

Trust in God's Transforming Power

On Sunday 7th August, after a 48 hour journey from Kenya to UK (involving an interesting but not highly recommended flight with Ethiopian airlines) we flopped in front of the TV to catch up with a bit of news. We were confronted with scenes of youths rioting and destroying public property, and wondered which country was having problems now. Astonishingly we slowly gathered these were scenes from London! Over the next few days as the riots continued and spread to other cities in UK, it was hard to watch scenes of looting by young children and hear attitudes of having rights to "things" just because someone else has them. Even more shocking was seeing a group of teenagers robbing another teenager as he lay bleeding on the ground.

During this time we received several emails from our Kenyan friends and colleagues to check if we were alright or had been hurt in any of the violence. It was then we realised how the scenes we were seeing on TV were being shown around the world. We often get concerned emails from friends in UK asking if we are alright in Kenya, especially this happened during the post-election violence in 2007-8 and more recently during the drought of 2011. What struck us about emails the other way round, from Kenya to UK, expressing concern about our well being, was how small the world is, and how much goodness there is. People in Kenya, whilst in the middle of drought and many difficulties were worrying about our well being in UK.

It has indeed been a very difficult year here in Kenya and in Maua Methodist Hospital. The Horn of Africa has experienced its worst drought for 60 years, which has affected us both directly and indirectly. Somali refugees poured across the Kenyan border in huge numbers, massively overloading the largest refugee camp in the world, Dadaab. The Kenyan Government was concerned about security issues, which proved to be founded with the kidnapping of 2 Spanish doctors working at the camp culminating in the ongoing war with Somalia, or more specifically the terrorist organisation Al Shabaab.

Inflation in Kenya has soared over the year due to the drought, war expenses, and global economic instability with the Kenya shilling plummeting on global markets. Inflation is quoted at around 25% but in fact basic food prices have increased massively, some things like our most widespread staple commodity, maize flour, increasing up to 100%. Peasant farmers and pastoralists, who make up most of the population, have been worst affected as drought ruined many crops and took the lives of huge numbers of cattle. This forced these normally self-sufficient people to now buy the food they normally provide for themselves, but they lacked money to do so as they had nothing to sell, leading many to near or actual starvation.



Concerning the hospital, many of our drugs and medical supplies are imported and inflation has affected us very badly especially with the decline in value of the Kenya Shilling. This coming at a time when patients have little money to feed their families, leave alone pay hospital bills, has led to a drastic reduction in income for the hospital. Trying to pay staff salaries and keep up payments to drug suppliers has meant severe financial difficulties for the hospital. During the year many civil servants in Kenya have been on strike asking for pay rises due to the increased cost of living. The Government has given large pay rises to those working in the health sector, (although one wonders how the Government will sustain these salaries in the medium to long term, especially as aid from other countries is on the decline). The hospital has no ability to match these salary increases since costs have gone up and patients' ability to pay has gone down, and as a consequence many staff are leaving our employment to join the Government. Interestingly, as the doctors were on strike recently it has been the faith based organisations such as ours that have been providing most of the technical

health care, e.g. caesarean sections to the general population and one wonders what would have happened had hospitals like ours not been here.



On a personal level it has been a big year for both Claire and Barbara. We had 3 weeks leave in UK in August to catch up with family and friends. Barbara's niece Abigail got married in a splendid little 15th century church (and Barbara wore a very fancy fancy in her hair). Barbara's mum is doing well but as she approaches her 90th birthday is planning to move house to be nearer the town, amenities and family. This is especially important as she has been undergoing treatment for her vision and has had to reluctantly give up driving. Claire was able to be with all her family in N Ireland, and learnt of the expected arrival of a great nephew in mid-February 2012 (*please Mary don't call him Valentino as threatened!*).

In addition this year Claire had the big 50th and Barbara her 60th birthday. A combined celebration was had with 5 days spent in Tsavo West Game Park. We had a wonderful time, but most special was seeing a leopard by the dirt track, almost close enough to stroke (no we didn't, but Claire did stick a leg out of the car to manoeuvre a better position for the 'perfect' photograph – her leg is still intact). The leopard stayed for 45 minutes with just ourselves observing, no other tourists, what a privilege. When he did move off, we went another 200 metres down the track only to see lions mating. Wow, that was special.



We are also very blessed to live near Meru Game Park (20 miles away) and now there is a tarmac road we can even go for a Sunday afternoon trip. In September when we went the park looked desolate, the ground was bare and scarcely a leaf to be seen in a tree. It looked like there had been a fire and everything in its path destroyed – only there had been no fire, only drought. The rains started in October so one afternoon we went to see how "our" park was doing – some grass was appearing and a few buds could be seen on the trees, but the recovery was less than we had hoped. At the end of November we decided to take another quick trip and this time the transformation was unbelievable. Not only were the trees green, the grass had grown and was now flowering, but amongst this beautiful sight there sat a cheetah. God's world is truly stunning.



2012 looks a very uncertain year for Kenya and for us in Maua Methodist Hospital. We await the decision of the ICC in The Hague, about the 6 political leaders accused of being involved in the organisation of the post-election violence in 2007-8. Whichever way the verdicts go we are unsure of the repercussions. Our next general election due in 2012 is awaited in trepidation after our experience after the last election. So far parliament cannot even decide on the date of the election, March, August or December.

We thank God the drought is over, although weather patterns are so unpredictable we have no idea how things will be in 2012 and most of the population is highly dependent on the 2 rainy seasons. Inflation shows no signs of slowing down

(petrol increased 10p per litre in just the last 2 weeks), the teachers are threatening to go on strike again, and the Government has announced it will be hiring more health care workers in February making the future of our hospital even more uncertain.

It is easy to feel the way Meru Park looked during the drought, barren and devoid of hope. Yet we think about how our Hospital and Lion's Club in Maua responded to the local need during the drought. Together they raised money, bought food and distributed it to 500 families, benefiting a total of 1500 – 2000 people in Karimbene, 20 km from Maua. As our Hospital Chaplain commented, grown men were moved to tears (although not publically as that would never be allowed), seeing the gratitude of those who benefitted.



So blades of grass and buds of trees can be seen even in our situation, and as we celebrate the birth of Christ we remember, that through faith and trust in God, even the bleakest of situations can be transformed. Even where we are uncertain, we do not know the way forward, and things look impossible, we know that God can transform the parched and desolate ground to become green grass with purple flowers and a cheetah sitting in the middle!!



We wish you a blessed Christmas and a hopeful and Happy New Year.

Barbara and Claire