left for six months. But then we find the church has grown stronger and brighter in taking on it's own preaching and leadership.

Last Sunday Adam was asked to preach. Sitting in the congregation of a couple dozen people listening to my husband, I was so proud of him. He shared the story of how we came to Africa, and how the Bible continues to challenge us to face poverty not as a curse, but as an opportunity for blessings. He shared openly our hopes to stay with this church for our whole time in this country, and the congregation applauded. People kept nodding and mm-hmming and after church shook our hands more warmly than ever. I said to myself, even if nothing else ever comes of our time in Africa, that was a good day.

Incidentally, while Adam preached, Phoebe played outside with some older children. When I came to find her she said, "Wanna go see the goats?" I did, and when we got there, she said, "I even got to ride one. The big kids put me up on it and held me and it just walked around a little." Not your usual Sunday school experience!

In addition to our house and church being topsy-turvy, we found out on Wednesday that our old Bible study with some white South African friends is folding. We loved the people in that group, but we too disliked stress of driving forty minutes to meet. So honestly we're excited to "shop around" for something to balance out our connections to white South Africans, and there are many Bible Study we hope to try.

I imagine our staff and clients are feeling a bit topsy-turvy too. They had just come to love and trust Betsy, and now here we come in her place. Things change, and change is frightening in countries where life itself is fragile.

When one thing goes, another comes to fill its place. Some new blessings will never precisely fit the old hole. In our new setting I haven't yet met any friends as close as Jabu, my old neighbor. And I miss our mountain view, even though I have a gurgling

river within walking distance now. But I'm willing to wait while life shifts and brings new blessings each day.

Business Empowerment of Our Little Youth

On Fridays Phoebe and Zeke spend the afternoon at a friend's house while Adam and I hold our staff meeting. Afterward driving home, Phoebe asked me yesterday, "What did you do at the meeting today?"

"We did what we usually do. We help big kids start businesses." The previous week I had explained to her a little to her about what a business is.

She thought for a minute. "I sort of have a business." When I asked what kind, she explained, "I make things. Like out of toothpaste and tractors and flashlights and things." It's true. She does spend most of her time building things out of unlikely building blocks. Earlier that day she had made "a man" out of a flashlight, a washer, a tube of toothpaste, a triangular block, and a toy truck. It didn't look much like a man to me, but she did manage to stick everything together.

"It's not really a business though," she went on. "Because I don't sell things like at a store. Maybe when I'm bigger I can do that. Like when I'm six."

I told her six seemed like a good goal for selling things at a store. "Yeah," she agreed, "right now I can just practice."