



Faith and Works

June 2, 2021

Rachel Yates

This past Sunday was Mission Worker Sunday: a time to celebrate mission workers serving in this country and abroad. Thank you to the congregations of this Presbytery that support our PC(USA) mission co-workers. If you are curious to learn about the ministries of our global partners and the ways in which our mission co-workers accompany them, you can [read and subscribe](#) to their letters. From that page, there are ample ways to financially support our mission co-workers, and I pray you will consider doing so.

One recent letter struck me because of the ways it tied into our recent Presbytery Gathering worship. During our worship, we tied our Matthew 25 vision to James 2, which addresses faith and good works. We used a litany of confession that repeated the verse: “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill.” (James 2:16 NRSV). Confronted with the needs of the world, it is not enough to bless people with words and send them on their way.

Jim and Jodi McGill, serving in Niger and South Sudan, confronted this in a power, but amusing way. I am delighted to share a portion of their letter with you:

When we lived in Malawi, one of our favorite Easter celebrations was the village street pageant that began around 3 o'clock in the morning. In the pageant Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb and finds it empty. The angels at the tomb pronounce, “Go and tell them, Christ is Risen,” at which point all the people at the pageant start processing around the area singing and shouting, “Go and tell them, Christ is Risen.” The procession stops at every house and is greeted by the inhabitants who step out to share in the singing and celebration. We have been able to participate in this celebration since we left Malawi in 2015 except now, we experience the celebration through WhatsApp messages. So, this Easter, Jim was receiving “Go and tell them, Christ is Risen” messages and then, it happened.

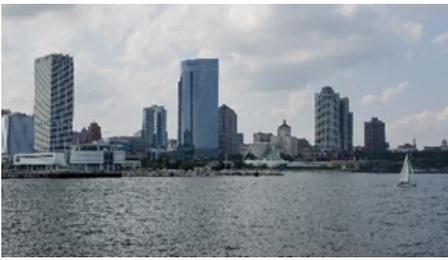
We all have experienced times of miscommunication and understand that communicating with anyone is complicated. It is fraught with possible misunderstandings due to assumptions, biases, and language barriers which may not even be recognized by those involved. Throw in technology and time differences and even more opportunities for confusion can happen. Yet, out of misunderstanding, there can sometimes come unexpected and deeper messages. Take for example the following Easter WhatsApp text message conversation between Jim and Othow Okoti, a South Sudanese peacemaker with whom he works when he is in South Sudan.

At the end of March, Othow wrote to Jim, “Good morning. Water Problem in Pibor”.

Jim responded: “How are you? What kind of water problems?”

Othow: “They drink from the river directly, and the water is too dirty, because people and cattle are bathing and drinking at the same place.”

Jim did not respond immediately so he could have time to focus on the issue with Mr. Okoti and gather more information. During the hiatus, Jim received messages from colleagues and friends in Malawi celebrating



Christ's resurrection, and in the spirit of joy and fellowship, he copied the same WhatsApp message to Mr. Okoti which he had sent to friends in Malawi.

Jim: "Go and tell them, 'He is Risen!' Have a very Blessed Easter!"

Othow thought Jim was responding to his message about people and cattle drinking together and responded: "OK, but if they ask, 'Where can we go to get clean water, what shall be the answer?'"

This was an Easter morning example of how, for church partners, the message of Jesus' gift of love is innately transformed into action, as is reflected in Matthew 25.

... Mr. Othow Okoti's words reverberate as the Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger, the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan, and you respond to needs within the communities they serve, regardless of their religious affiliation, if any. Yes, God is risen but after receiving the amazing grace of God's love, "If they ask where can we go to get clean water, what shall be the answer?"

As a Matthew 25 Presbytery, may we move seamlessly between faith and action, proclaiming the risen Lord and working simultaneously toward a more just, compassionate world.