

The Chameleon and the Snake

Do you know about Lumvwi (“chameleon”) and Njoka (“snake”)? Let’s re-tell their story in several sections since I have a second African saga to share.

That tale is true. From October 24 through November 21 Dr. Al Sorum of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and I led others on a learning journey. We met with brothers and sisters in Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia. We focused on stories from God’s Word.



L-R: Dr. Al Sorum, Debbie Witte, Percy Kalyobwe, Dan Witte

A Conversation Over Food

First, though, imagine God wants to talk with Lumvwi, the chameleon. Why? God made all things very good. He created Adam and Eve in his image, in his likeness.

But they ruined everything. You know the story. Death fills this world, like smoke pervading a room, for we all have sinned. Even wounds that heal leave scars. All human skin wears out. Bodies wear out. Everyone perishes.

“They need new skin,” the Creator announces. So God summons Lumvwi.

“Listen, Lumvwi,” God says. “I have something for you to take to humankind. Hurry! Tell people I sent you. Give them this.”



Lumvwi (chameleon)

He holds out a tiny present. "I trust you, Lumvwi. You are fast. Go now!"

Lumvwi takes off for Earth quick as lightning. He holds the package under his arm.

When he gets to a river he pauses. He is so thirsty.

Njoka (snake) is drinking there too. "Sssay, Lumvwi (Chameleon)," he hisses. "Essspecially ssspeedy today! What are you up to?"

"God sent me," Lumvwi says between gulps of water. "He has something for people."

Njoka hates people. They walk so tall. They fear snakes. Some kill snakes. And God attends to them more than all the rest of his creation. Jealousy fills Njoka: "Why would God give them another gift?"

Then he has another thought: "What could I do to keep them from getting this gift, whatever it is?"

"Sssay, Lumvwi," Snake hisses. He comes closer to Lumvwi and the gift. "Ssso ssspecial to sssee you again!"



Njoka (snake)

"My family hasss misssed you. Sssometimesss other relativesss ssstop by for mealsss. But not you. Perhapsss you sssusspect you sssurpassss the ressst of usss."

Even the suggestion bothers Lumvwi. "Oh no, cousin," Lumvwi replies. "I would be so honored to eat with you sometime."

"Sssay," Njoka suggests, "why not now? My wife hasss lunch ready. She would be so pleasssed to sssee you dine with usss!"

"Oh, dear," Lumvwi thinks.

"God told me to hurry," he tells Njoka. "Perhaps some other time?"

"Yesss, yessss," hisses Njoka. "Jussst as I thought. Too good for the likesss of usss! Ssspeed along with your bussinessss."

Lumvwi looks at the sun, high in the sky. “Maybe I can have a quick lunch with Njoka and his wife,” he thinks, “and still have time to deliver the gift.”

“Wait, Cousin,” Lumvwi blurts out. “I’m sorry. I would love to eat with you. Why don’t we do so now? I’ll get back to business right afterward.”

“Oh, Lumvwi,” Njoka replies. “*Thank you.*” He tries to sound humble. “What an honor for uss.” He leads Lumvwi off.

Why a made-up story of Lumvwi and Njoka (Chameleon and Snake) talking, then eating? For one, Al Sorum and I had so many good conversations and meals with God’s people in Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia over four weeks.



chancel drama in a church of the LCMC Kenya

Telling THE STORY

Each of us exchanged our own stories. We discussed God’s mission to save the world through his Son.

In all three locations, Al especially taught gospel outreach—personal and congregational. In Kenya, I led learning about the Augsburg Confession. Both Al and I stressed stories.

Al led off with the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus from Luke 19. “What is evangelism?” he asked. “It’s going to people. It’s telling God’s good news to people who are between God’s light and Satan’s darkness.”

We discussed more stories. Three of my favorites: 1) John 4— the woman at the well, 2) Luke 15—the waiting father, and 3) John 12— the Greek men who wanted to see Jesus.



Pastors in Zambia discuss Bible stories to share with others

Participants rehearsed one of those, or another favorite good news story about Jesus. Then we all hit the streets to share the gospel with others.



Al Sorum and Kosmos met on a busy street in Lilongwe, Malawi

In all three settings (Kenya, Malawi & Zambia), we loved hearing each other's witnessing stories after we regrouped. Pastor Frank asked a vendor at a market in Sondu, Kenya, "Why are your bananas so small?" That led to a great gospel conversation. There were too many others to tell.



Pastors and Evangelists in Kenya

Brand New Skins

Back to our fable:

Njoka's wife was so hospitable to Lumvwi. "Have more," she kept saying.

Lumvwi ate so much he could hardly move. "This is such good beer, too," he told his hosts. Lumvwi forgot all about his mission from God.

Njoka smiled slyly. Lumvwi's head nodded. His eyelids drooped. Soon Lumvwi slept.

"What isss ssso funny, my husssband?" asked Njoka's wife. She took Lumvwi's sleep as a compliment.

"Sssee thisss?" Njoka hissed. He slid God's gift out from under Lumvwi's arm.

"What isss that?" she asked.

"Sssomething from God," Njoka laughed.

Njoka tore open the tiny package. Its contents expanded.

“Ssay!” he exclaimed, lifting something from the box. “New skins. God ssseemsss to have has ssent us new ssskinsss. Whenever our *old* onesss wear out let usss change into *new* onesss.”



group of Pastors in Malawi

Njoka laughed again, louder. He woke Lumvwi. The sleepy guest took one look at what he had brought along, now open. He realized how foolish he had been.

“No, Njoka.” Lumvwi begged. “Those are not for you. They are for people. God sent me on a mission to humankind. Give them *back*.”

When Njoka said nothing, Lumvwi stretched out his hands. “Please, Njoka! I need to fulfill my mission. Give the skins *back*.”

But Njoka refused. He kept up his evil laugh. He held the skins too far away for Lumvwi to reach them. Then he slithered off with them. “Hah, cousssin. Now

thessssssskinsss are oursss.”



Lumvwi & Njoka

When you think about God’s mission to save the world, does it crush you? Scare you?

On the evening of the first Easter Jesus told his disciples, “As the Father has sent me, I also am sending you” (John 20:21).

Go and save the world? Me?

“Why would God still want me to go tell his story to others?” we think. “I have gotten so distracted. I have failed so many times.”

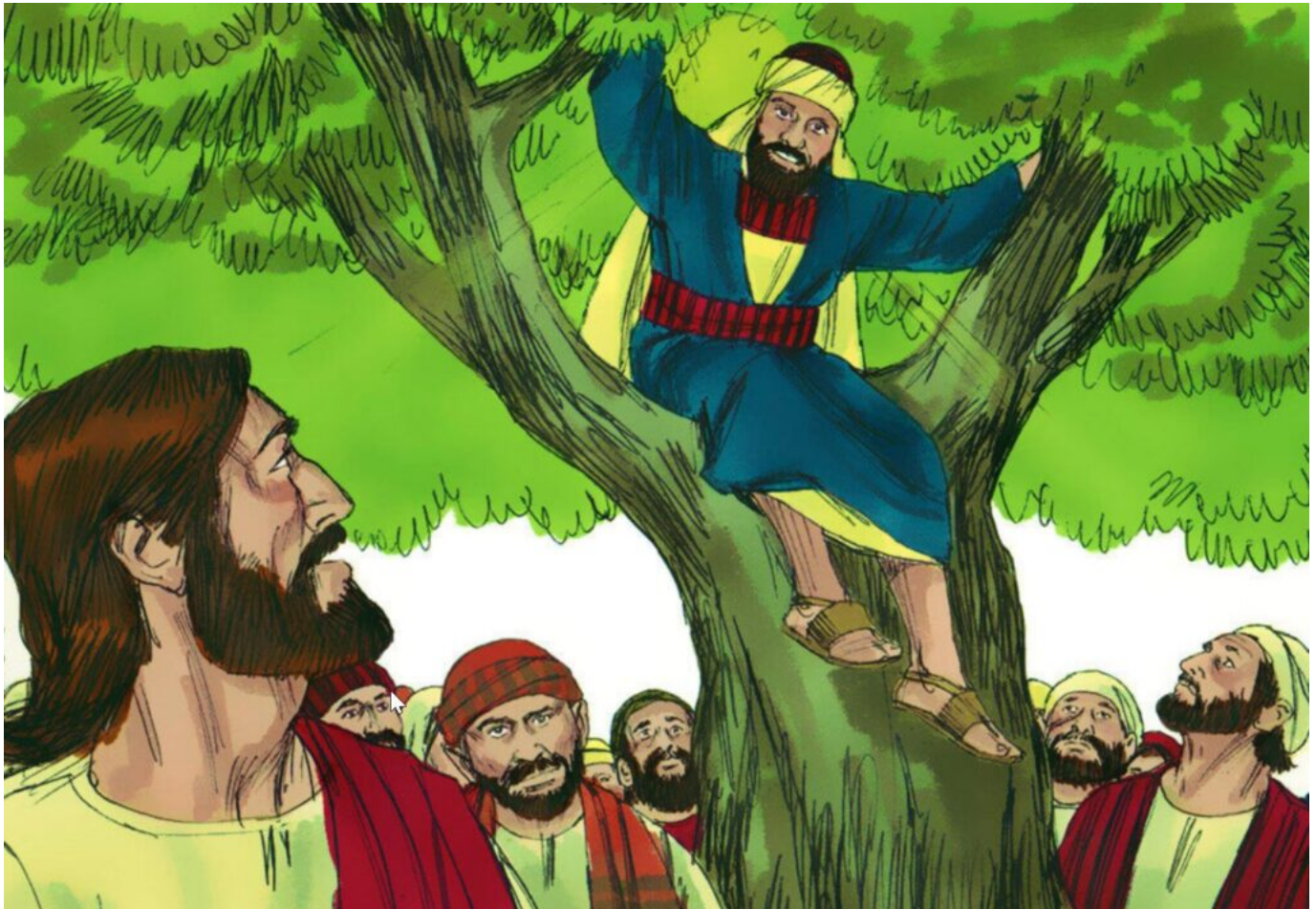
The real snake ... is still such a liar. First, the devil distracts us from God’s mission. Then he accuses us day and night. “You are such failures,” he hisses.

We start thinking the same. “I’m so worthless.”

The snake, the devil says, “It’s hopeless. God could never forgive anyone like you.”

But God not only forgives you, he sees you as holy. He invites you to be part of his worldwide mission. And he prizes all you do in his name.

Jesus said to Zacchaeus up in a tree, "You come down. I have to go to your house today." He did that in your place. God sees you as if you were Jesus.



Zacchaeus in the sycamore-fig tree (Luke 19:1-10)

Because Jesus was fearless, and because Jesus came to seek and to save what was lost, not only did Jesus redeem you by his blood. His holy life counts for you too. God sees you as someone who has perfectly fulfilled his mission for us all: "Go and save the world."

Yes, the world is ruined. Jesus is going to come on the last day and judge the whole world. And he will give new skin, like his skin, to everyone who trusted in him.

We don't know what we are going to be like with our new skin, but we know we are going to be like him. We will see him as he is.



group of Pastors in Zambia

So our African fable ends quite differently from that story—the best, truest story.

As the sun sank Lumvwi felt sick. Njoka had betrayed him. And he had disobeyed God. He had failed.

Some say this is why still today snakes shed their old skins and have new skins. And it is also why, some say, chameleons no longer move fast. They hide a lot. They hide in the crooks of trees. They cling to branches. They fear facing God and man.

How about you?

As surely as Jesus lives, you have *nothing* to fear. You have nothing to fear from the God who equips you with his Spirit to tell others the story of his Son. You have nothing to fear from anyone you tell that story to either.

Please beg the Lord of the harvest to keep sending out workers into his harvest field—you too.



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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>