

Changing The World

8-5-07

While we were in Kenya I kept a travel blog that many of you kept up with during our trip. I can't express enough thanks for the number of you who looked in on us, and the number of you who sent notes of support and encouragement. When all was said and done we had over 600 hits on our blog. Now, if you discount the 200 times that my mother visited the site...that's still a pretty nice number!

So, changing the world, eh? Whenever, this phrase or idea comes up, I feel a little like a contestant on the Miss America pageant..."I'd like to see World Peace." Frankly I admit, this idea of changing the world does seem a bit pollyannish. The problems we face in our everyday lives sometimes leave us jaded—cancer, domestic abuse, bankruptcy...whatever. These everyday problems can become paralyzing and leave us with the feeling that nothing we do could possibly make a difference. Then, you take problems in the context of today's message, the prospect of change or making a difference can be overwhelming or even seem plain silly. When you look at AIDS and poverty straight on...it's scary and mind boggling.

You have heard me say these things before...In our world today over 7,000 people die every day due to the complications of AIDS. In our world today, over 50,000 people—30,000 of whom are children—die due to extreme poverty...they simply don't get enough food to eat. In our world today, AIDS has created over 12 million orphans and the toll rises every day—every day.

So I'm standing in the office of the AMPATH hospital with Mike waiting to get our credentials. The AMPATH hospital is the AIDS hospital that we filmed in 2004. *Then* it was an incomplete structure waiting to host its first patient. Now, it is a fully operational unit that is the cornerstone of the IU-Kenya Partnership's ability to serve over 40,000 AIDS patients around Kenya. Anyway, I'm looking around the office and I notice this tattered piece of paper on the wall with the following quote...

When I was a young man, I wanted to change the world. I found it was difficult to change the world, so I tried to change my nation. When I found I couldn't change the nation, I began to focus on my town. I couldn't change the town and as an older man, I tried to change my family. Now, as an old man, I realize the only thing I can change is myself, and suddenly I realize that if long ago I had changed myself, I could have made an impact on my family. My family and I could have made an impact on our town. Their impact could

have changed the nation and I could indeed have changed the world.

Hey Mike...you see that? "Umm hmm...I see it." Sometimes you really have to whack me over the head before I get things. You see, the night before my colleague Brian Durand, who is the pastor of youth ministries at St. Luke's, led a devotional and asked all of us what have we learned about ourselves on this trip so far. The kids gave these incredible answers. One right after another they reeled off these amazingly articulate expressions of their life transforming experiences. I just kind of sat there, hoping the subject would change before it got to be my turn...well, no such luck. What have I learned about myself? I've learned that I'm very consistent...things don't really dawn on me until waaaay after the fact. What I mean is that, I feel like we are a sponge here. You guys are able to soak up everything that is happening as it is happening...me? Well, I feel like I'm the other side of the sponge. What happened here...the real impact won't occur to me until long after we are gone and the sponge gets wrung out.

You know, I should know better. I've been to Kenya before, I've experienced this before, but it took a second trip, and kids pointing out the blindingly obvious for me to really get it. What these kids were describing weren't big things—they were small things—small things that were turning their worlds upside down—changing and transforming them. God was speaking to these kids through the orphans at Neema Children's Home.

And, when these kids—any of us—allow ourselves to be transformed, God smiles knowing that real change is just around the corner. And, in fact, that is exactly the way real change has occurred in Kenya. Individuals experiencing personal life transformation and using that to affect change...one person at a time.

Many of you may be familiar with the name Dr. Joe Mamlin. Joe Mamlin is the field director of the AMPATH program of the IU-Kenya Partnership. Joe had a long and successful career with the IU School of Medicine.

He was in a senior teaching and administrative role nearing retirement. As he looked around, he saw new leadership emerging and decided the best way to let new leadership grow was to get out of the way. So he and his wife Sarah Ellen decided they would go to Kenya to visit IU School of Medicine's partnership with Moi University. In 1989 the partnership formed as a simple medical exchange so that American students could experience how medicine was practiced in Kenya and vice versa. However, when Joe arrived in Kenya things were changing. People were dying...a lot of people. This

was the year 2000. In the year 2000, one didn't dare talk of AIDS...it was taboo. People were silently dying of AIDS, but no one spoke of it.

So Joe watched helplessly as patient after patient was wheeled away on a gurney toward the morgue until one day, for Joe, the game changed. On this day a young man named Daniel was brought to the hospital and left to die. Daniel Oeching though, was a Kenyan medical student—a young man with whom Joe worked. As Daniel lay near death on a gurney...waiting his turn on that path toward the morgue, Joe said enough is enough.

In desperation Joe called an old friend in the United States and asked him if he could borrow \$2000. \$2000 was the cost for medication that could save Daniel's life. The money was sent, and on that Day, Daniel Oeching became IU-Kenya's first AIDS patient. On that day, Joe Mamlin, nearing retirement said he found his life's work. He and his wife Sarah Ellen now live there permanently.

The IU-Kenya Partnership is a world model for how to prevent, treat and care for AIDS. Joe Mamlin has been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. Joe oversees the treatment of over 40,000 AIDS patient every month, but the key is where it started...it started with a transformation within Joe...and one patient...one.

There is another story too. Back in 2004 when we went to Kenya for the first time, I met Joshua and Miriam Mbithi. At the time Joshua and Miriam were the house parents of an orphanage called Jackaranda. The orphanage was part of a large and successful boarding school complex. They had been house parents at Jackaranda for over 20 years—Miriam had actually grown up as an orphan at Jackaranda. However, dark times were at hand. The man responsible for the administration of the school and the orphanage had a son who needed a job—in essence the son ultimately forced Joshua and Miriam out.

In response, Joshua and Miriam opened their own residence and took in one child, then more. But, not just any children—they opened their home to children who were HIV+. These are children who nobody else will take—there is no other place for them. Well, they quickly outgrew the capacity of their house, so they added on and filled it too. At capacity with no room to grow Joshua and Miriam decided it was time to put their trust in God to help them achieve a lifelong dream and vision of building an orphanage for children infected and affected by HIV. After days of prayer it came to Joshua that if any grand vision were to be achieved, it would have to start small, and start within them. That day Joshua sold the family car and used the proceeds to purchase concrete. With absolutely no money and

no promise of any to come, Joshua laid the foundation of the orphanage with that concrete.

In the ensuing months, Joshua began to send me pictures of the orphanage...walls going up one brick at a time, one row at a time as money would permit. In Kenya, you build as much as your budget allows, then you stop.

Well, when Joshua and Miriam learned we were coming to visit, the pictures stopped. I begged Joshua to send more, but he said...you need to see this for yourself. You can't imagine the thrill I got to see this...Neema Children's Home...under roof. Neema Children's Home will open on schedule this month and serve 30 children immediately and will soon be able to accommodate 100 children. However, Joshua is quick to point out, it all started with one child in their home, and one bag of concrete.

So you see, God is doing big work in Kenya to change the world. But, this big work is being done in small batches by individuals answering to a sensation, an emotion...a feeling within themselves that they don't quite understand. I firmly believe that this feeling is The Holy Spirit at work within each one of us...I believe that's just the way things work.

There are two Bible passages that explain this in simple terms. You can read the full text of both, but I want to get right to the point...In the first one from Matthew, it talks about God, working through Jesus, to transform our lives. It says, "*Jesus will ignite the kingdom life within you, a fire within you, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out.*"

Okay, so now what? The fire is lit within us—we have this awakening, what do we do with that sensation. In the second passage from John...Jesus says...look, I'm not going to be around forever. If you believe that the work I've been doing is valuable and life transforming, then you are going to have to continue it...you can do it just like I can. This passage, no matter what version of the Bible you use, is often paraphrased as "*Anything I can do, you can do and more.*"

You know, perhaps my view is too simple—but I think right here is the secret to changing the world. Allowing ourselves to be transformed by God...transformed by this inexplicable sensation that we don't understand, and then using the unique tools God has equipped each one of us with the affect real change in our world.

CLOSING:

God has a funny way of getting our attention and tuning us in to what is really important in life. When

we tune into God's frequency...we become real agents of change for our world. I found this quote by Morrie Schwartz that I think sums things up:

So many people walk around with a meaningless life. They seem half-asleep, even when they're busy doing things they think are important. This is because they're chasing the wrong things. The way you get meaning into your life is to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you, and devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning.

Have a great Sunday, go in peace.