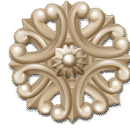


Travel Journal

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Kampong Cham, Cambodia

Five Loaves and Two Fish

By now it was already late and his disciples approached him and said, "This is a deserted place and it is already very late. Dismiss them so that they can go to the surrounding farms and villages and buy themselves something to eat." He said to them in reply, "Give them some food yourselves." But they said to him, "Are we to buy two hundred days' wages worth of food and give it to them to eat?" He asked them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out they said, "Five loaves and two fish." So he gave orders to have them sit down in groups on the green grass. The people took their places in rows by hundreds and by fifties. Then, taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to (his) disciples to set before the people; he also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied. And they picked up twelve wicker baskets full of fragments and what was left of the fish. Those who ate (of the loaves) were five thousand men. Mark 6:35-44

A few kilometers from the small rural village of Viheathom, in the province of Kampong Cham (磅針省) of the Kingdom of Cambodia, there lays an incomplete artificial lake. This failed water reservoir was commissioned by the Khmer Rouge during the frenzy years of Pol Pot in the late 70s. During that period, forced laborers were rounded up and sent to the area to dig the reservoir. What they did not know was that they would be digging their own grave— soon be massacred and thrown into the gigantic pit after the expenditure of their labor. An estimated 200,000 Cambodians were killed there. Today, the lake appeared deceptively tranquil. The surrounding rice paddies gave the lake a hazy, Indochina charm under the midday sun. As our mission team approached the lakeshore, we saw many water buffalos bathing in the shallow muddy water along the shoreline. About twenty local villagers, both young and old, all bronzed by the equatorial sun, were sorting out fresh water snares and clams. We walked through an unusual beach of dry shells to take a closer look of their livelihood. During the dry season, the farmers would subsidize their income by collecting mollusks from the lake. As our footsteps made crushing sounds on the dried shells, I suddenly realized the scientific fact that shells are

composed predominantly of calcium. Why would there be such over abundance of fresh water snares and clams here? A bitter chill ran down my spine as I realized that these shells could have originated from the bones of the massacred and that we were actually walking on the sorrows of the past.



Seeing

Three months ago, Pastor Jonathan Chiu (邱志健) of the USA Care Ministries International (CMI) came to my home church in New Orleans as the guest speaker of the annual church retreat. He spoke of the need of Chinese Christians to break cultural barriers and bring the gospel and love of God to people of other cultures, just as the Western missionaries did at the twilight of the Qin Dynasty in China. He showed a video documentary of the short-term medical mission in Cambodia directed by CMI in 2010, and challenged our congregation to consider participating in January, just three months later. Knowing that my four-year term as a deacon of the church would be complete at the end of the year, I had been asking God to guide and give me a clearer vision of possible outreach missions in the incoming year. An avid globetrotter, I had already scheduled a two-week vacation from hospital in January but did not know where I would be going. Just a few years ago, I had travelled to Cambodia to see the famous ruins of Angkor Wat, so this nation that just came out of drastic social upheaval three decades ago was familiar to me. Pastor Chiu stated that after seeing the killing field museum in the capital city of Phnom Penh, he felt that God wanted to use him to help heal the genocidal pain of the Cambodian people. How could a nation that prided on the peaceful state religion of Buddhism produce such atrocities? Only Christ, the true Lamb of God who was sacrificed on the cross for our sake, could heal this land! Perhaps it was now God's time to bring healing and salvation to Cambodia. Watching the mission documentary, I was immediately reminded of the famous scene from the movie, *The Killing Field*, of the protagonist walking through a sea of human skulls and bones. In the silence, I prayed: "Yes, Lord, I see the suffering and the yearning for hope in Cambodia. I want to heed the calling and obey your plan for me. You

have given me the gift to heal the body as a medical doctor. Give me the courage to trust and follow as your child.”



Seeking

The apostles saw the problem of feeding the large crowd as it had become late, and they asked Jesus for help. But rather than waiting for Christ’s reply first, they immediately gave their opinion that the crowd should be dispersed as soon as possible in order for them to find food in the surrounding villages. Similarly, now a day, we make the mistake of wanting to serve the Lord according to our own ways and forgetting to seek the Lord first for guidance. At the end of our church retreat, I told Pastor Chiu that I was interested in the medical mission but did not want to commit myself. Yes, as we settle into our own comfortable Christian circles, breaking away seems unsecure and preferring the easiest way out to do our part in the Grand Commission becomes the new norm. Though I don’t want to underestimate the importance of mission funding, an important logistical concern for supporting frontline missionaries, the easier solution for many Christians in wealthy countries seems to be writing a check and calling it responsibility fulfilled—without actual physical participation, let alone committed intercession prayers.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." Mark 8:34

The love of God was fully revealed in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Taking up the cross is the privilege of Christians to partake in the love of God. We must remember that the crucifixion was an actual physical event that God performed for our redemption and continues to do so spiritually every time we ask Christ to cleanse our sins in our spiritual journey. Yes, we are all weak and have little confidence, but our faith and authority as Christians derive directly from the Lord. Let us not doubt what we cannot see but trust completely in the goodness of God’s will. When missionary Robert Morrison (馬禮遜) was asked shortly after his arrival in

China if he expected to have any spiritual impact on the Chinese, he answered, “No sir, but I expect God will!”

Following

After a two-day rest in Hong Kong to ease the jetlag from traveling across the globe, I arrived at the petite International Airport of Phnom Penh. All I had was the itinerary of the short-term mission with emergency contact phone numbers and the instruction that someone would pick me up at the airport. The temperature was surprisingly ambient in the Southeast Asian dry season as I exited the customs area, but I looked everywhere and did not find anyone with a sign of my name or see Pastor Chiu, the only person I knew on the mission list. After ten minutes of waiting in the arrival area, I decided to call the emergency contact numbers. Perhaps it was a mini test of faith; the top two phone numbers did not work after multiple attempts. I was not quite sure whether it was the problem of my cell phone or the roaming in Cambodia. Finally I tried the last remaining phone number on the list (that of Sister Shu Jun 恕君) and a female voice answered after a few rings. I briefly explained my predicament and was comforted by her that someone would find me shortly. As I hung up the phone, an elderly man who was waiting next to me approached and introduced himself as a member of the mission. I had seen him waiting there earlier and thought he might be a member of the team as he looked Chinese, but I was afraid to ask. (Elder Cheung (張), an acupuncturist, would turn out to be my roommate during the mission.) Shortly after our mutual greeting, Pastor Chiu suddenly appeared, walked over and greeted us. My brief anxiety dissipated after seeing the smiling face of Pastor Chiu. He explained that he had been waiting for a while as his flight from Taiwan arrived an hour earlier. It happened that I got to the arrival area when the first group was moving to the waiting area away from the arrival gate. As it worked out, there were three groups of arriving that morning: two from Taipei and one from Hong Kong.

We checked into the simple Favour Hotel (滿意酒店) in Phnom Penh, and a few other mission team members arrived subsequently. Together we were three pastors, two medical doctors, one acupuncturist, three dentists, one nurse, and other talented assistants from nonmedical professions from overseas. From the Cambodian side, Sister Mei Jun (美君) acted as the coordinating missionary in residence along with Sister Shu Jun (new missionary), a cadre of local translators and dental personnel. Our age ranged from 20s to 70s. It was a true blessing that the Lord called together a group of God-fearing Christian elites. We all had something to give to and something to learn from each other. We had one common goal—to show God’s love to the people of Cambodia.

Sharing

Our objective was to attract the local idol-worshipping villagers in rural Kampong Cham to associate with us by providing free healthcare and medicine. As one of Southeast Asia's poorest nations with an average annual income of US\$450 (as of 2009), the Cambodia government is struggling to provide sufficient basic healthcare to its people, especially in the countryside. Although there are medical services available in the provincial cities, most villagers find it difficult to afford care. The city of Kampong Cham does have a hospital run by the French Cooperative that is willing to provide free hospital care for those in dire needs, but the villagers have to pay for transportation to the hospital, food in the hospital, and prescription medication. Most resort to ineffective traditional herbal medicine, superstitious shamans, or simply don't seek care. By partnering with a local Christian church, CMI hopes to bring the villagers to the church with the allure of free healthcare. We are optimistic that when the villagers see the love of God in our service to them, they will become tolerant to the idea of having Christian church in a traditionally Buddhist land and open their hearts to the gospel. Thus, we would act as a catalyst for the planting and growth of the local church.

Preparing

Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire." So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention. (1 King 18: 25-29)

From the main road that links Phnom Penh to Kampong Cham, just a few minutes from the laid-back provincial city, a 15-kilometer, dirt road branches towards the artificial lake where the inconceivable massacre took place. Along the narrow road, four large Buddhist temples blotch the area; their grandiosity seems utterly incongruent to plain battered houses of the locals. Cambodian farmers build their houses on wooden pillars to thwart flooding during raining season. Domesticated animals like chickens and pigs roam on the dirt ground. A front ladder leads to the elevated house made of wooden planks. The roof can be of wood or straw depending on the income level. The Viheathom Methodist Church is situated between the third and fourth idol altars. Pastor Naren and his wife Chandry were commissioned to evangelize from this newly erected church a few years ago, with themselves as the only congregation members at the start. The church is a single-story brick building with white-washed façade. It blends in unpretentiously with the local village houses. Two water wells

were dug up in the recent years to provide portable water supply for the pastor's family and his neighbors. Pastor Naren's family lives within the church building in a small room adjacent to the main sanctuary. Lord, how merciful and wonderful is your plan! The four grotesque pagan altars did not prevent the massive killing of the innocent nor heal the pain of their descendants. Yet, Lord, you have planted this small humble church as the lighthouse of your gospel. Let us be the salt and light of your amazing love in this country of sorrow!

At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!" (1 King 18: 36-39)



Witnessing

After making the necessary preparations of buying essential supplies and collecting medications, we worshiped and praised God on Sunday at the Hall of Peace (和平堂), a.k.a., the apartment of Sister Mei Jun in Phnom Penh. A missionary commissioned by CMI, Sister Mei Jun has been serving in Cambodia for more than a decade, and was the indispensable coordinator for the logistics of this short-term mission. On Monday morning, five minibuses carrying around thirty of us headed for Kampong Cham, about three hours north of the capital. For the first two days we were stationed in the plywood factory of Brother Lu (盧), the next two days in an elementary school close to the Methodist church, and the last three days at the church.

The miracle of the five loaves and two fish is about God making wonders through our fellowship with Him. Lord, who am I that you're mindful of me? By obeying God's commands and fellowshiping with other Christians, we become instruments of His peace. Yes, sometimes

we fail to see the big picture and wonder whether we labor in vain as we suffer scorn carrying the cross, but we must trust that the harvest would come in God's time. Our fellowship in Cambodia was not just about providing free healthcare, but giving life testimonies. Every morning began with personal testimonies of the mission team participants followed by Pastor Liu's (劉智欽) discipleship course on cross cultural missions. We provided 6-7 hours of medical and dental clinic each day. At night, after fellowship dinner, we had another session of personal testimonies. We praised God with hymns and prayed incessantly throughout the day. We preached God's love through our action of caring and our simple words in translation. Our effort was greatly augmented by the young Christians at the church who prayed for the sick individually and spoke of Jesus to their fellow villagers. Despite the intense daily schedule, our hearts were always filled with joy, love and gratitude.

**O goon, o goon, Prea On
O goon, o goon, Prea On
O goon, o goon, Prea On, neh nong zeh!**

**Thank you, thank you, Jesus
Thank you, thank you, Jesus
Thank you, thank you, Jesus, in my heart!**

I believe that God's miracle was working throughout our fellowship. We were the first to benefit as our faith was strengthened and our heart renewed by the Holy Spirit. The local coworkers in the mission team were the next to pass the loaves and fish. They saw doctors and professors forgoing their vacations and humbling themselves to serve the Lord. We saw our Cambodian brothers and sisters working tirelessly with us to cross cultural and language barriers in order to help bring the gospel to their countrymen. Our hearts filled with joy as we discovered that the Viheathom church had doubled its membership to around 45 people in just one year. When we saw God's army in the form of teenage Cambodian village Christians passionately speaking of Jesus to the patients waiting in line to receive their medicine, we knew that the five loaves and two fish were already multiplying. These were the images engrained in my mind: Elder Cheung bending down to do acupuncture on a patient lying on the bamboo bed; Dr. Huang (黃) smiling and waving the Teddy Bear on his stethoscope to a crying baby, Drs. Zhao (趙), Miao (繆) and Chen (陳) extracting teeth from patients as Cambodian dental students watched and learned; Nurse Xiao examining a patient as the adjacent team of four sisters packed prescription medicines nonstop; young mission volunteers directing patient traffic and giving some patients individual shoulder and neck massages; Professor Chang (張) measuring blood pressure next to Brother Xiao (蕭) checking blood sugar in the reception area; Brother Sheng (盛) coordinating registration with Sister Jin Zhen (金珍); various translators asking each other for better translation of medical terminology in Cambodian, Chinese and English; Sister

Mei Jun checking on everyone to make sure we had what we needed; and pastors praying for patients and sometimes doubling as assistants to whenever needs arose.

**How good and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in unity!
It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down upon the collar of his robes.
It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.
(Psalm 133)**



Thanking

In seven days, we saw over two thousand patients for medical, dental and acupuncture care. To me, treating patients was second nature as a physician, but I prayed that my action would reveal the love of God in me. I came to Cambodia out of a calling to provide healing to the body, yet I was the first to receive spiritual renewal through fellowship in Christ there. During testimony one night, Dr. Huang thanked God that he was able to greet a baby that morning whom he had seen last year and deemed too sick to survive. The lesson of the five loaves and two fish is also the message of hope. As we pass the loaves and fish to our fellow coworkers, we trust there is hope in this world since our Lord Jesus has redeemed us from the bondage of sin. I too have my own encounter for hope. On our first day seeing patients at the church, I met a woman in her sixth month of pregnancy presenting with blurry vision and dizziness. Her blood pressure was an astronomical 220 systolic over 120 diastolic for a pregnant woman. In the US, she would have been immediately hospitalized for treatment of

preeclampsia. Without adequate control of blood pressure, both she and her baby would certainly die before delivery. She said to me that she knew about the high blood pressure, but was told by the government sponsored prenatal clinic that there was no medicine available—perhaps due to scarcity of pregnancy-safe antihypertensive, I supposed in utter disbelief. Alarmed, I asked her to return daily the next two days as we put together a treatment regimen based on the availability of certain medications in the local pharmacy. I was able to reduce her blood pressure to a more manageable level and relieve her symptoms associated with preeclampsia. I gave her four-month supply of medication to carry her through delivery. Yet I was still not confident medically that pre- and postnatal complications could be thwarted. I knew that our only hope would come from God. I learned that the patient had been attending the Sunday services at the church and asked Pastor Naren and his wife to pray for her. As we laid our hands to pray for her on the last day before saying farewell, I prayed that God would allow me to return next year to see her and her healthy baby worshiping at the church.



Rejoicing

When asked if she would return again at the end of mission last year, Sister Yu (余) boldly replied, “After eating breakfast, you naturally want to eat lunch.” Indeed it is more blessed to give than to receive. When we seek Christ and take up the cross as he has commanded, we experience the amazing love of God first hand and in turn receive abundant grace. During the mission, we offered a small amount of our time, money and labor, but God granted us the privilege to experience Him in the most profound way—the amazing peace which transcends all understanding. He also opened another door for me to see the thirst for Christ in other cultures. I trust that He will continue to guide me to live a purposeful life. Praise God in the highest for his mercy and love endure forever!