

FaithBIT



Three Takeaways from Tanzania

Reflection by Kim Rathjen

1) God's People are lovely. We spent a day with Dr Steve and Jodi Swanson, our medical missionaries. Every penny of the \$5800 in benevolence support Immanuel gives them is making a difference. They are the most humble, smartest, loving people and they are changing the narrative around premature and at-risk births in Tanzania. Not only have they brought expertise and equipment to Tanzania, they are investing in training local doctors and nurses so that other hospitals can serve families with babies needing special care. They are teaching sustainable practices, like skin to skin "kangaroo care" for premature babies and how to feed a sick baby. We met a mother who had suffered several miscarriages and stillbirths (which becomes a stigma in Tanzanian culture) whose baby was being cared for in the NICU and, with the care of the medical team, will survive. Steve and Jodi LOVE DEEPLY. They love the babies, the mamas, and all whom they meet with the love of Jesus. One can't help but be drawn to them and the love they share.



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2) God's Church is alive, and we share the same struggles. We worshipped with Nkiraawnaga ("God Calls") Lutheran congregation in the foothills of Kilimanjaro. We also had conversation with Pastor Calvin, who is shepherding the flock of 15,000 in his parish. He is a humble, gentle man and a powerful preacher. We worshipped in Swahili, not understanding much of anything. But the rhythm of worship, the cadence of the liturgy, and the beautiful music spoke to our hearts. The Pastor shared some of his struggles with us over lunch: decreasing worship attendance, being relevant to young people, encouraging the church to be outward instead of inward focused. We were drawn together as followers of Christ who gives us this work to do together as the Church.

3) God our Creator is Amazing! We were able to experience a safari and the beauty of God's creation in the Ngorongoro Crater. The animals and birds are breathtaking! But the story that has stuck in my head has to do with the Acacia trees that the giraffes eat. Giraffes graze and eat all day long on their preferred Acacia trees. After about 15 minutes, a tree that is being grazed emits a different scent and taste that the giraffes don't like, so the giraffe will stop grazing on that tree, keeping it from being destroyed. Amazingly, the tree also sends a signal to nearby trees and they also begin emitting the bad taste, so that the giraffe doesn't eat them either and must move on to another area. God created the acacia trees to take care of themselves! God the Creator is Amazing.