



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

Partners in Mission

12th November 2017

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Today I have good news for you! We have been working since July to secure visas for the Revd Tito Ndalú and the Revd John Bei to come from Kondoa, Tanzania, to visit us – and on Friday, we got news that the visas had been granted! It has been a difficult path, but the obstacles have been overcome and we expect to see them next week on Friday or Saturday.

Tito and John are men who are determined and committed to Kondoa Diocese. They work for no pay and they have no guarantees. They live and work in rural parishes. They each farm a patch of ground which, in good years, yields enough to feed them and their wives and families.

We all know that Kondoa Diocese is a poor diocese. It is a savannah area of the country which is dry for months of the year, so the people there are mainly subsistence farmers. Offerings to the diocese from parishes are enough only to pay for the Bishop's secretary and a night watchman. Almost all priests are non-stipendiary apart from the Bible School staff.

Why would they choose to serve without pay? It is not like that all across Tanzania. In fact, John's wife, Christina leads a parish in DCT and receives a stipend. Clergy like Tito and John have studied at Msalato Bible College in Dodoma to diploma level. They are qualified to be appointed in any other diocese in Tanzania.

So why do they choose to minister in Kondoa Diocese? It is because God has called them. They are obeying Him even though it is a sacrifice. And they are doing well. John leads a congregation of 600 which is only a few years old. That is something which here, we only dream of. But one of the reasons we have invited them over here is that they have skills and knowledge which we don't have. So let's be open and eager to learn from their expertise and their focus.

The major reason for their visit to us is to build the relationship between their people and our parish. What is important is that we take the opportunity to welcome them, to talk with them and get to know them. These are men known to us. Helen, Anne, Lindy and I have all met Tito. Helen and I have stayed in his house for several nights. Helen and I met John last time when he was an ordination candidate about to be deaconed. We then visited his parish when the Bishop went to confirm people.

I was talking yesterday to Peter Akester, our friend, the CMS mission partner working in Kondoa. He told me of the great value a similar visit had in Rangiora some years ago when a couple visited and just took part in parish life for six weeks. The result was a strong bond between their parish and the work over there.

Let's not imagine for a moment that this relationship is all one-sided. They have qualities to teach us:

- Joy

- Their vibrant singing and dancing.
- All ages involved – plenty of young families and children
- They value the gospel
- Sacrificial commitment
- Courage
- Readiness to evangelise
-

I asked them to teach us a dance and they said, “We will teach you how to sing and how to dance! God bless you.” So get ready, Church!

One area of focus is that by their lifestyle, they are investing in heaven, in things that count for eternity, more than in amassing wealth for their own comfort on earth. Jesus’ instruction is that we should lay up treasure in heaven, where moth and rust do not attack our possessions.

So as they come, just being with them will help us to re-orientate ourselves to make investment into things of eternal value. We may gain an altered sense of what true riches are.

The riches which we share in common with them are: access to the word of God; true hope which will stand the test of time and circumstance, and a certain amount of time and breath to use in our sphere of influence. What words will come out of our mouths? Will they be words which point to Jesus, words of encouragement, I pray that through rubbing shoulders with them we will gain boldness and learn to use our influence for God’s purposes, to extend his kingdom.

In the Gospel reading Jesus warns us that we should be wise about our attitude to his return. We can be like the foolish virgins and not be ready. The Jewish custom was for the bridegroom to come to collect his bride when he had prepared everything for her. She would not know when that might be. In the parable, he comes late at night and the foolish young women have no oil for their lamps. The wise girls have everything ready and can go to the wedding feast.

Do we need to adjust our priorities to be ready for the unknown time when Jesus returns? Do you?

The Epistle reading points us to our hope of eternal life. Last week was All Saints and yesterday was Armistice Day when I led the RSA parade. As we came to the Last Post and Reveille I explained the significance of those two bugle calls. I wonder if you know it? You heard in the Epistle a repeated reference to death as sleep and those who have died as fallen asleep. Jesus spoke that way and we see the Apostle Paul doing it too. Why would they use that term? I think because the expectation is that a sleeper will awaken, and they taught that the dead will rise to life again at the resurrection.

The Last Post is of course the bugle call to tell the troops the day is over and they can go to their rest. The reveille is the wake up call. By playing them at a military funeral, on ANZAC day or Armistice Day, the symbolism is the death is a long sleep until the the trumpet of God sounds and calls those who have fallen asleep to rise in the resurrection. Those bugle calls are a reminder of the hope we have of eternal life.

Another thing we may learn from Tito & John is a sense of accountability towards God that embodies a biblical “fear of the Lord.” (Joshua 24:14) They live in areas where the majority of their neighbours are Muslim people. At present, in their part of Tanzania, relationships with Muslims are neighbourly. However, I am sure they are aware of other parts of Tanzania where Muslim influences seek to establish Sharia law and squeeze Christians out of influential positions. Tito and John live their lives in the shadow of these facts which may become their own experience in their own villages. Their courage and determination to continue to press on and extend the kingdom of God is exemplary. There is a window of opportunity for them which they are grabbing with both hands. They look upon their accountability to God as more important than any temporal danger or hardship. This is an outworking of the fear (or honouring) of God.

Tito’s church is on the South-bound road out of Kondoa township. The first time we visited, it had walls, roof paid for by Rochester Diocese but the floor was just stone chips. Now, it has a good concrete floor and is one of the largest in the diocese.

They are willing to invest time and effort in their community. In Chemba, where Tito works, they are building a vocational centre for young men and women who have no opportunity for formal educational learning, but who can learn to earn their living as tradesmen etc. This will bring hope and a future for many young people who would otherwise live on the edge of starvation, helpless to do anything about it.

The vocational centre was in embryo when we were last there – just stacks of concrete blocks. These are made one by one in this single block mould. One of our parishioners donated a significant amount of money to help get the vocational centre up and running. The charity “Windmills for Africa” has helped make the vocational centre possible by providing a bore with a windmill pump which can supply enough water for the whole village as well as the centre.

John is priest of Humeakwa parish, about the most Southern in the Diocese. The side road leading there is pretty rough! But when you arrive the welcome is impressive!

How can we use our earthly treasure to invest in heavenly agendas? One way is to support the mission in Kondoa and other missions you may favour. Let me be clear, we are not supporting Kondoa because it is my personal choice. When Bishop Given first came, I had no intention that we should commit to them, but the response of the parish in a love offering was overwhelming as you gave \$4000 in one Sunday. Vestry then chose to adopt a mission target of helping with +Given’s stipend. Our mission targets are set for three year periods. At the end of the first three years, Vestry decided to renew that commitment for another period. Donations from Op Shop profits are recommended to the AGM by Vestry but ratified by the AGM. It is worth noting that the voluntary giving from the parish to Kondoa has far exceeded the targets that Vestry has suggested.

There are people who are willing to live and work in amazingly difficult circumstances, bringing their Muslim and animist neighbours to Christ. We can support them by providing money to pay the rent on their house and land so they can support themselves by farming, while preaching the Gospel.

We can also learn to invest time and energy into extending the Kingdom of God here in Whangaparaoa. We have what it takes to give people hope for their futures. From the Hope Project, we learnt how to make the most of everyday conversations to help people one step further towards finding the love of Jesus and meaning for their lives.

I know you will be good and generous hosts to our guests. They will be involved in parish life while they are with us, attending most of what we do. I hope they will be welcomed to homegroups, and private meals in your homes – there will be a sign up sheet for invitations.

As you have seen by all these photos, there are considerable differences between their context and ours. One such is that in Tanzania, Christians do not drink alcohol. So please do not offer them alcohol if they are at your house for a meal.

They will be at mid-week events, visiting our shops, and any other places where we can mix and learn together.

Our planning is that they will be with us over the next two Sundays and then they will visit Holy Sepulchre on their third Sunday here to be with Tikanga Maori who also support +Given. For the last weekend they will visit Rangiora, before heading home after 3.5 weeks here.