

JOURNALS POSTED ON FEBRUARY 11, 2019

Storms in the Congo



I Will Never Tire of the View...

Bill & I live in a one-bedroom apartment that belongs to Heal Africa, our partner in Goma. The walls are built from volcanic bricks, hewn from the lava that cascaded into and destroyed the city of Goma during the eruption of Mount Nyiragongo in 2002. It is quaint and secure and after four years in South Sudan sharing various dwellings with others, we love having our own place. Some would say the inside is a bit small... but our front yard is immense; it extends in fact, as far as the eye can see. We live on the sheer expanse of Lake Kivu. Our apartment is built on volcanic rubble, sitting on top of the lake. I will never tire of the view!

Lake Kivu, surrounded on three sides by volcanic mountains, is said to be the highest natural lake in Africa. At an elevation of 5,000 feet, it extends 55 miles from Goma to Bukavu. We have numerous species of birds which use the lake as their source of food (cormorants that swim just under the surface seeking fish and pied kingfishers which dive from 40 feet in the air straight into the water to pierce their catch). We also have fishermen in small hewn wooden canoes (pirogues) who pass by our door every morning and then again in the evening with their share of the lake's bounty caught in hand-woven nets. The lake is usually calm but due to its immense size, its location near the equator, and the altitude, ferocious storms can arrive unannounced and pummel the shoreline (and drench our home if we don't quickly clasp the doors.) These unpredictable storms are a particular threat to the fisherman.

A Threatening Storm...

It was on a beautiful day as dusk was turning into evening and fisherman were returning home that I glimpsed the beginning of a threatening storm on the horizon and watched the many boats hurriedly head back to shore. The wind picked up swiftly as three-foot waves began to crash onto the rocks. Whitecaps were visible across Lake Kivu. Then the torrential rains began. One lone pirogue must have thought they had more time to get to safety and were caught in the tumultuous waters.





Storm Raged On...

I saw the boat, just offshore, being tossed up and down and stood transfixed in the doorway ... watching ... waiting ... praying. What a helpless feeling; there was nothing I could do as the wind gusted, the waves exploded against the rocks and the rain poured down. Time crept on as the storm raged. I prayed for God to be with them, to save them, to calm the storm.

Unable to fight the storm, the fishermen ducked down into the shallow boat and covered themselves with a tarp, being tossed about as dusk fell. For more than an hour I stood at the door and watched, continuing to lift them to God and pray them through the storm. I felt as if I was somehow responsible for them, having witnessed their plight and with no one to call or summon to the rescue in this part of the world.

Suddenly lightning struck the water, encircling their meager boat in a bright flash. I worried they were hit, but as the storm slowly abated, and as the dark clouds lifted, I could see them moving as flashes of retreating lightning lit up the darkened sky. With each burst on the horizon, they moved their boat slowly towards port ... and I thanked God for keeping them through the storm.



Daily storms... The Congolese people have faced, and continue to face terrible storms in their lives: hunger, poverty, horrific atrocities from the multiple militia groups, unemployment, volcanic eruptions, and the newest adversity, a virulent outbreak of the Ebola virus, already the largest and deadliest in Congo's history. Last night's storm was a small microcosm of life here. We see the suffering, we see the danger ... and there is seemingly so little we can do. Yet, in God's mighty power, nothing is impossible for Him. He hears our prayers

and the prayers of so many of you who remember the suffering of those whose lives intermingle with ours in places like the Congo.

He accompanies us, His rod and His staff comfort us, and He is with us, and with those we serve ... each and every day!

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Psalm 46:1