

## **God Calling – Tanzania**

John 3:16/ Matthew 25:34-40

July 10, 2011

Bonita Wood

### **(Start with slide of Africa – God Calling)**

There is a story that starts out like this:

There was a man walking along the beach.

In the distance the man sees a little boy walking towards him.

Every so often the little boy stops, bends down and picks up something and throws it into the ocean.

On the beach where the man and little boy are walking are thousands and thousands of starfish washed up from the ocean and just lying on the beach.

When I first arrived in Africa and we started our drive out to Tarime, we had to drive past the slums of Nairobi.

The slums of Nairobi are the second largest slums in Africa.

I had never seen such poverty on such a massive scale before.

I have to confess I was overcome with sadness and truly with shock.

I never dreamed poverty could look like that – so hopeless.

Then we headed on out to Tarime – the whole 9 hours worth of driving after 20 some hours of flying.

But as we drove along we passed hut after hut and – well you saw the towns on the slide show. Each town was very much like the rest.

And again I was struck by the overwhelming poverty.

### **(show slide of town)**

We made our way to Tarime and on to Angel House and the picture didn't change too much. Everywhere we looked, there were those in need.

There was poverty on a massive scale.

I felt much like the man on the beach who was viewing the thousands and thousands of starfish washed up on the beach.

Where do you begin?

What can one person do?

How can I begin to help?

Lord, why did you call me here of all places?

(slide of Africa-God Calling)

As I sat in my bed that second night in Africa, reading the Bible and praying, those questions and others ran through my mind.

And I knew in the morning I would be preaching to a culture that I had no knowledge of, to a culture that had blown my mind and broken my heart in just 24 short hours, but also to a culture that was filled with God's children - just like me.

Then I recalled some passages of Scripture.

The first one is John 3:16. Many of you probably know this Bible verse.

Say it with me if you do.

*For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*

Jesus loved the whole world so much that he was willing to humble himself and die a criminal's death on the cross.

If he loved the world that much then perhaps I should love it more. I should love the people that he loved.

Maybe, just maybe, Jesus is calling all of his followers to take responsibility to do their part in loving this world that he died for, more.

We pray the Lord's pray which says:

**Your kingdom come, ON EARTH as it is in heaven.**

ON EARTH – Your kingdom come ON EARTH.

Johnny Cash sang a song that said – *You're so heavenly minded, you're no earthly good.*

Believing in Jesus doesn't just give us an insurance policy for when we die. Believing in Jesus is meant to be lived out here on earth.

And it is not just a private transaction between Jesus and us.

Richard Stearns who wrote "The Hole in Our Gospel" says this:

*"Being a Christian or follower of Jesus Christ, requires much more than just having a personal and transforming relationship with God. IT also entails a public and transforming relationship with the world."*

The kingdom of God here ON EARTH can only become a reality through the deeds and actions of His followers.

And that is not always easy.

We are called to love our enemies as ourselves, to forgive those who wrong us, to lift up the poor and downtrodden, to share with those in need, to proclaim the Good News, to live lives of sacrifice.

In short - to be radically different from how the world operates.  
 And my friends that takes more out of us than just privately retreating into our own lives and loving Jesus without doing anything for him.  
 Imagine if Jesus' remaining 11 disciples had done that after he had been crucified.

St. Teresa of Avila said this, *“Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion for the world is to look out; yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good; and yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now.”*

*For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son* to die for it, for you, for me, for Africa, for Europe, for Asia, ...

And he loved each of us so much that he sent us to go and be *Christ with skin on* so to speak.

The Apostle Paul said it like this, *“We are...Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.” 2Cor 5:20.*

God had called me to Africa, to Tarime, for this moment, for this point in time, for whatever reason He may have had in mind.  
 Therefore, I was going to do my best to be his ambassador and to allow him to use me in whatever way he chose.

The other passage of Scripture that God brought to my mind as I lay in bed that night were the words of Jesus – the words that our Care Ministries, our Matthew and Stephen Ministries here at church are based on.

*Matthew 25:34-40* which says this:

*Then the King will say to those on his right, “Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what’s coming to you in this kingdom. It has been ready for you since the world’s foundation. And here is why:*

*I was hungry and you fed me,  
 I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,  
 I was homeless and you gave me a room,  
 I was shivering and you gave me clothes,  
 I was sick and you stopped to visit,  
 I was in prison and you came to me.”*

*Then those sheep are going to say, “Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?” Then the*

*King will say, "I'm telling you the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me – you did it to me." (The Message Bible)*

Those words remind us that before we can fulfill the Great Commission to go into all the world and baptize others in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teach them God's commands, we must first make sure they can hear us.

And they can only hear us when their bellies are not rumbling and they have a roof over their heads and they know we genuinely care.

Frederick Faber said, "*Kindness has converted more sinners than zeal, eloquence or learning.*"

So I got up that Sunday morning and went and proclaimed the Good News as Christ's ambassador.

**(show slide of church service)**

And my mission teammates joined me that Sunday as together we sang, Jesus Loves Me, for the congregation.

We would spend the rest of our time doing all the things you heard the other servants speak of:

building a hostel, teaching at the school, giving treats to the children, teaching the kids chimes, learning the vision and hope from some of Angel House's leaders, embracing the culture, visiting some of the homes of the Tanzanians, sharing in their lifestyle, sharing our gifts from home that we had brought.

**In other words, we were loving them as Jesus loves them, by not just proclaiming the good news but by being the good news.**

At least I know that was and is the hope and prayer of the mission team.

It is our prayer that we lived out our lives there in such a way that those who we encountered will have caught a glimpse of God's character – His love, justice, mercy – through our words, actions and behaviors.

I had each of my mission teammates share with you how they knew God had called them on this particular mission team and how they were personally impacted by this mission.

Let me share with you how I was impacted personally by finishing the story I started with.

You see the story of the man and boy on the beach goes on to say this:

As the man neared the little boy, he realized that each time the boy bent over what he was picking up was a starfish. He would pick it up and toss it gently back into the ocean. When the man met up with the boy he said to him, “What are you doing?” The boy explained that he was tossing the starfish back into the ocean. The man said, “Yes I see that, but why are you doing that, how can you possibly think you are making a difference?” With that the little boy bent over, picked up a starfish and tossed it into the ocean. He turned to the man and said, “It made a difference to that one.”

When I looked at Africa through my eyes, I wondered how in the world would I ever be able to make a difference. There was just too much poverty, too much need, too much required to make a difference.

But Jesus showed me that He sent me to Angel House to indeed make a difference.

And I did, we did.

**(show slides of children)**

We made a difference to that one, and to that one and to that one.

You all helped to make a difference to that one and to that one.

*“Belief is not enough, Worship is not enough. Personal morality is not enough. Christian community is not enough. God demands more. When we commit ourselves to following Christ, we also commit to living out our lives in such a way that a watching world will catch a glimpse of God’s character – his love, justice, and mercy – through our words, actions and behaviors.”*

(Hole in the Gospel by Richard Stearns)

God called me to go to Africa, to go half-way around the world, to remind me that:

He calls me, he calls you – to go out, to proclaim the good news, **to BE the good news**, and to change the world, one life at a time.

**YOU ARE CHRIST’S AMBASSADORS!!!**

**Together may we help usher in “His Kingdom ON EARTH as it is in heaven.**