

Sharon Curry Update The Journey

Life is a Lot Like That...



I decided that life lately is a lot like a taxi drive in Addis Ababa. If you get on a mini-taxi (blue donkey), it is supposed to hold 12 passengers but can usually squeeze in 14-16 plus kilos of fresh veggies in plastic bags stuffed between seats and the floor next to the door. I have ridden a few times when the produce was stacked as high as people's heads and had to be pushed in to close the door. You usually start out with plenty of room but at some point in the ride you will be packed in like sardines or sitting on a wheel well or gas tank. I especially like the money takers who hang their heads out the windows and yell the final stop on

their routes – giving directions and inviting people in.

Life is a lot like that - we start out with plenty of space and a clear direction. Then, somewhere along the line we are going to find ourselves very crowded or balancing on the edge. God is a lot like the money taker – hanging his head out the window of heaven, giving us directions and inviting us in.



A contract taxi – Ladas as they are called, the little blue cars- are adventure in life itself. You hire them. You tell them where you want to go and they take you there. One thing I have found is that every time I have ridden one even though I am going to the same destination, I rarely go the same way. Sometimes the ride is smooth and steady and sometimes I have to wonder whatever in the world possessed me to get in the car with this driver as they go careening down the streets shaking their heads and their hands at people trying to cross the

road or other drivers who get in their way.

Life is a lot like that – how many times are we able to take the smooth easy way and how many times do we go careening through – shaking our heads and hands at things that get in our way?

Sometimes it is easy to sit back and enjoy the ride, look out the window enjoy the view, notice things we've never seen before like the building I noticed today. I have driven by that building countless times and not until today did I notice that the side walls painted a pretty shade of light green and arched window with its light brown shutters, reminiscent of an old Italian building, had a tin front or that it looked like the original front may have been missing since the days of the bombings here. I never noticed that the thick walls were made of stacked flat



rocks held in place by concrete.

Other times we go barreling through and miss the lady standing outside the church with the longing look on her face because she can't go in because of the rules that prevent her entry. We miss the lady who is cleaning her babies bottom on the side of the road with a leaf because she has no bathroom, because she has no home except the boxes tacked behind her or the papers and boxes piled inside the drainage pipe where someone slept last night; or the man across the street who gathers rubbish and



lights a fire in "his" drain pipe to keep warm during the night.

Sometimes we go barreling through so fast we miss the street children laughing as they play a game of "football" and cheering each other on when someone scores - it doesn't matter that it was the other team, someone was successful and they all celebrate. We miss the man with the tattered clothes drop a few coins on the blanket of the man with no legs, or we miss the looks of joy on the women's faces as they take time to stop and greet each other and share a story or two, or those gathered around the grieving mother as she holds her lifeless child.



Yes life is a lot like that – we celebrate each other's successes, we help those who need more than us, we share times of joy and fellowship and in each other's sorrows.

Driving in Addis is not like driving any place else I have ever been. Sure, there are lines on the road – in some places – but really I think they are more like a target. If you don't like the way someone is driving or your lane is too slow – make a new one – no problem. But the rule I like best, a friend recently explained to me, is that the

car going up the hill has the right of way because it might tip over if it has to stop on a hill – well, sometimes there are two going uphill and that is when the fun begins – the one with the most guts goes for it and everyone else better get out of the way. It is almost like riding bumper cars, except nobody bumps.

Life is a lot like that – you can sit back and wait for things to happen and move or you can be the first one to charge through and be confident that God will take care of the bumps and bruises you get along the way.



Another thing I love about Addis is walking. You see things you don't see in car or taxis. I thought, yesterday, as I was walking down the Piazza hill that we sure miss a lot in the US by zipping by in our cars. I have been down that same hill many times but I have missed the community that lives there near the river. I have missed the signs of life that are the epitome of life in this country – houses built out of whatever materials can be found to create shelter, the smoke from the cookfires, the smell of freshly roasted coffee, laundry hanging on lines, and women chattering as they stoop down to fetch their water, bathe, wash their clothes...children playing, gardens growing...

There are harder sights as well, today my brain didn't register what my eyes had seen until I was well past. Perhaps that is part of God's protection – time to reflect. I was making my way through the crowded street, trying not to step on the blankets, tarps, and old pieces of cloth and burlap bags that mark the places where people live, while trying not to step on the ones that have given up hope and just laid down to wait for heaven. I was past the place and on my way when I realized that the plastic tarp I had stepped over had been a man. Someone had taken the time to wrap him carefully in two pieces of tattered blue plastic. Carefully tying it closed with pieces of rope and sting that had been knotted together around his legs torso and neck. I think it was the neck that caught my attention and made me realize what I had seen.

And, life is like that – we are protected from the harsh realities by a God who loves and comforts us all. God is our refuge in times of trouble and struggle and it is his love that keeps us stepping when the times are hard.

Sometimes it is easy to look around and ask "where is God", but when I take time to look, I can find God with his arm wrapped around the lady wanting to go in the church, in the leaf he provided the woman to clean her baby, in the rubbish that is left to bring the man across the street warmth. God is standing on the sidelines celebrating the successes of the street children, and patting the man in the tattered clothes giving to those who have less and saying "Well done, my child". He is there in the joy and laughter of the ladies stories and he is comforting the one who mourns her child.

And life is like that, too – God is where we look for him, in hard times and easy, in our joys and our sorrows, in our richness and our poorness and in our going and our waiting.

I am waiting. I am waiting for God's timing to send me back into Akobo, and while I wait, God has provided the leaders who guide me and work hard to guarantee my safety. In the waiting I am grateful for God's provisions.

May the God of love and wonder open your eyes to see in the hard places, may he cheer with you as you celebrate your joys and successes, and may he wrap his arms around you and hold you in your sorrows and give you patience in your waiting.

Peace be with you,

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