

## Sermon for 9<sup>th</sup> October 2009 Gill returns from South Africa

It's good to be home! I want to tell you 2 stories about my first week in our link diocese of Kimberley and Kuruman in South Africa. I was there to help lead a summer school for the clergy of the diocese, which is the poorest area in South Africa, the part that's always overlooked and gets very little government money or attention. It's the only area of South Africa that's getting no investment as a result of the football World Cup next year. The area is largely rural, and most of the land is owned by white landowners or large corporations – the people are very poor and there are massive problems of poverty, alcohol abuse, HIV/AIDS and domestic violence.

The day after I got there, I stayed with Fr Drake Tsenkeng and his wife Hope. While we shared breakfast, Hope told me some of their story.

- black, Setswana-speaking South Africans
- active in the struggle against Apartheid
- friend of Steve Biko
- Drake was detained by the South African Defence Force for 18 months when he had 2 little girls at the time
- Hope had no idea where Drake was, or when he would be released
- Released
- Biko murdered and Drake taken to see his body - threatened
- Refugees in Botswana
- Tutu intervened - went to Glasgow, Drake at university
- Arrived with no warm clothes and baby wrapped in blanket
- Looked after by church - 5 years in Glasgow
- Back to Botswana for 10 years
- Returned in 1998 (4 years after apartheid ended) and resumed ministry
- Drake is parish priest (one of 25 paid priests in an area twice the size of UK)
- Hope (trained teacher) runs HIV/AIDS education programmes and home visits
- Encounters huge poverty and ignorance about how to care for AIDS sufferers
- Lent project – save a spare cup/plate for someone who doesn't have one

From there I drove 3 hours to the Moffat Mission in Kuruman, on the edge of the Kalahari desert to help lead a clergy summer school. The mission is named after Robert Moffat, a Scottish missionary, and who arrived there in 1820 and stayed 53 years with only one visit home. It was an amazing place, one of those thin places (as Celtic Christians call them) where the line dividing earth from heaven seems somehow thinner. In one of the breaks, I went to look round the homestead where Robert and his wife Mary lived. I noticed two things in particular. One was discovering that on Moffat's one visit home, he persuaded David Livingstone to come to Africa; the other was the order of service from a mission service for young people that Moffat led at Maidenhead when he was 80 years old. 1200 young people attended and one of them gave the order of service to Revd Humphrey Thompson when he left his church in Maidenhead 56 years later to come to the Moffat Mission. Revd Thompson stayed at Moffat for 59 years.

There's much more to tell, of course. But I wanted to tell you those two stories because I was so deeply touched by both of them. Hope and Drake's story left me sitting at the table trying to eat cereal with it turning to ashes in my mouth with the shock of what she was saying. And the story of Moffat, Livingstone and Humphrey Thompson because I was bowled over by what God does through the daily work of his people.

In the gospel today Jesus speaks to a rich young man who was very keen to do God's will to the best of his ability. We're told that Jesus looked at him and loved him. But the young man was so wrapped up in his own concerns and getting it right that when Jesus told him what was really required the story tells us the young man was: *shocked and went away grieving*.

It's very easy for us to get wrapped up in our own concerns - whatever they are - so much so that we fail to see the bigger picture that God sees. And when we do see a tiny glimpse what God asks of us, it's so shocking that we usually just forget it's there or pretend we haven't seen it, and we are the poorer for that. We fail to see that God looks on us with love as he looked at the rich young man, even when, especially when, we get it wrong, especially when we disappoint him and fall short of who he knows we can be. We fail to see that the only true wealth is in knowing God. We fail to see that our possessiveness and self-absorption costs someone else very dear. We fail to see that try as we might we'll never be good disciples, nor even adequate ones, most of us. But that it's only through the grace of God that we are here this morning daring to come into God's presence and worship him.

Blessings  
Gill