

**No More Shall the Sound of Weeping
Be Heard in the Land**

A sermon by Louise Westfall and participants of the 2004 Ethiopian Visit
Fairmount Presbyterian Church

Cleveland Heights, Ohio

14 November 2004

Text: Isaiah 65:17-25

The sounds of Ethiopia....

...the piercing solo cry at 5 each morning, emanating from crescent-topped mosques, calling Islamic faithful to prayer;

...the whine of diesel engines shifting into gear, rumbling through city streets, spewing heavy exhaust;

...the pulsing marketplace where most people are pedestrians, humming with activity in the capital city of Addis Ababa with a population of over 3 million;

...the rhythmic reverberation of African drumbeat, sometimes throbbing, sometimes jubilant, that greeted us on arrival and accompanied the music in worship;

...the divine harmony of little children's voices raised in song, praising God who loves us all;

...the quiet, but intense tone used by one of our host pastors describing the unexplained killings of 300 Ethiopians of the Anuak tribe last December, and the fear and uncertainty that continue to grip the faith community.

...these are some of the things we heard during our two-week visit to Ethiopia. Sounds that surprised us. Sounds that inspired us. Sounds that jarred us, and resound within us even after returning home. Today you will hear some reflections about this experience, and in the weeks ahead there will be further opportunity to see photographs and learn more. But first I want to name the question that may be uppermost in your mind: *Why? Why go to Ethiopia?* We have problems right here in our own city. We have hungry children, and people with HIV/AIDS. Our nation faces challenges; our churches do too; certainly our congregation is working hard to address the spiritual and material needs of our community. *Why travel half-way around the world?*

Each of the six participants has his or her personal reasons for doing so. For Dr. Dan and Jane Reynolds, it was a homecoming of sorts, a return to the place and people where they had been medical missionaries for over 17 years. I have wanted to rock in the cradle of civilization for almost as long as I can remember, and the opportunity to do so with this wise and faithful couple proved irresistible.

But there is another reason. Though the Judeo-Christian tradition comes by way of a covenant relationship God established with a particular people, from the very beginning its vision was universal. Israel's history mirrored God's gracious intent for the whole world. The morning scripture text provides an especially compelling example of this. The prophet speaks God's word in a time of national uncertainty and trial. Released from captivity in Babylon, the people had returned to their homeland, and found it in disarray. Above this despairing scene, another voice is heard: one which foretells not merely a city restored to its former greatness, but an entirely new earth. Imagine a place of peace, where all are joyfully welcomed, where old enemies are reconciled, where families thrive. No more is the sound of weeping heard in the land; no more the cries of distress from hunger, disease, warfare, loss and death. Listen....for God's word to the world—here and there—in the reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah, in the 65th chapter at the 17th verse.
[Isaiah 65:17-25]

I. Carol Flack ETHIOPIA CHURCH

Good Morning.

I would like to share with you our trip to Ethiopia

First, I would like to share sunshine

13 months of sunshine because they have 13 months in their calendar. It is usually in the 70's during the day and 60's in the evening. But hotter in the summer. And here is a calendar to prove they have 13 months.

Next, I would like to share scenery. The country is rugged with breathtaking views. If you have ever traveled Route 77 South through Fancy Gap area in Virginia/North Carolina and remember the view. That is the kind of views we encountered for hours as we traveled to Gambella to the West of the capital.

Third, I would like to share coffee. Coffee is the country's large export. We experienced the coffee ceremony in many places. It is a long ceremony that starts with the roasting of the coffee beans on a small burner by turning the beans over and over again. After a long time the aroma tells your nose that the beans are roasted and ready to be ground by hand. While the pounding is taking place, the pot of water is put on the charcoal burner to be ready for the ground coffee to be added. Then the fresh brewer coffee is poured into miniature cups to be served. Now that is a fresh cup of coffee. This wall hanging shows the steps of the coffee ceremony and these are the cups to partake.

Fourth, I would like to share traffic. Think about New York City's people and cars mixed with cattle, goats and sheep all using the same street at the same time because there are no sidewalks. People walk everywhere. Walking is the main means of transportation with blue and white taxis darting in and out. We had very excellent drivers and saw very few accidents.

Fifth, I would like to share the children. With only 30 plus percent of the country able to read the hope of the future is in the children and young adults. Everyone seems to be going to school walking of course each in a colorful uniform with books in their hands. In the countryside we would pass the children with smiles on their faces walking toward the school, usually for a half day session because of lack of space and limited teaching staff. Some children in the same area

had long faces as they had to tend cattle for their family. A family must supply the uniform and books if their children can attend school.

In Addis, we visited Hope Enterprises that feed street children. We watch them appear around a corner, use water to wash hand and face, then wait to line up for breakfast of rolls and a banana plus drink. They sang for us before eating. Later these children will be given some education instruction. Other older children had eaten earlier and were attending school. At another location, a committee chooses 50 very poor children per year at age 5 to attend their campus school, providing uniform and books plus a little money for the family. They sit in rows of chair, three children to a small table for instruction. How could Cleveland choose only 50 needy to educate? Once in the school, they continued for 10 years. At this location there is also instruction for older youths in woodworking, electrical training, metal construction, etc. It is a start.

Sixth, I would like to share buildings. These buildings, you helped construct through your mission giving. I saw the money at work: A two room Bible School classroom in Gambella to educate ministers that are at such a shortage.

I saw a girl's school in Addis that was built in part by Fairmount money that is a thriving campus of young women. Pastor Louise spoke to these leaders of tomorrow, telling them all things are possible at their chapel service. This was the first time they had seen and heard a female minister. What an inspiring message.

At last I would like to share the joyous people. In church services where we could not understand a word, the joy and praise to God was very easy seen and understood. Wherever we went we were greeted with the three sided embrace of welcome. This greeting was because of the love and devotion Jane and Dan Reynolds have made in their commitment to Ethiopia. They are a true testimonial to missionary works. I am very grateful to have seen Ethiopia through their eyes. It is a true gift of love.

II. [11 only] Tom Allen

Tin-est-a-ling!

Greetings from our Ethiopian brothers and sisters in Christ!

Last summer, I believe it was in July, Susan and I had the pleasure of spending some time with other members of the APNC and their spouses in Chautauqua. During the course of the weekend, Dan and Jane Reynolds raised the subject of their upcoming trip to Ethiopia. Now I have always considered myself a well-seasoned traveler who had gone to a number of far and distant lands. I'd even spent 3 weeks in Africa in 1976 on a photographic safari. But to be honest, I had never given any consideration to traveling to Ethiopia. In my mind, it was a country of drought, famine, and pestilence. It had had revolutions and political upheaval. The heavy chains of poverty and desolation weighed it down. It was not a country I felt called to visit.

But God works in very mysterious ways. It was my wife, Susan, who first suggested that I consider this trip. Frankly, I think she felt I could be of some assistance to Jane and Dan, Louise and Carole, on what would undoubtedly be a challenging, arduous journey. And, since I had just turned 50, and was looking for a little adventure, I thought this trip might be just the answer.

As I contemplated the proposal, it occurred to me that my older brother, Chip, would be interested in joining me. Chip lives in Chapel Hill, NC, is a Presbyterian, and is an ER physician. He's gone to Cuba with a delegation to observe the state of their health care system, traveled extensively all over the world, and has a keen interest in connecting with people from foreign countries to learn their customs, traditions, and values. As for me, I just thought the trip offered an opportunity to spend some quality time with my only sibling, without the distractions of the holidays and other family events that can be so consuming when we typically get together.

When I approached Chip, he jumped at the suggestion, and before I knew it, we were off to Addis Ababa!

While traveling in Ethiopia, and with some insistence from Louise, we concluded every day with a time of devotion, a time to reflect on our experiences in the context of selected scripture passages, song, and prayer. I am proud to say we didn't miss a night, but for one, even if it meant getting to bed after midnight.

During the course of our wide-ranging discussions, a definition of "miracle" was proposed that resonated with me. The essence of a miracle is not when God does what we ask him to do, but rather it is when we do what God asks us to do.

I'm here this morning to witness to the fact that during the 16 days we spent in Ethiopia, we experienced nothing short of a miracle. Whether we were in the teaming city of Addis Ababa, the smaller towns of Jimma, Mattu, or Gambella, or the isolated village of Pokwo, I not only witnessed, but came face-to-face with some of the most dedicated,

hardworking, faithful Christians I have ever met...people who spent all of their time and resources to do God's work, to do what God asks us all to do. Despite poverty, disease, inadequate housing, and minimal educational opportunities, these people were energized by the Power of God to live a Christian life and spread the word of our Lord Jesus Christ. Conditions were often so desperate that I wondered whether the faith of our Ethiopian brothers and sisters was, in part, actually strengthened by their adversities. Leprosy, Malaria, HIV Aids, assorted parasites and other afflictions are not just prevalent, but at epidemic proportions. Sewers, electricity, potable water, in fact even running water, were often nonexistent. Hand-to-mouth subsistence living was the norm in many of the areas we visited.

Yet after we drove 2 wrenching days over the roughest roads and through some of the most remote, isolated areas I could imagine, the Anuac people of the Mekaneh Jesus Church were lined up to greet us in the dark of the night, with malaria carrying mosquitoes swarming about, holding candles, singing songs, beating drums, joyously praising the name of Christ Jesus. Their skin is so dark, a beautiful black ebony. All we could see in the darkness of the night were the whites of their eyes and the most beautiful smiles as they sang their tribal songs of praise to our Lord. Printed signs of welcome, each individually greeting us by name, were posted on the trees. How wild is that, to find your own individual name hanging on a tree, wishing you God's Blessings, 7,000 miles away from home?

We talked at length with numerous groups of Christians, the Anuacs, the Nuer, the Amharacs. Each of them was energized by and committed to their faith with an intensity and fervor that forced one to reflect on one's own individual level of spiritual commitment. These people, who seem to have so little, left me with a personal sense of inadequacy and deficiency when it came to my own faith. I could not escape the irony when I realized how much I learned from them, although many of them were illiterate or had little more than a grade school education.

Despite the conditions and desperate situation described so far, I could not complete my witness without mentioning the political situation that has evolved and continues to evolve in Ethiopia.

During our stay in this beautiful country, we met with numerous individuals who had been repressed, imprisoned, and had no reasonable expectation of ever breathing the sweet air of freedom again. Sammy Iama, who carries on Dan and Jane's work as best he can in what remains of the clinic in Pokwo after the government cut off all supplies and support and confiscated existing inventories, grew up as an angry, disenchanted youth in the 60's who ran off to join a guerrilla movement in the Sudan to fight for the rights of his Anuac people. He was ultimately imprisoned and tortured. Mobatu, a highly educated Amharac who received his bachelor's and master's degrees in business from Ohio State, and has a beautiful family and home in Addis, was imprisoned for over 6 months for economic sabotage when the company he helped run was nationalized by the Communist Government of the 80's and ultimately failed to meet the goals that were set for it.

And perhaps most shocking, we met with family members, friends, and neighbors of the estimated 300 Anuac people who were brutally executed only last December in an organized operation for which no one has yet taken responsibility. In fact, sporadic fighting continues as each group seeks revenge and tries to intimidate and subjugate rival groups both within and outside the government.

Yet, despite the hopelessness and desperation of the situation, the Church offers Ethiopia a shining beacon for the future, the hope for tomorrow.

We met many people during our visit to this vast, complex country. We witnessed many strange and wondrous things. Much was asked of us, and hopefully much can be done to help build God's Church in this country. The need for medical supplies, equipment, food, educational support, financial aid, training, and assistance of all kinds is readily apparent. Yet the principal request we received from everyone we spoke to was only that

we pray on their behalf; pray on behalf of God's Church, pray on behalf of the country of Ethiopia, and pray on behalf of the people that live there. I therefore ask that you keep Ethiopia in your prayers, and remember that they are truly our brothers and sisters in faith, doing God's work, working miracles in Christ's name.

Ama-sega-nalu!

Thank you, and God bless.

III. Jane Reynolds

Welcome Home is a phrase that came to mind several times on our trip. First at the airport in Addis Ababa, a welcome with roses for each of us from Wondu and Amsale, the parents of Matthiwos who died 2 days before he was scheduled to come to the States for Rx at NIH for his Acute Lymphoma Leukemia, last year. They have turned their sorrow into action by establishing the first Cancer society in Ethiopia and named it for Mathiwos.

Again as we traveled to Gambella we visited briefly Mettu where we covered the government hospital for a year and passed by Gore, where our youngest daughter Nancy was born. Then after bumping over the rough road down the escarpment and arriving in Gambella, at the Eastern Gambella Bethel Synod's compound, was a special Welcome Home. I heard Tom say, "My name is on the tree". Ours was the first car to arrive and as we got out, we were greeted by the synod President Ojod Miru and other staff members. The 40 member choir were in their robes and lined each side of the path. They lit candles, the drums began to play a hymn and the choir sang as the second car arrived. We were welcomed by Pastor Akway the first ordained Anuak pastor, he then gave a prayer of thanksgiving for our arrival and led all of us in the Lord's Prayer. We went down each side, greeting each choir member and staff, then the 3 drummers came to be greeted. Thanks to computers, each of our names graced a tree and the door of the room where we stayed. As Carol said WOW!

The next morning we traveled by motor boat down the Baro River to Pokwo, that had been the center for evangelist training, agriculture, medical and education outreach, but now only the clinic and church remain in use and the school has been relocated to another area. Ayema watches over the clinic that was ransacked by the military last December. They were suppose to kill Ayema but changed their minds after severely beating him, for which we give thanks. In the center of the compound is the circular church that was built in the late 19 50's and continues as a place of worship. A group of children gathered and sang a Bible song for us. Then we visited the grave of Beth Reimer at the side of the church. Beth died just after her 8th birthday of Meningococcal Meningitis. Her father Pastor Niles Reimer said at her service that he had ministered to many Anuak families at the death of their children and now, he too was able to look forward to seeing Beth at home in heaven.

Joining in worship on Sunday was a welcome Home . The drum hymns, head usher, a woman with a great technique of filling up each bench to the utmost so that a space that holds 200 people, had 400 plus people not counting the ones looking in the windows or on the entry porch. This is where Dan and I received comfort from the pastor's message the Sunday following 9/11. This time Pastor Louise Westfall was preaching. After church Pastor Daku told her that they were a like, forceful in preaching the Word.

Our home in Addis Ababa was the Synod Guest House and we were once more welcomed home by Nona and Mamo Dibaba. Mamo was the first Amharic teacher at Pokwo during our first year. He later met Nona, a nurse with the Presbyterian Mission and they were married the year her parents were hosts of the guesthouse. Mamo then studied for his masters and PhD in Education. After retiring they have started village schools in remote areas. They are in Addis Ababba while Mamo teaches at the Evangelical Seminary. They were always there to listen and help us in what ever we needed.

After travel to the historic places in the north, including Cleveland's Sister City Barhir Dar, where we were entertained by Mayor Marye Kefyalew and those who traveled to Cleveland, we returned to " Home", the guest house for some shopping and packing. All too soon it was time to head home. We arrived in Cleveland, Wednesday to be welcomed at the airport by Larry Griffin with a smile and a hug. When we arrived at the church parking lot, Susan and Rebecca Allen helped me feel at home with roses and birthday cupcakes each with a candle and a chorus of Happy Birthday from our gallant wonderful travel group.

IV. Luke 12:48 report to the congregation by Dan Reynolds

I must confess that a heavy burden was lifted from my shoulders when the plane touched ground in Cleveland on Nov 10, and we were safely "home" It is quite one thing for Jane and I to decide to go to Ethiopia and quite another to take a group. We felt it was God's Will that we go to Ethiopia with self selected companions who felt the same and we are grateful to God for safe return.

When you have a passion about something there is a great danger that you become a bore. Jane and I have a passion and the passion is for Ethiopia, and we have tried hard not to be a bore about it to our friends in Fairmount Church Jane and I feel privileged and blessed by God to have been able to spend 17 years working primarily among the Anuak people of Ethiopia.

When Pastor Louise Westfall came to Fairmount cherish as senior pastor in one of our early conversations she expressed her lifelong desire to visit Africa and especially Ethiopia, so we began to plan and now she and our group have completed their first and I my 7th trip back since leaving Ethiopia in 1978.

Since beginning our planning the situation in Ethiopia has become complicated. Dec 12 of last year a terrible mistake occurred in which 7 or 8 highland Ethiopian WHO workers surveying for a new refugee camp were attacked and killed by outlaws and the attack blamed on the Anuak people so in retaliation on one weekend some 200 men were killed and many Anuak homes burned. In the ensuing weeks some 600 Anuak have been killed, villages burned and many Anuak have fled to Pochalla in the Sudan and some to Kenya.

In addition, There has been a movement among the Orumo people advocating independence from Ethiopia and some among them have chosen to disrupt the government by attacking vehicles on the road between Dembi Dollo and Gambela.

Because of this we initially planned to visit Jimma, Mettu and Dembi Dollo and not try to visit Gambela. However the month before leaving on our trip, Dan had a long talk with Rev. Niles Reimer our colleague of 17 years in Ethiopia, who in retirement, had just returned from 3 mos in Gambela teaching an evangelism course. He related that the Anuak Church would very much appreciate a visit from us and urged us to try and go. I sent Ojot, the president of the Bethel Synod, an e-mail asking about the possibility of a visit and received an immediate reply with not only an invitation to visit but also a schedule of the possible use of our time while there. It seemed reasonable to try and visit Gambela.

Upon arrival Solomon Nega helped us to arrange for 2 vehicles through Abba Travel and drivers Wondi and Ababow who took us to Gambela. The trip went better than we could have planned and we believe the 4 who went with us to Ethiopia now better understand why Jane and I have such a passion for Ethiopia. We also believe in Luke 12:48 where Jesus tells us that "to whom much is given, Much shall be required!" We in this church and in this nation have been very blessed in so many ways. We look forward to what may happen as we seek to find appropriate ways to relate to and learn from our Christian brothers and sisters one half the way around the world.

Go into all the world, our resurrected Lord commissioned his followers. The church called by his name can never be confined to one particular place, one faith community, one social location. We have a global gospel. We are part of a worldwide family, and it seemed good to get acquainted with sisters and brothers on another branch of it. What we saw and heard in Ethiopia witnesses to a vital, dynamic, servant church, with Presbyterian and Swedish Lutheran roots, nurtured in a distinctly African context. Over 4 million members (compared with 2 ½ million in the Presbyterian Church USA)—of which 70% are under 30. Worship services packed to overflowing; pastors and lay leaders working side by side to proclaim the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ in word *and* in deed. There seems to be little distinction between worship and mission. Pastor Ojot looked surprised when I commented on this. He said, "Jesus Christ saves the whole person: body, mind, and spirit." So the church is immersed in national literacy programs and expanding educational opportunities. A church leader wrote the book on medical treatment of persons with HIV who live in rural areas with little access to life-prolonging medicines. We heard about church initiatives to stop female genital mutilation which is widely practiced, as well as ongoing efforts to translate the Bible into more of the 90 tribal languages present there. The church struggles too—in an extremely poor nation with a literacy rate of only 33%. The repeated attacks on the Anuak are especially troubling. The church itself is a human institution, and we also heard examples that sounded familiar: of congregational fights and denominational debates; of organization and re-organization; of budget shortfall and half-hearted stewardship.

What we saw and heard in Ethiopia reminded me that the Christian church in North America is but one part of the church universal. To think globally and to act locally are two sides of a single mission. We have much to learn as well as to contribute. I wonder how it is that the Church in Ethiopia is growing like wildfire—why are Christians there so eager to share their faith and invite others to join them? In a denomination that is aging, what could we learn from the youthful perspective and energy of this young faith community? How might we share resources to meet human needs in both areas? What better way to consider these questions than in an ongoing relationship, a partnership of equals, whose different contexts, perspectives and practices could enhance and enrich the whole. The Presbyterian Church (USA) encourages these partnerships through presbyteries, and we'll be exploring this with our own presbyter of the Western Reserve.

We're gathered here today in our own time of national uncertainty. The election that so polarized and divided us is over; the future is not yet clear. But if we place our trust in a God who rules over all, we will hear, deep in our souls, the sounds of a new earth being born.... With gratitude and hope, let us commit ourselves to that enterprise, working with God until the sound of weeping will no more be heard in any land, for all shall live together in peace.

**TO THE GOD OF ALL GRACE, WHO CALLS US TO SHARE GOD'S
ETERNAL GLORY IN UNION WITH CHRIST, BE THE POWER FOREVER!
AMEN.**

The Rev. Louise F. Westfall, D.Min., Pastor