

God's Eternal Dwelling Place



Come along with me...

I'm weaving through villages and fields, traipsing down
narrow foot paths and trudging through muck.

I'm jumping over mud puddles and broken bricks. I'm skirting around fallen walls,
bent

roofing sheets and twisted trusses. I'm
stepping over soggy blankets and dirty clothes.

Malawi 2015 revisited. What happened? A deluge of rain.

Rivers overflowed,

Maize fields flattened,

Bridges demolished,

Roads cratered.

Different year,

Different people,

Different location,

Same result: Devastation.

Rains are a double-edged sword. Just enough and wells fill, fields drink, crops grow
and the land produces. Too much and houses collapse leaving them useless; pit
latrines overflow rendering them a danger.

It all happened in Malawi.

Again.

People are reminiscing that this same thing happened just
four years ago.

The Malawi 2018/2019 wet season had a great start. A great balance of rain and
sunshine. Crops were looking good. Tobacco. Maize. Groundnuts. Farmers were
ecstatic!

It's going to be a

*bountiful harvest! We can sell our cash crops...our granaries will be full...we will
harvest plenty to eat good...our bellies satisfied...no hunger this year!*

Then came the 6th of March 2019. Ash Wednesday arrived. So did another rain. Well, not just another rain, but a downpour. The heavens opened. Water fell by the bucket. Cats and Dogs. Didn't let up for 3 solid days. This time the land and the areas most affected are quite flat so the water didn't have a natural run off. When rains fall that rapidly and that powerfully, mud houses just don't stand a chance against such force and pressure of water.



The torrent was enough to bring down the roof.

It did.

Many houses were destroyed. Families are displaced. Women and children are sleeping in church buildings. Husbands and fathers are staying in any manageable place that they can find in what is left of their houses. A makeshift shelter. A tiny covered corner of a room. Some are sleeping under the stars. All who are affected

are trying to pick up the proverbial pieces. And lurking right around the corner?

Disease. It's what happens when outhouses collapse and the holes brim over. It's a stream you don't want to be near. But there is a stream you do. A river actually. A river of living water.

*"Though the earth give way...though its waters roar and foam...there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells."*¹

The one who wrote those words also wrote these:

*"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."*²

To the people who are sitting in the rubble, asking themselves questions and trying to make sense of it all, the pastors in the Lutheran Church have been able to bring this kind of message: God indeed is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Though many people have many questions, there's another question that rises above all the others. It stands tall and strong like a beacon in the storm:

*Who or what can separate us from the love of Christ?*³ We know what is written in Romans 8:35. A bunch more questions that answer that first one. (If you're not sure, check it out). But what about the questions on the minds of the homeless people in Malawi who are wondering how they are going to start over and rebuild?



What can separate them from God's love?

Rains?

Floods?

Unusable toilets?

Obliterated fields?

Collapsed houses?

Lost property?

Can these things remove God from their world of broken walls and caved-in roofs?



NO.⁴

Paul, what do you mean, *NO*? *Tell us more!*

*"NO, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. None of these things shall separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*⁵

Ah, yes. Good words, Paul. The people need to hear those words. So do I...when things in my own life collapse! You, too?

For three days we surveyed the destruction and assessed

the damage. So much rain...so much ruin. With such incalculable devastation I could only imagine incredible loss.

What I didn't imagine – or even think about – was the incredible gain.

*Incredible
gain?*

As the people shared their stories, I noticed that they had gained something: a new appreciation for the goodness of the Lord. A renewed indebtedness to the grace of God. Gratitude for something bigger than earthly comfort.

Heavenly blessings!

When we arrived, they not only spoke of the rains that came down from heaven but of the promises of God that do, too!

They shared with us how God spared them, protected them and saved them. We paused here for a prayer. Sat there for a devotion. Spent time with the families in meditation and thankfulness. We were invited to so many places we didn't have time for everyone.

We brought our phone cameras but took more than pictures and videos.

We took heart! (The people encouraged us!)

We took assurance! (The presence of problems doesn't mean the absence of God!)

We took with us a renewed sense of joy! (Our Lutheran members know the grace and love of God in Christ Jesus despite the trials that come)



After seeing one collapsed house after another, what falls like rain upon my heart are the words of Moses:

“Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations...from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”⁶

Like Paul said, *“...we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands...”⁷*

His is a house that will never fall. The roof won't leak and the walls won't collapse. The foundation is strong and the rooms are safe.



Meanwhile, here on earth, whether in Malawi or the USA or somewhere in-between, we groan and are burdened. All creation, too. Apparently, that includes the rains. And the mud from which many houses are built.

But we look forward to a time when all those in Christ
Jesus we will be safe and secure in...

God's Eternal Dwelling Place.

Your Malawi Mission Partner,
Missionary John Holtz

1. Psalm 46:2-4.
2. Psalm 46:1.
3. Romans 8:35.
4. Romans 8:37a
5. Romans 8:37-39
6. Psalm 90:1,2
7. 2 Corinthians 5:1

Dear Mission Partners,

Maybe you know and maybe you don't, but our beloved WELS is showing faith in action by getting involved with both prayer support and financial aid.

The Lutheran Church of Central Africa - Malawi Synod, the WELS Board for World Missions, and WELS Christian Aid and Relief have been working hard at evaluating the immediate needs of those in our Lutheran congregations who are greatly affected by the floods, especially in the southern region of Malawi. (It was the southern region that was affected in 2015, too). Through funds made available through CAR, the LCCA members affected by the floods will receive some much-needed practical items. Things like buckets for clean water, blankets for warmth, and plastic sheeting for temporary roofing can meet immediate needs. A church building that has collapsed can be rebuilt.

Your Africa Missions team would like to encourage anyone whose heart is moved to give a gift to help people in need (due to flooding or other disaster) to please donate to WELS Christian Aid & Relief. Please follow the link below:

<https://community.wels.net/page.aspx?pid=394>