



A bit too improbable

Steve Vinton, January 13, 2008

For days we've been hearing rumors. We've been listening to people coming, sometimes breathlessly, insisting that they had heard from someone who had heard from someone who had actually heard it himself on the national radio.

We've been getting phone calls from lots of high government officials congratulating us. The SMS instant messages have been coming from literally all over the country say how thrilled people were with the news. It might sound bizarre, but I have to admit that there were more than a few times that in my frustration with the silliness of it all I almost got angry at people!

And then finally this morning Godfrey and I received the two sealed envelopes from the Chief Zonal Inspector with the official results on the national exams of our students at Madisi and Sawala!

It wasn't that we were being unreasonable or argumentative all these days when we kept telling people that we simply wouldn't believe anything that anyone said until we actually saw the written reports with our own eyes. We had decided when the rumors first started that we were simply going to be like Thomas who said that there was no way he would believe until he touched the nail prints and saw with his own eyes that Jesus had been resurrected!

A lot of people thought we were being completely unreasonable this past week, just as I imagine that many people thought Thomas was being unreasonable -- when in reality Thomas was being totally reasonable. It didn't matter how many people were spreading rumors that they had seen Jesus alive, it didn't matter how many people had talked to someone who had talked to someone who had seen him alive, the fact remained that the news was simply too improbable, and therefore it was only reasonable for a person to be cautious. And to doubt. And even frankly to disbelieve. After all Jesus had not only died, he had been buried, and so what really were the odds that he was alive? Thomas wasn't being unreasonable. He was being asked by people to believe something that was simply a bit too improbable.

And so it was for us with the reports that were circulating everywhere about the national exam results! People were asking us to believe something that was simply a bit too improbable.

What were the odds that every single one of our students had passed? Let's face the facts. In most schools in this country, less than half the students pass the national exams, in many schools not even a quarter do, and now people wanted us to believe that all of our students had passed? Best to be cautious. Best to doubt. Best quite frankly to disbelieve.

After all, our students in our schools were the "unchosen" ones, the kids who when they finished primary school were passed over, who weren't among the few who scored high enough to get to go to the government secondary schools. They were the kids who were told that they would never get to go to school again. Our kids were the orphans, the kids with no shoes, the ones who ate only one meal a day. Half of our kids were girls, almost none of whom ever even dreamed that one day they'd get the chance to go to school! Our kids were the kids who had been two and three and four years working in the fields because the year that they finished primary school their names didn't come out on the list of those few who were chosen to go on to secondary school and they had given up any hope of ever going to school again. Until suddenly there was this flurry of activity of building Madisi and Sawala right here in their villages. And now they were competing against the kids who had gotten straight A's in primary school, the kids who were eating three meals a day in nice boarding schools, the kids who had electricity to study by at night, the kids who had textbooks and always had enough pens and notebooks and paper. Our kids studied if they were lucky by kerosene lanterns, if they happened to have the money to buy kerosene. They fretted over what to do when their pen ran out of ink and they didn't have the ten cents to buy another one. And we were supposed to just believe someone running up the hill with news that they had talked to someone who had heard from someone else who had heard on the radio that at Madisi and at Sawala not a single student had failed!

I've thought a lot about Thomas these past few days. After all it didn't matter how many people were spreading rumors that they had seen Jesus alive!

The news was simply too improbable for a reasonable man to believe. Jesus hadn't just died, he had also been buried for a couple of days, and so how probable was it really that he could have come back to life? And so it

was with the reports that were circulating about the national exam results of our students. How probable was it that every single one of our students had passed? How probable was it that not only had both of our schools beat out all of the government schools in our district, but that our two schools had placed in the top twenty private schools, not just in our state, but in the tri-state region that included Iringa, Mbeya and Rukwa with 386 schools, and that the names of Madisi and Sawala had been read out on the national radio?

The more people insisted, the more improbable that it sounded. Two little schools in remote villages don't suddenly the first year their kids take the national examinations end up beating out the schools with the long and proud histories, the nice buildings, the ones that had laboratory equipment and textbooks and whose teachers had years of experience and had all been to college.

And so when we were handed the two envelopes we kind of stared at each other for a moment and then excitedly ripped them apart like little kids at Christmas time ... and there it was ... all totally true, just as it had been announced on the radio, just as everyone kept saying, every single student at Madisi and Sawala had indeed passed the national examinations!

And we were right near the top alright! What was from every rational standpoint unbelievable, what no rational thinking person could really accept as having happened, was indeed, I had to admit, fact. Just as there was joy for Thomas in being proven wrong, there was deep and incredible joy for us in having all of our doubts erased.

And so my friends now I can dare to share with you all the incredible news, now that it has been totally verified and I've seen it with my own eyes, that which was so improbable has really indeed occurred. Every single one of the 197 students from Madisi and Sawala who took the national exams passed! In every single subject, our students class average ranked in the top quarter and in subject after subject we were ranking in the top 10%.

And so now three years after we first launched the dream of starting these schools here in this country, I am feeling an overwhelming sense of thankfulness. It was just a dream that we had, a conviction that God really

wanted His church to do something about helping kids in these villages to at least get the chance to go to school. My thanks to all of those people who believed with us that this was something that God wanted done. I want to thank all of you who have over the past couple of years given money to buy the metal roofing and the cement to build these classrooms. Many thanks to those of you who gave money for the scholarship fund that enabled us to help all of these girls go to school, because I know in my heart that most if not all of them would have never made it this far without the help from many of you. And I feel so much thankfulness to all of the parents who made bricks and hauled stones, the people in these villages who responded to a dream by putting in so much backbreaking labor to help their children. And for all of those teachers who came from America and Canada and Europe to invest their lives in helping these kids -- and to all those who invested in giving the money that bought their airplane tickets. And for all of those teachers from colleges and schools here in Tanzania who responded to a call to come teach with us, not because we had great salaries to offer, but because we appealed to their hearts as Christian people to give of themselves, to go to the hard places to live, in order to give those Jesus calls "the least of these my brothers" some kind of a chance at an education.

So rejoice with us friends and accept our thanks for partnering with us in this work. Something extraordinarily wonderful has happened.

And on Monday our eight schools re-open to begin another school year. And it's very possible that a determined woman who we sent to the village of Ulolela a couple of months ago just might succeed in opening our ninth school Monday morning. There are rumors that she's had over 100 kids coming every day for the last couple of weeks to work hard to help the carpenters and the masons to get the buildings ready and that they are determined that school should begin on January 14th. It's probably not true. But we had a phone call this afternoon from a government official in the town of Mbinga 40 miles from Ulolela who insists that he keeps hearing people talk about it being true, but he wasn't sure if it was really possible that it could be true, and so he wanted to hear Godfrey himself if it was really true.

These days we never really know.