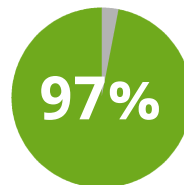


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Easter 2019 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo



GLEN & RITA CHAPMAN



SUPPORT PLEDGED



Easter 2019

Dear Friends,

Easter blessings to you! How amazing to know that believers all around the world are celebrating this special day today. And, in so many tongues! "Oh for a thousand tongues to sing, our Great Redeemer's praise..." As I was packed in closely today at our Kikongo church, I reflected on the many ways in which we express our joy around the world. Our congregation today spontaneously danced, sang, undulated high pitched African cries of joy, and gave voluntary offerings up front as they accompanied ten choirs (or was it eleven?) singing their special Easter songs. One of our student pastor's wives sitting next to me couldn't stay seated, she was so excited. Each time she sat down, she happily borrowed my fan and began vigorously fanning herself, only to find that the next choir number was better than the last one! Congregants all over the church popped up and down joyously singing along in no fewer than 4 different languages. Children from Sunday School each presented a Bible verse or Easter blessing, to which the congregation responded in Kituba, "He has risen, indeed!" As this Easter service is the main event of the day, and this is Africa, nobody was in any particular hurry. The pastor finally preached after about 3 hours...and then it happened... a tremendous rainstorm blew up. There was a sudden flurry as many of us women dashed out of church to run home to save clothes or manioc out drying in the sun. (Yes, me too.) Rain poured and thunder rolled, but it still didn't drown out the enthusiastic singing coming from the crowds in church. I'm not sure what time they finally finished! The afternoon is now drippy, somber and cool – just the sort of afternoon in which most people here find a cozy chair at home to sleep in.

As I write, Glen has preached at a village several hours away by bicycle. God willing, he will be home with his Easter story by the time the full moon begins rising tonight.

Love,

Rita

Glen's Easter Trip to Kimbai



Kimbai means « friendship ».

With Easter break, I decided to take a little trip to the villages. I used to get out a lot, but my responsibilities at the University don't allow me the time (or energy) to get out very much anymore. A marathon bike trip is always good for my soul, so Rita was happy to push me out the door and on my way.

The wife of our University administrator is the head nurse at Kimbai, so when I asked him about what village I should go to for the Easter service, he quickly offered Kimbai as my destination. Our administrator has a motor cycle, so he often makes the 37 km. trip.



On Saturday, I set out under the hot sun. April is normally a wet and rainy month, but it has been unusually dry, so there was lots of sand on the road. The roads are so poor these days that besides the sand there is lots of erosion, and overgrowth. Nevertheless, it took me about three and a half hours to peddle the distance. The UNIBAC Gospel Choir also sent a delegation. They normally have about a dozen members, but six were available to make the trip. They were dropped off by motorcycle a ways down the road where they had to walk the last 12 km.

I spent Saturday evening visiting people in the village while enjoying the moon-rise.

On Easter morning, we all gathered at the adobe brick and thatch church. One choir after another took their turn singing and dancing. Finally, it was my turn to preach. I spoke on Jesus as the "chief without borders", playing off of the organization "Doctors without borders". Most chiefs have a geographical limit to their jurisdiction. Most chiefs have a time limit to their term. Here in Africa, it is usually death that limits the time one is in authority. Most chiefs rule over a certain ethnic, tribal, or nationality. Jesus though is without borders. He is not limited geographically, nor to a certain people, nor to a certain time frame. The only border that Jesus cannot penetrate is our own hearts. He will not force his way to dominate us. He comes to us when we invite Him into our lives. I asked the people to break down the barrier keeping Jesus from having authority over their lives. Be like the "village of friendship" and be friends with Jesus.

During the service, three girls presented themselves as desiring to study theology at UNIBAC next year. One of the church elders prayed over them asking for God's blessing on their dream of becoming church leaders. That alone made my trip to Kimbai well worth it.

As the service progressed, we could hear the thunder getting louder and louder. The pastor seemed to be oblivious of the darkening skies. He wanted to follow the program he had planned complete with communion. I made a quick inspection of the thatch roof and decided I didn't want to be in the church when the storm hit. We got to the benediction, and I was getting ready to run off to seek shelter when the pastor motioned me to go out the back and shake people's hands. The first drops struck with the first hand shakes. I didn't care about protocol anymore, and ran off to the medical dispensary where I had been given a room. Since the dispensary has a tin roof, and a reception area, everyone followed me there too. There is nothing like a heavy rain on a tin roof. It is too loud to even talk.

After a couple hours, the brunt of the storm had passed and the elders of Kimbai wanted to have a talk with us. It is always part of the formality.

About 4:30, I asked to be excused so that I could begin my bike trek back to Kikongo. I just needed an hour of daylight to get past the worst stretch of the road. Once I got to the river, I figured I was familiar enough with the road to ride in the dark. The first part was pretty bad since all the elephant grass had blown over onto the trail, and it was soaking wet. I did manage to get to the river though at dusk and rode the rest of the way with my headlamp lighting the way. I told people that I would rather ride in the coolness after a rain than to wait and ride under the hot sun. The moonless African nights are pretty spectacular without any artificial lighting ... anywhere. This time of year, the Southern Cross constellation is at it's highest point in the night sky. By the time I got home, the eastern sky was aglow with the moon rising.

It was a great Easter adventure to get out of the office and experience the friendship of Kimbai.

Thank you for making our time in rural Africa possible.

Love,

Glen