

So Much More than a Burial



The body of late Evangelist Chitanzane Kantokoma Mapulanga was laid to rest on 6 December 2020

The coffin was lowered. The dirt was heaped. Wreaths were placed. But the funeral was so much more than a burial. It was a “witness to a stricken world.”

*In Christ, who tasted death for us
We rise above our natural grief
And witness to a stricken world
The strength and splendor of belief. – CW #607*

Some say that the best evangelism opportunities in Malawi are funerals. Why? Because the masses gather. Not just the fellow members of the deceased's home church, but the people of the entire community. Crowds of people. And as you can well imagine, a variety of faiths. In need of a message whether they realize it or not.

What better time to share the gospel of Jesus? That is exactly what Pastor Khwima Msiska did. He preached 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

"...the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing."



(L-R): Rev. Brester Msowoya and Rev. Khwima Msiska serve congregations in the Central Region of the LCCA Malawi Synod

Pastor Msiska could have hijacked the sermon time and simply highlighted how much Evangelist Mapulanga had accomplished during his personal and ministry years. God had given the Evangelist a total eight decades spanning from 1940 to 2020. There would have been plenty to say. After all, just in his gospel ministry of

serving the Lutheran Church of Central Africa, how many sermons did Evangelist Mapulanga preach? How many babies and adults did he baptize? How many member visits had he made? How many people of the Lutheran church had he comforted, corrected, rebuked, and trained in righteousness? Over decades of service, how many kilometers had he pedaled, and miles had he walked to serve the Lord's people?

But Pastor Msiska didn't dwell on those things. For that matter, neither did the Liturgist Pastor Msowaya nor any other speaker. The funeral focus was not about the man Mapulanga but about the GOD MAN Jesus Christ. Both LCCA pastors answered very clearly the questions that are most important:



Members of the Lutheran Women's Organization (LUWO) of the LCCA sing assist at every funeral

What had Jesus done for Evangelist Mapulanga? What had the Promised One accomplished? Why did Christ die on the cross? What do Jesus' perfect life and innocent death mean for him - and me - when I die? Ah, now that's something to talk about. And sing about. And that is what the Lutheran women and men did. The preacher and the liturgist were not the only ones witnessing to the stricken world. So were the many people who attended the funeral and are longing for Christ's

coming.

We arrived at the funeral home at 9:00 am. We departed at 4 pm. Count them: Seven hours. And for the better part of seven hours, people were singing. Why? Because there was something to sing about! The funeral was so much more than a burial. It was a witness to a stricken world that there is hope beyond the grave. There is life after death. There is a crown of righteousness in store.



The long line of people walking and singing on their way to the cemetery

No wonder the family of God longs for their Brother's appearing on the last day! We are not just waiting for Jesus Christ to come again, but desiring it, yearning for it. Looking forward to it, patiently but anticipantly.

One day our fight will be over. Our race will be finished. And we will live no longer by faith but by sight. And so with the strength and splendor of belief, the men and women lifted up their voices. They sang...

- at the funeral home
- at the mortuary
- walking to the cemetery

- huddled around the grave



Evangelist Mapulanga and his wife

The day was one of song. And the songs were ones of witness. And the witness was to just One: Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus rose from the dead, so will Evangelist Mapulanga. Because Jesus paid the penalty of sin, we don't have to. Because Jesus gave up his crown, we will wear one - a gift of grace!

Until the Lord calls us home as he did Evangelist Mapulanga on 4th December 2020, we will still have graves to dig, funerals to attend and loved ones to bid goodbye. We will mourn. Hearts will ache. Tears will flow.

But not without hope. We rise above our natural grief. So we will also have sermons to preach and songs to sing and a witness to give. Because there is a world out there stricken with sin and in need of a Savior. No matter in which country our loved ones die, let the masses and the crowds come to our Christian funerals!

So much more than a burial.



Rev. John Holtz and Evangelist Chitanzane Mapulanga in 2016

Missionary John Holtz lives in Malawi

Please pray for those working in fields that are ripe for harvest. Share their story, engage with future news and receive updates. Learn more about our mission fields in Africa and how the Holy Spirit is working faith in people's hearts at <https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/africa>