



NEPAL 2017 PILGRIMAGE

A Mission Journey with ARDF

ABSTRACT

A travel journal and spiritual reflections on a journey to Nepal in 2017. We visit Anglican Churches with ARDF – the Anglican Relief and Development Fund.

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Living Word Photography

Nepal – 2017 ARDF Pilgrimage Journey



Introduction

In February 2017, a group of 13 pilgrims, led by Bill Deiss, Rev. Johnny Kurcina, and Rev. Bill Haley were met by Rev. Lewis Lew – the Dean of Nepal – in Katmandu, to begin a journey visiting Anglican parishes in cities and villages. A pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred place. One discovers that the presence of the Lord is what makes a place sacred. Along the way, together we experienced the Lord's presence in His house, in His people and in His creation. We then came to know the journey, also as sacred. This pilgrimage had a mission to care and to share, a vision of fellowship and prayer, and a purpose to expand our reach and relationships beyond our own borders – uniting distant church families together - through each other's and the Lord presence.

The greatest of these

Among the mountains of the world – eight of the ten highest peaks are in Himalayan mountain range in Nepal. The greatest of these is Mount Everest. But this land of dramatic geography, among the world economies, is counted among the least of these. The culture, reflecting the colorful history and traditions, would by many, be considered among the greatest of these. Yet, the social structure of the Hindu caste identifies many of the poor, as the very least of these. The Himalayans have been formed through enormous forces, that continue to move these mountains ever higher, as the earth's surface binds along a great fault. This massive, creative force can suddenly become a catastrophic earthquake. Two years ago, the world shook, as shock waves hit Nepal with a devastating earthquake. As an avalanche roared through Mount Everest, thousands of lives and millions of homes were lost throughout Nepal - and the least of these, bore the greatest of these sufferings.



When did we see you Lord

As the news spread, and images of the devastation dominated the media, the world's attention and compassion focused upon Nepal. But as weeks and months passed, the magnitude of the restoration was beyond the world's comprehension. The suffering intensified as aftershocks continued to build fear. Many struggled to rebuild their homes and lives while grieving great loss. In some areas, whole villages were lost. The poorest of the poor, the least of these, were desperately isolated and scared.



Responding to such great need is the mission of the Anglican Relief and Development Fund, and quickly respond they did. But it is also a call to each of us - to care, to earnestly offer prayer and to share in the suffering and response to distress. For as Jesus said "whatever you do for the least of these...", because in His kingdom they are counted among the greatest of these.

And so, our journey began with a privileged opportunity to care, to share, and join in prayer with the greatest of these – our esteemed brothers and sisters in Christ – in whom we would see Him!



United by love

Moments before going to Gethsemane, Jesus said to his Father “ I am praying for them..... that they may be one even as we are one”. In a world that often separates us, by miles, language, culture and political domains, we are called as Christians to be as one. Coming to Nepal, hosted by the Anglican church families, we experienced warm hospitality and were greeted as family. From the ceremonial welcoming gifts, to shared worship and enjoying meals together, we began to understand our oneness. Churches and homes were opened, some rebuilt, some damaged while others found shelter in tents. But the light that we saw radiated through the eyes of the many pastors, leaders and members of the churches and villages that we visited along our way.



Even the rooftops were used when needed. The neighbors were captivated by the children gathered there to worship. And fulfilled among them was Jesus’ reply to the question of who was the greatest in the kingdom – And calling to him a child, he put them in the midst of them and said “Unless you turn and become like children... whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest... and whoever receives one such child receives me”. For these little ones and for the church in Nepal, the light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it!



Did you visit me

The idea of an international mission trip can be intimidating - that is until you encounter the children and families along the way. In Matthew, in the final teaching of Jesus, we are given simple guidance on what is expected of us. When I was alone, or in prison or suffering – did you visit me? And yes, reminded again that whatever we do for the least of these..... As we visited a village near the epicenter of the earthquake, we encountered our Lord in the hearts and eyes of those we met. Although the trip was challenging, the welcome was always warm.



Children are on the heart of the church in Nepal. Many have lost parents. Responding to this tragic need, one of our host, Rev. Rinzi Lama, has forty-five adopted children living with his family, another pastor that we met has nine. Then there was Pastor Daniel, who responded to the Lord's call to care for the children in a poor community that many call the river slum.

The school they built absolutely radiated the peace and presence of the Lord! I was humbled by their commitment and work. The love of Christ made manifest in the lives of so many, with such great need.



Did you feed me

On the long journey to the villages, we witnessed the financial hardship of many in Nepal. This can feel overwhelming, until you realize that the Lord did not ask us to solve world hunger, but instead, “when I was hungry did you feed me?”. We all know how to share a meal with someone – it is a way to welcome someone as family. In our travels, meeting families and spending time together allowed for hearts to open. Love is a common language and the women, in particular, bonded instantly around the children.



We did have the opportunity to come bearing gifts, as ARDF had brought supplies of rice and blankets in response to the current needs expressed through the local parishes. In the remote villages, we were warmly welcomed, and with great anticipation. It felt like a new holiday had been declared. It is amazing how comfortable it is to join with a church, half way around the world, and enjoy the fellowship of caring and sharing together.



Did you see me

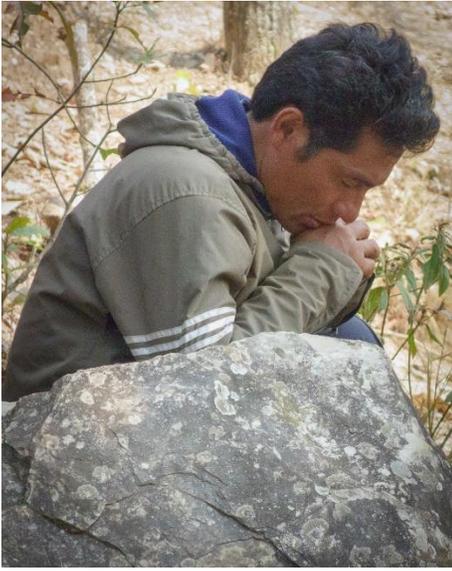
It was a difficult walk through this community in Katmandu. The poor have assembled homes with whatever material that can be found, on a strip of land between a dump and a badly polluted river. Pastor Daniel led us through narrow alleyways. As we rounded the corner and entered a small open area, there was a sudden sense of peace and the presence of God. "Some call it a slum but I call it Jerusalem – a light on the hill!" he proclaimed. Here, Pastor Daniel and the community, had built a small church and school for pre-school thru early elementary. If pilgrimage is defined as a journey to a sacred place – we had just entered the Holy Land!



Words are challenged to describe what we witnessed here. Joyful children, diligently being taught, and lovingly cared for as parents were away, trying to earn enough to support their families in this humble corner of the earth. They sang "Jesus Loves Me" in English. The classes were bilingual. The faithfulness of the pastor and his staff to the call of the Lord, to care for these little ones, in these most difficult conditions, must be among the greatest in His kingdom. The miracles that were shared not only included healings and deliverance from harmful situations – but one half of the families in

this community are now Christians – in a land where less than one percent profess the faith.

And now these three remain....



Faith



Hope



Love

As our journey came to the end, our thoughts had been transformed. Having witnessed the great loss among the least of these, we had also seen the moving testimonies of faith, resilient hope and enjoyed the warm fellowship of love of our Christian brothers and sisters in Nepal. We were blessed with the opportunity to share and provide some material support. They generously shared from their deep spiritual wealth that hardship has provided.



A pilgrimage with a mission, is a journey of a lifetime. The friendships made, the blessing shared, the fellowships forged, were all hoped for as we prepared. The divides of culture, language, and geography, were gently overwhelmed through the light of Christ, shared with simple acts of mutual kindness. The church of Nepal and its people continue to need our love and support. We also need their encouragement, spiritual conviction, and lessons in walking difficult journeys along our way. Although known for the great mountains and mighty creative forces that form them, Nepal's greatest gifts are faith, hope and love.

And the greatest of these is love!