

“I held an umbrella . . . until we got through the resurrection.”

Colleagues,

Now there's a title for a sermon next Easter Sunday!

No, that topic sentence was not written by a madman. It comes from Loren Bliese, telling us of his most recent mission out in the desert in Ethiopia. When you read it in his narrative below, it does make sense.

Loren and Edith Bliese were mentors for Marie and me during our 1995 assignment as ELCA “Global Mission Volunteers” in Addis Ababa. [I was guest lecturer at the seminary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus [EECMY], Marie was helper-outer both in the library and for things calling for computer-competence in seminary administration.] The Blieses, pioneer missionaries from the American Lutheran Church, arrived in 1960, just one year after EECMY was constituted—and stayed for 48 years. Though they now live in Oregon, Loren (often accompanied by Edith, who founded and managed a Christian school in Addis) goes back a couple of times each year to continue his Bible translation work in some of the minority-people languages in Ethiopia. Depending on which expert you ask, there are 90—or maybe just 78—different languages among Ethiopia's 82.5 million inhabitants. Imagine that, 90 languages in a country not quite twice as big as Texas!

Loren has already worked on Bible translations in 27(!) of these languages. At the EECMY's 50th anniversary celebration in January he received an honorary doctorate (to add to his earned

one) for this monumental ministry. And he's at it still. Also on this retiree return visit. When he's there, we get weekly emails. Here are the last two. He's just returned from a two-week junket into the hinterlands to consult and listen to native speakers (mostly all Muslims) in order to get the Afar-language-translation he's now working on as "right" as can be done.

Want to hear how that umbrella/resurrection sentence fits into the story? Read on. That's not the only head-shaking item in Loren's narrative.

Peace and Joy!
Ed Schroeder

Oct 20, 09

Dear Family & Friends,

It is Tuesday noon and we are in Waldia. [Ed: Several hundred kilometers northeast of Addis.] Ali Nuriye and I left this morning from the desert after spending eight days there. God was with us, and the difficulties were minimal compared to the blessings. We started Monday morning from Addis Ababa, and arrived at Mille in the desert in the afternoon. One former hostel student met us and we took him part way toward the area he works in. It was raining hard when we filled up with diesel in Mille. We thanked God for the rain, since some areas we had come through were completely dry, with even the acacia brush dead. This is the end of the rains when there is normally good grass everywhere. Some spots had gotten rain and were green. It rained two nights while we were there, and grass had sprouted and yellow flowers were blooming by the time we left.

Since rain was threatening and the road was muddy, we stopped before dark at the school the Lutheran World Federation built at

Garri. The teachers gave us a classroom, so we didn't have to set up the tent. They have four grades with 30, 40, 30 and 17 students. It was good to see that they are functioning properly.

We went on to Chifra, and met with the LWF staff there for the rest of the morning. The river has undermined the Waqaama diversion dam so it is completely out of use, and would probably not be feasible to repair because of the extreme flooding from the highlands. I interviewed the health officer, who is teaching in discussion groups to change the practice of female circumcision. He gave me valuable information for my Ethiopian Study Conference paper I'm working on. He also gave me posters they had made of a lady who had a fistula for 25 years before they sent her to Addis Ababa where she was repaired. Later when I was distributing them in Alalesubla, the chief's son said the woman was from his father's village. When we later went there, they verified this, and I met two of her children. We thank God that people are really being helped by our programs.

It is now evening. We went to Mersa and Girana this afternoon and came back to the hotel. I got a bucket of warm water to pour over myself for a shower. That was nice after nine days. We met with the family of a former pastor in Girana, and were able to share a lot. The wife who was nursing a baby in a family picture I took in February [Loren's visit earlier this year] has gone to Kuwait to get a job and send money home. The baby was left with the family. He seemed happy enough, but it is hard to understand how they made this choice. The term is two years, and many never return, or come back sick. In fact one daughter had just returned from Saudi Arabia sick.

Sam's sister [Sam is the Blieses' adopted Ethiopian son, a baby handed to them on the day of his birth during the famine of 1973] Zewdit in Mersa was hospitalized with a bad kidney infection last spring, and has heart problems. Her 12th grade

daughter, who has been attending school in Bahr Dar for seven years, came home to be with her. Hopefully she will still make it through 12th grade in Mersa, although the quality of school won't be as good.

Last year on the desert we had a scorpion under our tent when we broke camp. This morning we had a 10-inch viper. The man I work with there had been bitten several years ago, and was very sick at that time. A girl in the chief's village died last year after being bitten. I thank God for his protection, according to his promise Luke 10:19 that we will even tread on snakes and scorpions and not be harmed.

I worked with a skilled person for three days, and with others for some hours going through about half of the words in the prophets and historical books of our translation. Besides the spelling corrections, it was especially useful to have the dialect input from this area. I also had good interviews in two villages about "cousin-marriages" and customs that harm women. When I get back to Addis I'll have lots of material to work into the paper I'm preparing to present.

We had a crazy or possessed man come while I was showing the Joseph film. [Ed: Loren connects his computer to the car battery, and the locals cram around the computer screen to see the show.] He reprimanded us, and told the people not to listen and be corrupted by our message. He tried to take my glasses, but I was able to hold on to them. After a half-hour of his ranting, some of the younger listeners overpowered him, tied him up and carried him away. I turned the film back on, and we finished it shortly after ten o'clock. The next night I showed the Jesus film until it started raining. I held an umbrella over the computer until we got through the resurrection. The third night there I showed a Navajo canyon film of a mountain lion and shepherd boys. That is always a favorite. I also showed part of

the David film. It is so far from the scripture, that I don't normally do so. Since they are in English, I summarized the Joseph and David films in their language as we went along for those sitting around me. Both Ali and I had the opportunity to answer questions about history, since by their [Muslim] teaching all those like David from Adam on are counted as followers of Islam.

We also showed films the three nights in the chief's village. There were over forty there. One son brought a film of Libya about how a sheik had led the struggle against the Italian invasion [of Ethiopia] in the 1930s. It was in Amharic, but its source was religious, of the Libyan variety. I reviewed parts of the three disks first, and saw that it was mainly war. When we showed it, only portions of each disc worked, which I appreciated. You can guess which side was cheered on when they blew up the others. It was a real education in religious loyalty, and identity with brothers of the faith. What I saw as mainly a war chronicle, had deep religious significance for them.

God can use even such events for his good. The next night they said yes when I offered the Jesus film, to which they had said no the first night. We showed it all the way through the final prayers to believe and be saved. The night we stayed in a third village the one in charge said to only show the lion and shepherd film.

I delivered several children's story books to each of the three schools in the area, as I had agreed to do in last year's confrontation. The local administrator who challenged me then, has been replaced, for which I thank God.

It is nearly bedtime, and tomorrow we are planning to leave early for Wachu, and visit Sam's relatives. I'll see if the

internet connection I bought works here. We are aiming to get back to Addis on Friday.

Love,
Loren

Oct 25, 09

Dear Family & Friends,

Thanks be to God for a safe and fruitful trip to the desert and Wallo. I got back to the Volunteer House at 8 Friday evening, eleven hours after leaving Dessie. We had another flat on the way, and parts of the road are under construction. I also spent over an hour in Addis in traffic jams, and missed a turnoff on the ring road in the dark. Rev. Nahum, the general secretary of the North Central Ethiopia Synod [of the EECMY], rode with us. He and Ali had a good time sharing about people they know in Wallo, and I shared Psalms and history of the American Lutheran Mission [Loren and Edith's first assignment in 1960 was to the region he visited on this trip]. We met Bishop Halvorson and Pastor Birhanu from the Northwest Washington Synod [ELCA] near Debre Sina. They are on a two-week visit to their sister Synod in the EECMY, and were accompanied by the Synod President.

We visited with the Finnish missionaries and other staff in the EECMY Synod office in Dessie Thursday before dark, and more on Friday morning. Akililu, the development program head, is preparing a paper on how the church can serve in the big irrigation development in the desert. He gave me his draft, which I edited in the evening, and I shared some of the research I have done, and showed him my paper on cross-cousin marriage. In the morning I gave the message in the staff devotions, using Luke 10 about how God worked during our time in the desert. I

closed with Isaiah 55 referring to the rain we had there, and how the dry desert had turned green with flowers by the time we left. We pray and trust that God will fulfill his promise that his word which was sown through the Jesus film will also bear fruit as he intends.

Ali and I spent Wednesday through Thursday morning in Arerit and Wachu, the home of Sam's birth relatives. A sister with seven kids, two aunts with two and four kids, and many cousins live there. Yimam, the teenage son of his sister, went to Saudi Arabia to look for work because of the poor crop this year. His mother's cousin Zemzem went to Djibouti last year and helped him get to Saudi from there. I pray for the many young people who are risking their health and lives by going to Arab countries for work. I showed the pictures I took in February while waiting in the house that Sam's sister's husband built in Arerit. They sell tea there on market days. Otherwise it isn't occupied. After walking to Wachu I spent the time mainly having the students read to me from an Amharic Bible story book. Except for two cousins, the older ones could read fairly well. They are in 5th and 6th grade in Arerit. The two cousins are in 4th and 5th grade, but can not read. The fourth grader doesn't even know the alphabet. I'm afraid they are just being passed to the next grade whether they learn or not. Many of the younger children are attending 1st and 2nd grade in Wachu, which is really good to see.

There is only one Christian family in Wachu. Bekele was a literacy teacher for our program there and in the desert back in the 70s. We visited with him, read scripture and had prayer. He gets together with some of Sam's male relatives for Bible reading. I pray for them regularly, that they will come to know Jesus as their Savior and not just as a prophet. I brought reading glasses for one cousin to whom I gave a Bible two years ago. I got prescription glasses for Bekele last year for his one

good eye. Bekele's daughter Yamrot has mental problems, and is getting better. Ali and I prayed for her healing a year ago, and we continue to pray for her. I took a picture of the family by the tree that Paul [a Bliese son] hung his hammock on over the edge of a cliff in the 70s. It was a meaningful time. I had to stop and rest three times climbing the hills the hour walk back to Arerit. From there it is an hour on a steep mountainous hand dug road with river crossings to the main road.

[Back in Addis] I spent Sat. morning unpacking and putting the camping things in my outside office storage area, and went shopping for fruits and vegetables. Zegayech [caretaker at the mission hosue] washed dishes, cleaned the house, baked cookies and cooked a hot dish. In the afternoon I started organizing pictures and notes from the trip. I also went to pump up a low tire. I'll have to have two flat tires from the trip repaired in Addis this week. I also plan to do more banking to pay the balance due on last year's Canaan [the school Edith founded] rent, and do some repairs on things that got broken on the trip. Then I plan to continue work on the spell-check word list for the prophets and historical books in the translation, and enter all the notes I gathered from interviews in the cross-cousin-marriage paper I'll present next week.

I thank God for health and protection, and for the opportunity to be his witness and servant.

Love,
Loren

PS: I have run out of minutes on my email, so I'll buy some more and send this tomorrow.