

MALAWI BLOG

DEACON LAURA RAMLOW

October 16, 2025: Just a Piece of a Cake

Hello friends of the Warm Heart of Africa.

Takulandirani! Welcome, and thank you for joining us for our 2025 partnership visit to Malawi!

On Sunday, our group of four travelers, Pastor Randy, Pastor Jenny, Patti and myself, made it to Chicago in time to check into our hotel, eat dinner together, and get a good night's rest before heading to O'Hare airport early in the morning to catch the first leg of our trip. Unsure about what impact the government shutdowns would have on our check in, security, or flights, we arrived with plenty of time...just in case.



Too much time it seems, because we were there 30 minutes prior to our own airline staff. But, once we checked our luggage, we headed toward security and made it through with little to no line. And, despite not currently being compensated for their time, every single agent was kind, patient, and friendly to everyone – even when they had to scan Randy's bag three times.

We grabbed a quick bite to eat at the airport and eventually boarded the plane. For those who don't have experience with Ethiopian Airlines, they are often very gracious with the seat assignments for their long trips, leaving a space between every person so we have ample room to stretch and sleep during the 13 ½ hours to Addis Ababa. They also feed us very well in flight.

After the long leg we disembarked in Ethiopia for a quick 60 minute layover before the second leg of the journey. How can this four hours possibly feel longer than 13 hours?!? The four of us arrived at Kamuzu airport in Lilongwe in the early afternoon, made it through customs fairly quickly and with no lost luggage! We were quickly greeted by Mphatso Thole, the companion coordinator for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi and it was so nice to see my achimewene (brother) again. Chicondi Namalanda (Chico, as many of you know him!) assisted us with our luggage and kindly drove us weary travelers to the ELCM compound to get settled.

We met with Bishop Bvumbwe and his head office staff for some brief introductions and to look over our itinerary, and then had some time to rest before dinner. Lazarus treated us to a delicious meal and we all crashed early.

I awoke after 10 glorious hours of sleep, and decided to walk around the ELCM compound for a while around 7am - while I usually hear and see a constant bustle of people preparing for various jobs in the morning, I was surprised to be solo in my walk until about 7:45 when activities started happening.

We were also pleasantly surprised to be greeted by Mama Bishop (Maria) before we all started our travels beyond Lilongwe. She is truly one of the kindest, most lovely people I have had the pleasure of meeting.



Wednesday Mphatso and Stywell (our driver) accompanied us to the city center in Lilongwe to check out the market, buy some fabric and see the sights before taking us to the Lilongwe Wildlife Center. This oasis is in the middle of the city and is a place for trail walking, education, and animal rehabilitation and conservation. In all my years in Malawi I had never visited here – it was lovely to walk together, laugh, and have an easy day before we spend the next few days driving long distances. One highlight was hearing from a school group that they saw waterbucks and a crocodile! But a favorite moment was climbing into a treehouse that was built to discretely watch the birds. We were all completely amused by this! These are the moments that build relationships, friends.



We returned home and met up with Chico's daughter, Chimwemwe, celebrated with her that she is now done with university and is busy with all kinds of sewing jobs, and to give her some fabric that she has graciously agreed to fashion into dresses for Jenny and Patty.

I joined Jenny and Patty who were in the dining hall playing cards, and the three of us were quickly joined by Chimwemwe Leonard, who often assists Lazarus with meals. Patti was an excellent teacher, showing him step by step how to play the game, beating Jenny and I a few times before he had to go back to work. After dinner we all retreated to our rooms to prepare for our long journey to Zomba tomorrow.

After a lovely breakfast, we started gathering our luggage – we took the ELCM's Range Rover so we could more easily navigate the unpredictable roads, but this means our luggage gets packed onto the roof rack. Once our bags and supplies were neatly and carefully packed in, a tarp and strap secured the load. Impressive packing, as usual.



We headed south down the M1 toward Zomba, stopping a few times along the way, first at a favorite stopover for a rest room break and a few snacks for the car. This year's choices were pineapple biscuits and spicy crisps with a passionfruit soda. We continued to Nsipe, a village in the Ntcheu district – and the hometown of former Malawian Vice President, Saulos Chilima. He was among 10 people killed in a plane crash in June of 2024, and his death left the country grieving for days. He was known by people here as humble and a great leader, as well as a hopeful candidate in the 2025 presidential election. Many believe his death was not an accident and some are pushing for a deeper investigation.

We made a visit to his resting place, a cemetery in Nsipe where his parents and relatives can also be found. Although his burial is complete, there was a crew there actively working on building a memorial structure around it, a tribute to his leadership and legacy that will likely see visitors for years to come. I am grateful to the leaders from the local catholic church who gave us a brief, special tour of this place. It was an honor to be there, but certainly special for Chico and Mphatso as well who shared stories about him during our drive.

Our daylight drive gradually became sunset and darkness as we entered the Zomba district. The hazy sky started to thicken and we began to see more and more fires in the mountains. In these areas we often see a lot of small fires in the mountains, mostly for making charcoal. This practice is not legal here, due to the deforestation that happens in the process. The finished product, often sold for much-needed income, and bought for cooking, required wet wood from fresh trees to create. It was lovely, however, to see so much land that had actively been reforested, an intentional effort to help maintain tree coverage in the area. Deforestation here causes much more damage during the rainy season as erosion and flooding can have nothing to soak up or deter the heavy rains. The repercussions continue to grow – more houses and crops destroyed, weakened and depleted soil, and damage to community infrastructure. Every effort to reverse this creates positive environmental change here, little by little.

After a zigzagging around potholes, pedestrians, bikes, and other cars, we arrived safely at the ELCM lodge in Zomba. I am excited for the other travelers to see how beautiful it is here in the mountains, but for now, we are enjoying the tremendous hospitality, the beautiful building with its intricately carved doors, and the delicious food that was ready for us as we arrived. It's amazing how tired you can get simply sitting in a car on a long journey. I am grateful for Mphato's leadership, and Chico's driving. When we thanked him for taking such good care of us on the road, he laughed and said, "No problem - driving here is just a piece of a cake." And, of course, I am consistently thankful for all of the conversation, learning, and curiosity that happens along the way.

Tomorrow we head further south to Blantyre, the beginning of our ministry visits, which will start with one of the newer wells built through the partnership between the ELCM and NWSWI. I hope you will join us for part two!

Today I pray with gratitude for the gracious hospitality we receive each and every time we visit Malawi – and that we might be so inspired to choose this as our default method of engaging with others. (After all, it's just a piece of a cake, right??) I pray for the people of Malawi, that their newly inaugurated president, Peter Mutharika, leads with integrity, humility, and wisdom. And, I pray for those who are severely struggling within an economic system that is in need of recovery and change. Zikomo Mulungu. Amen.

Tiwonana, friends!
(See you!)

Much more to come....



October 18, 2025: Mountains, Movement and Migowi

Moni nonse!

(Hello everyone!)

Tathokhoza kwambiri (thank you, so much) for joining us for part two of our Malawi 2025 visit! These last two days have been a whirlwind of activity.

Friday morning, we each packed a small bag to take with us for the next two days. Our group headed to Phalombe district, but we'll be back to Zomba on Sunday evening – we were happy to leave some things behind for a couple of days. (I bet our companions were happy, too, since they are the ones loading them on to the cargo rack of the Land Cruiser every time we change locations!).

After a lovely cup of coffee and some breakfast, we packed into our vehicle and started driving south. From Zomba southward Malawi is rich with mountains, a sight we did not get tired of these last two days. Mphatso told the travelers about Mount Mulanje, the tallest in Malawi, and the third highest in Africa at about 3,002 meters (just shy of 10,000 feet). We will drive by it during tomorrow's travels.



Two hours in the car, down the pitted paved roads and a few rural driving trails, we arrived at the Chimvu parish center. As we drove up to the church we were greeted with embodied joy and enthusiasm by crowd of congregation members and Abusa Nkhoma who were waiting for us, singing songs of welcome. Their words, “takulandilani” (you are most welcome) and “we are cemented together as partners,” felt like a gift, prepared for us out of sincere love and hospitality.



If you've never experienced this in Malawi, it nearly takes your breath away – it's emotional, and special, in a prodigal son returning kind of way – like they've just been waiting for us to come home. And we did. Malawi has been my second home since 2016, and I hope the other three travelers are beginning to feel like this is home for them, too.

While we were there, they took us to a well that was recently dug next to the church. Until this one was dug, the nearest water source required people to walk from several miles away. Now, it is within or nearby several communities who will benefit from year-round, clean drinking water. For context, there are nearly 2,000 primary school children in this village. This particular borehole was made possible through the generosity of congregations in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin who continue to partner with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi. For those who give to well funds for easier access to safe drinking water, zikomo kwambiri, (thank you so much). Madzi ndi moyo. Water is life.



After many of us gave pumping the new well a try, we were invited into the church building for a short program. The congregation sang our way into the space which was large with strong brick walls, (built by hand by the congregation members), solid timber beams and a tin roof. This newer building still needs windows and a concrete floor, but has given them a large enough space to worship. The program included sharing greetings with one another, introducing the elders in the congregation, acknowledging the local village chief who chose to attend, some music from the choir, and having a bit of time to share greetings of our own, translated by our friend, Mphatso. I am trying hard to use as much Chichewa as I can, and, although still sparse, I am happy when I can say something and it's met with appreciation for at least trying! My travel companions have been trying to catch some phrases and our Malawian friends are really gracious, helping us all with good humor.

After the short program, the women in the congregation had prepared lunch for us - rice (which is often used for special occasions), sauteed cabbage, and hard cooked eggs in a tomato sauce. It was delicious. As we rested for a bit after lunch we entered into several small group conversations, and as time passed I noticed the quantity of children's faces in the windows grow exponentially. More and more children heard there were visitors and wanted to see for themselves until nearly every one from the village seemed to be there! As we wrapped up conversations they started making their way inside the church building where we decided to embrace our inner child and start taking silly photos with one another. It was 10 minutes of pure joy and excitement. Oh, to be a child who wonders and embraces curiosity and courage like this!

We said our goodbyes as the choir sang songs of farewell and we loaded into the vehicle. Heart. Full.



Just before dark we arrived at our lodging for the evening (thanks to Chicco's incredible driving, per usual!) – a lovely lodge perched up high in Blantyre with a view of the mountains. We ate dinner together and went to our rooms for a respite.

Saturday morning we awoke, packed up our things again, had a quick plate of eggs and chips and a quick cup of tea and left the city for Phalombe and Migowi. We arrived at our first of four congregational sites today, which also has a brand new preschool! We picked up Abusa Suwedi (pastor in Migowi), Abusa Naitha (Dean of the Phalombe Deanery), and Abusa Ngo'mbe (Asst. to Bishop Phiri in the newly established Blantyre Diocese). We all sardined into the Land Cruiser and we were off to the next congregation.



After a couple of hours on the road, views of the mountains, and several cities, we arrived at the Phindani congregation, one of the seven in the Migowi Parish. It sits at the base of a mountain and next to a beautiful lake (Lake Mpoto) which shares a border with Mozambique. Again, we were greeted by dozens of congregation members with songs of welcome as we were guided to the church. A special row of chairs was waiting for us, which is often the case, and our new travel companions sat in between us to share their translation skills with us. We were so grateful. They shared a few stories about how Cyclone Freddy (2023) and a subsequent pattern of annual storms continue to damage things before they can finish repairs. This particular building had lost its roof to the wind and has only been half finished due to the lack of funds needed for materials.

This is a common thread here, as the value of kwacha has decreased and the cost of goods has increased up to ten times what they should be for staple goods in many regions. They are hopeful the new president will bring some common sense and healing to the economy here. In the meantime, congregations, families, and projects often have to wait. Yet, they are dreaming – thinking creatively about how to increase food security there. Since they have access to the lake, they know that irrigation equipment could help make water more accessible, increasing agricultural yields and providing overall wellbeing for families there. But equipment is costly and often needs assistance or sponsorship to purchase.

This congregation is another one of the Migowi parish, partnered with Evangelical Lutheran Church in Black River Falls. It was a pure delight to introduce Abusa Jennifer who was able to greet them in person and bring words of encouragement and solidarity and love to the community here. They made her and Patti, a member of ELC, both ambassadors, giving them the task of taking stories, love and hope back home with them.

We drove away, the sound of farewell singing in our ears and the children running and waving behind us. We drove past cattle and the lake, and we were headed to the next location.



Another bumpy rural path took us past more mountains (or maybe another side of the same mountain??) and lush baobab trees (being near two large lakes makes this area more lush than others so the trees are full!), until we arrived at the Khulambe congregation. No surprise now, we are greeted by singing, BUT entirely new faces and hospitality to build relationship with! As we entered the building and were invited to sit, we noticed what looked like a newer roof on the building.

[...a moment of backstory – hurricane Freddy in 2023 hit Malawi more than once as it came inland and then doubled back to the Indian Ocean. In the process, this entire region of Phalombe district, which contains Migowi, was greatly affected by wind, heavy rains, flooding, and rockslides from the mountains that killed hundreds of people, destroyed crops and homes, and washed away thousands of livestock in the middle of the night. For more details, you can check out the 2023 blog].



In 2023 Khulambe had lost the entire top half of their building during the storm, and were left wondering what might be next. A women from the congregation even shared with us that she had lost a child that night. Unfortunately, her story is not so unique in this region. Their partner congregation, Evangelical Lutheran in Black River Falls, sent a financial gift through the ELCM that was used to replace the beams and iron sheets for the roof. They shared with us that they can now worship and gather there, even during the rainy season.



After introductions and a heartwarming photo of Abusa Jennifer and Patti with their congregation, we followed the same road back to Abusa Suwedi's parsonage where his wife and family had prepared lunch for us. Rice, goat, chicken, cabbage, tomato sauce, bananas, and nsima – the group's first time trying this Malawi traditional dish. Mama Abusa graciously washed our hands with a pitcher and basin – as a deacon, this image has special meaning for me, as that is the symbol of word and service ministry. I always have a moment of gratitude for this gesture. We ate, thanked our guests, had a hilarious interaction with the children who were practicing their English skills with us, and we were off to visit the final congregation for they day.



(Whew! Anyone else as tired as I am yet!?)

One last rural route, more mountains, banana trees, several precarious concrete and wooden bridges later and we arrived at the Dzenje congregation complete with the glorious sound of singing and welcome. The original building, we discovered, was entirely destroyed during the hurricane and after finding another area of land, they worked hard making bricks and just finished constructing the walls in August. As we sat inside the floorless, roofless structure, we exchanged words of thanks to God for our partnership and remembered we are one church when we walk together in Christ. Abusa Jennifer did well in her crash course in Chichewa, trying phrases and words in her greetings. We waved goodbye, taking their deep faith, joy, and encouragement with us.



On the way to deliver our travel companions to their homes for the night, their mysterious stories, sharing, and laughing among each another in Chichewa made me smile. My lack of understanding was irrelevant – while their friendship was undeniable.

We stopped briefly at Abusa Naitha's home where we were able to meet his lovely wife, stretch our legs and enjoy some conversation before driving to our lodging for the night. While we were there, Abusa shared that, surrounding his church (which was on the same property) were several other churches, all different denominations – all neighbors. One of these community pastors stopped by to say hello and introduce himself. Our visit was short but very nice.

With our original travel group in the Cruiser and weary from the long day, we drove through the Malawian sunset up Mulanje mountain to our lodge. Although we cannot see our surroundings until morning, I anticipate that this place has some incredible views and accommodations, just based on the reception center and the placement of the cabins we'll be staying in. The staff has worked tirelessly to make a late dinner for us, bring us fans to keep us cool tonight, and see that we had hot water to use in our showers.



Our hearts are full - it has been a good day indeed.

Tomorrow will be the final day with our Migowi partners – there might even be some singing in our future – at least if Chicco has anything to say about it! (IYKYK)

As always, more to come, friends. Tiwonana mawa.

Today I pray that our congregations might find a way of hospitality that invites others in, no questions, just a pure love that says "You're home." I pray that we can all come to understand that God's church has no borders – it's global – it sings in a variety of languages – it prays together – and it loves unconditionally. And, I hope for a future where we no longer need feeding programs or hunger initiatives – that we might recognize that there is enough for everyone, share with one another freely, and create systems that ensure food equity across nations. Amen.



October 21, 2025: Hearts of Hospitality

Mwadzuka bwanji, nonse. (Good morning/How'd you sleep, everyone?)

Sunday morning we woke up on Mulanji Mountain – a very nice lodge that was a surprise to see in the daylight. The property was quite large and included a main lodge where meals were served, several multi-unit cottages, and several individual cabins. Also found on site was an event hall, a pool, and a few mountain “dams” (small lakes) where people could lounge. There was a playground, an area with outdoor tables and chairs, and during the rainy season, a large stream that has the capacity to weave through the property. Although...I did take a moment to recognize just how unsettling it can be to sleep there, considering all the rockslides that have happened during the rainy season. I imagine it's strange to live in the shadow of something like this on a daily basis, especially considering all the damage the cyclones have caused over these last few years.



During this stay our group encountered some new critters – I had a spider in my bathroom that was large enough to make pause and muster up the courage to smack it with my sandal...Randy had a bat in his room that a staff person shooed out with her phone with the kind of bravery I would have had to train for. There was a bright green praying mantis on my door in the morning, and several brightly colored lizards around the grounds. Although there was no running water in the sinks or showers, they had prepared large buckets in each room with hot water for washing up. It was a lovely lodge and I appreciated the newness it brought to our journey.

After packing up the Cruiser, we headed to the Migowi Parish Center for worship – we arrived, met with voices of welcome and some familiar faces – the Abusa, and Dean, as well as a few congregation members who had been with us at other locations. It is still humbling to know, based on our drives these last few days, just how far people walk to worship – for those who's home congregation was not the parish center, I can only imagine how early they started walking to meet us there. And, many of them were carrying children or other goods along with them.



I had visited this particular building in 2023, just a few months after Cyclone Freddy's destruction in this region. The church walls had several large cracks from the strong winds, impacting the integrity of the structure. And, outside, the foundation of a parsonage was seen, but the project was paused after the storm to divert attention to more pressing needs such as shelter, clothing, food and supplies for the community.

Many of the cracks had been repaired with concrete and although the parsonage was in the same state, there was a new building on site – a children's development center, constructed in partnership with Compassion International. The building was nice, complete with a ramp in the front and whimsical children's characters painted on the outside. We learned that Abusa Suwedi and his wife were responsible for initiating this project – one of their own children was born with disabilities – vision and physical impairments; in Malawi there are far fewer resources for children born with disabilities, and it becomes difficult for parents to care for them. This project will provide a space for young people with disabilities to learn and receive care in a school setting while the parents are working during the day. The project has been a work in progress for two years and is scheduled to open in early November. What a gift this will be to all children and families in this region who face the challenges of disabilities. I am proud of the efforts of this pastor, and for the ELCM's continued mission to care for one another as neighbors.



We sat in a designated space for worship - services in the ELCM Lutheran church follow a liturgy with words and songs that you'll hear no matter where you are – but the choirs often put together their own songs for each Sunday. Among their many songs, this choir shared songs that specifically referenced Cyclone Freddy and the damage it caused, but that also praised God for God's faithfulness and love for them. It's been said before, but Malawians don't often show much emotion outside of happiness, even when they are in pain, grieving, or depressed. I imagine composing these songs is a way to tell the story and be reminded of God's presence in our lives, but also as a way to process the deep grief and fear that this community has experienced in the face of these storms. The pastor's wife was the leader of both songs, and her strong voice filled the room with "emotion" and a plea to God, while the choir joined her with reassurance that God is powerful and will not leave us.

Abusa Jennifer, with translation assistance from Assistant to Bishop Phiri, Abusa Ngo'mbe, preached a sermon from Luke 18:1-8. Her charisma and energy was palpable in this space, and was an inspiration, not just to the congregation, but to the women evangelists who were present in worship.

As they continue their training, these women are well on their way to ordained leadership in the ELCM and are READY to serve! Seeing other women who preach and lead is very encouraging. Jenny was relatable and vulnerable, sharing stories about her family and congregation, not afraid to try Chichewa, and preaching a gospel-centric message that could be understood across oceans and cultures.



Toward the end of worship, the Assistant reminded us of mother's day (which happened in Malawi on the 15th of October), and gave us each a belated gift of beautiful fabric – a gesture often given here - many are created especially for holidays like mother's day. The women called each of us forward individually, wrapped the fabric into a chitenje around us, and sang a special song. We were overcome, receiving such generosity from our friends here. I found myself in tears as I made my way back to my chair.

After I was invited to greet the congregation on behalf of our synod with introductions and some information and words of gratitude, Abusa Jennifer and Patti presented gifts to their partners – a pictorial directory with photos of their congregation members and ministries, as well as a beautiful banner that was made by their quilters that said "God's work, our hands," had children's handprints, and an outline of Wisconsin and Malawi. These physical reminders are humbly received and often hung for years as a reminder of companionship and prayer. It was truly a special moment.



After worship, we gathered for a photo with the congregation, and stayed outside to look at the school and the new solar powered well that Compassion Int'l also funded. Good things are happening here. We chatted with the evangelists for a bit, and one of Abusa Suwedi's sons introduced himself and told a story of meeting my son, Gabriel, when we visited Migowi in 2023. He remembered details of their conversation and hoped they could meet again someday. It's these moments that remind me of how important the elements of accompaniment are in ministry – these on-the-ground, person-to-person connections that make partnership more sustainable. It's what all previous companion coordinators - Diane, Ramie and John -worked hard to accomplish, and what I strive for everyday in my work now. It makes friendships with our brothers and sisters tangible and the ministry we do come to life.

Abusa Suwedi and his wife invited us to their home afterward for lunch, and we gladly accepted, coming together for a traditional, delicious meal that sustained us for the rest of the afternoon. We were able to take a photo to commemorate a partnership between Migowi and Evangelical Lutheran – a photo of Abusa Suwedi and his wife with Abusa Jennifer and Patti – a keepsake that will likely be displayed as a consistent reminder of their partnership together, their collective prayer for one another, and a hope that they will see each other again soon.



We said our goodbyes, and found ourselves on the bumpy road back to the ELCM Lodge in Zomba. Mphatso took advantage of being so close to relatives in Zomba and went for a visit while the rest of us ate dinner. As we were finishing up, Chicco embraced his inner choir director and started teaching us some songs that he is hoping we'll sing in worship next weekend. (Yikes!!) While Malawians learn and teach so much through singing and dance, we often don't have that practice here beyond childhood, so we are struggling to learn the melodies and text – both of which are unfamiliar. Perhaps with a bit of practice we will be successful!



After breakfast the next morning, we were off to Mvuu Camp, a safari lodge in the middle of the bush in a preserved area of Malawi. This is always a favorite mid-trip spot to pause and take in some Malawian wildlife while processing all that we have experienced this week. I am so happy that Mphatso and Chicco have agreed to join us here. Often times they only stay long enough to get us settled, but they have worked hard this week, driving for hours on unpredictable roads, constantly translating conversations, sometimes learning about hunger/water/justice challenges for the first time along with us, and often still working via phone and email communication throughout the day. I am grateful to see them have time for rest as well.

Before even arriving at camp, we saw a few elephants, impala, and warthogs just driving along the river. We were assigned a guide for our time here, Patrick, who talked about safety in the bush and what we might see during our time in this beautiful place.

Although there are slight changes to the practices here, I am always grateful to see the sustainability efforts that they insist upon – no plastics, very few paper products, solar power, irrigation from the river, and upcycling of glass. And when it comes to wildlife, they have so much respect for natural habitat and proximity to animals in ways that ensure a non-threatening presence.

Our first activity here was a river safari, a few hours on a boat to see hippos, crocodiles, elephants, impala, warthogs, and so many birds, as well as several types of trees. At sunset the boat stops for sundowners - a brief time for a cold drink and a snack while we chat and watch the sky become as beautiful as the people who live here.



We docked and headed inside for dinner and were then escorted to our chalets by a guide – walking around at night is not always safe, so they insist we go with an expert. When we return, our bed nets are unrolled, and our beds turned down, ready for a good night's sleep before waking up early for a morning drive. The sounds at night are new and wonderful – hippos chortling, birds calling to one another, mysterious animals walking around the chalets eating leaves and grasses....it's difficult to sleep as you wake to all the new, exciting sounds.

Our guides stopped by our chalets on Tuesday morning to pick us up and have a cup of coffee in the main lodge before our early morning drive. The sun was not yet over the horizon as we loaded the car and drove south along the river. Although Mphatso had a work meeting that prevented him from coming with us, Chicco was along with the four of us and Patrick as we saw hundreds of impalas, some waterbucks, kudu and sable antelope. We saw three lions, a cheetah and three cubs, some large crocodiles, warthogs, several new birds, and enjoyed the fresh morning air. We stopped part way through and got out to stretch our legs and have a cup of tea and a biscuit, and while we were there we watched a family of elephants mosey their way down to the river near us. They were in no hurry, kind of how we all felt just then – just wanting to take our time and soak it all in.

We finished our drive across some very bumpy paths – and unbridled joy came spilling out as we giggled and laughed at the delight this bumpy ride provided to us. Some of us laughed so hard we cried. (Ahem... Jennifer!). Because Chicco has been the driver for so many companion visits, this was not his first time at Mvu Camp, but it was his first time seeing a lion. It was fun to watch his inner child shine with wonder as well.

We returned for breakfast and some down time in our chalets, where we sat and watched families of elephants and hippos and flocks of butterflies living their best lives along the Shire River. Bliss.

Tonight we have the privilege of doing a night safari and I am excited to see again what comes out after dark. I am grateful to the staff here who have trained, some of them for years, to provide hospitality and educational guidance to visitors like us. I always leave this place with new and valuable information. And, I have a deep appreciation for the Malawians who value the ecosystem and wildlife here in such a way that they want to participate in its preservation and longevity. Although I am very aware of how my own privilege allows me to be here, I will likely continue our visits Mvuu when we are in Malawi – even the small contributions we make economically, environmentally, or relationally can support good things.



Tomorrow we will make the long journey from Liwonde to Nkhoskhota, north of Lilongwe. It will likely take us most of the daylight hours to arrive at our lodge as we prepare for this week's ministry visits. We discovered yesterday that we will likely be attending the ordination of a pastor this weekend and we are all excited for this opportunity.

Please stay tuned for more partnership stories, my friends!

Today I pray for a collective awareness of the harmful environmental impacts we have in our own regions of the world, and take the time to recognize how we can be more active stewards of the creation that God has entrusted to us. I pray that our partnership with Malawi will have its own unique sustainability while holding tightly to the gospel. And, I pray a prayer of thanks for the embodied resilience and faith that our siblings here show us each and every day. May their shared strength inspire us to seek justice and change where it's needed most. Amen.

Tiwonana!

