

Jesus Loves Malawi Update

Winter, 2023

Hello Friends,

"Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! " Isaiah 43:18-19a

When we read this verse shortly after arriving back in Malawi in January it seemed to really stand out to us. In many ways it seemed that this was not just the start of a new year, but a new beginning as well: we were in a new house, with many boxes not even unpacked yet, and half of our kids gone. As it turned out we also needed to hire new helpers. We had mentioned in the previous newsletter that we had heard that there were staff issues awaiting us at home, and, unfortunately, it was true. Worse yet, the people involved showed no remorse, but were caught in many lies in their efforts to hide their tracks. The evidence was there, however, and after they failed many times to come clean, we made the heart breaking decision to let three of our workers go. Several of them had already been given a second or third chance previously, and we simply need to have people whom we can trust and who are willing to grow. Hiring and training new helpers, however, is a big job, and took up much of our time in February and March. But we now have three new guys who are thrilled to be employed! As one of them said: "I have six children at home, they all want to go to school, but without a job I cannot pay for the school fees, so I am willing to do anything you tell me!" Another one of our workers is able to send two of his granddaughters to school. It's a good reminder for us that employing people here is not just a necessity for us to help us in our work and provide security, it also really makes a difference in the lives of our employees and their families! I also connected with two new guys who will occasionally help me with translation. I am excited about their eagerness to learn and view this as another opportunity to invest in somebody's life. While we are spending time together and they are helping me, I can disciple them. God is doing a new thing!

Unfortunately, Malawi as a country is not doing well. Since last year, Malawi has been battling the worst cholera crisis in its history! And, as many of you have heard, Cyclone Freddy hit Malawi in March, causing severe damage and loss of life, and further worsening the cholera crisis. Weeks after the cyclone hit there are now close to 700 hundred people confirmed dead, over 500 still missing and over 1 million people in urgent need of humanitarian aid. Many people have lost their homes and have taken shelter in schools, which remain closed for classes for the time being. Food reserves and much of the harvest has been ruined or washed away. Collapsed roads and bridges make delivery of aid difficult and there are still regions that are only accessible by air! Malawi's President called it the worst natural disaster Malawi has ever suffered. But restoring infrastructure has already begun. In most areas power, water and internet has been restored to a large extent. And some roads and bridges have been patched enough to make them passable.



As for ourselves, even though we live in one of the districts that was badly affected, our immediate neighborhood suffered little damage. We had little wind, but more rain than we have ever seen! Our property lost two trees, and there were a few small mudslides up the road, but no major damage. We do however have springs coming out of the retaining walls near our house that were never there before. Our lawns still resemble rice paddies, and the area behind the house is completely waterlogged. As a result of all this humidity we have mold growing everywhere - on inside walls and on the clothes in our closet. But that is hardly something to complain about when so many others have lost everything!

Rebuilding homes will take a long time as the ground is still too wet, or even flooded, in many areas. Of course, a large part of the problem from the start is that homes are built very simply - most village homes

have no foundation or concrete pad. They are built with home made bricks that are held together with mud. Walls collapsed either because the ground sank under them, or the mud mortar became too soft to hold the wall together. But people simply can't afford anything better.

Even though we normally focus on development and not relief work, the needs in this crisis were so great that we decided that we should do something, however small our contribution. Dean cooperated with another local ministry in doing distributions to three groups. We were able to assist them financially a little bit and helped with transportation and distribution of basic food items, soap (to prevent cholera), matches and candles (there is no power there), and in some cases blankets. We focused on people who had lost their homes, but it was very difficult to limit the distribution to those who are most needy, because everyone feels they need assistance. When resources are limited, it can be very tricky (impossible) not to cause jealousy when not everyone gets assisted. Thankfully the area chiefs and their appointed helpers made sure that things were as calm and fair as possible. Both local and international aid organisations are getting into high gear now, though. We've seen truck convoys carrying supplies and more aid is arriving daily. So our focus has turned to other ministry again.

As you can see, it's been a challenging three months back in Malawi. But we are seeing God at work. Though there are many problems, we often remind ourselves that if everything were perfect here, God would have sent us elsewhere. We really appreciate your prayers for us and for Malawi.

As always, thank you so much for your prayers and support. Your partnership with us is far more important than you realize. We wish you all abundant blessings!

With much love and gratitude,

Dean and Stephanie Babcock,
Sarah, and Elianna

Instructions for sending support can be found at:
www.JesusLovesMalawi.com



Loaded inside and out.



These children are living with their families at this school because their homes were damaged or destroyed by Cyclone Freddy.



Heavy load on soaked soil. Result?? 20 guys pushed us out.