

World Communion Sunday/ Kenya Sunday, October 1, 2023 Sermon and Kenya letters from students.

SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 21:23-32, The Message

²³ Then he was back in the Temple, teaching. The high priests and leaders of the people came up and demanded, “Show us your credentials. Who authorized you to teach here?”

²⁴⁻²⁵ Jesus responded, “First let me ask you a question. You answer my question and I’ll answer yours. About the baptism of John—who authorized it: heaven or humans?”

²⁵⁻²⁷ They were on the spot and knew it. They pulled back into a huddle and whispered, “If we say ‘heaven,’ he’ll ask us why we didn’t believe him; if we say ‘humans,’ we’re up against it with the people because they all hold John up as a prophet.” They decided to concede that round to Jesus. “We don’t know,” they answered. Jesus said, “Then neither will I answer your question.

²⁸ “Tell me what you think of this story: A man had two sons. He went up to the first and said, ‘Son, go out for the day and work in the vineyard.’ ²⁹ “The son answered, ‘I don’t want to.’ Later on, he thought better of it and went.

³⁰ “The father gave the same command to the second son. He answered, ‘Sure, glad to.’ But he never went.

³¹⁻³² “Which of the two sons did what the father asked?”

They said, “The first.”

MESSAGE “*Choices*” Pastor Mary Jo Laabs

Pray with me: Miracle-making God, we humbly pray our thanks to you for all that you have made possible for us. May we never take for granted the blessings that are occurring all around us. Take a deep breath. Let it out. Breathe in recognition. Breathe out discontent. Amen.

Bring to mind your miracle story. What is one that occurred just yesterday? Or is it the one that is swirling around us in this room today? What will **our** story be tomorrow? When it happens, will *we, like the high priests*, need to see some credentials? Will we *prod* and say, “Who authorized **you**?”

When God calls US to the 2023 *vineyards*, will we go willingly, joining with other workers in the field of our dreams, or will we do some second-guessing. “My calendar is filled....someone else can surely do a better job that I can.” Or, “Let my brother or my sister do it!”

What will it take to convince us to think again of what is being asked of us, and just respond, “Yes!” when the call comes in? What will it take for us to write our names on the sign-up sheet, or to step up and say, “How can I help?” What will it take for us to turn around and take another direction, when we know we can’t afford another wrong turn?

These are the words of Mahatma Gandhi: “You may never know what results come of your actions, but if you do nothing, there will be no results.”

Whenever we feel like we are the ones on the proverbial SPOT; when an upcoming decision or task feels impossible, pause to breathe... turn to God in prayer and ask for guidance. *Do some believing* that by God’s grace and our good **choices**, we will be enabled to do a little miracle-making ourselves!

Let’s listen to letters from four of the students in our Kenya partnership.

May their stories warm our hearts and bless us as we listen. Amen.

LETTERS FROM STUDENTS in our Kenya Partnership:

A Letter from Metrine, read by Elena Eubank:

Hi Everyone,

My name is Metrine Jerop. I am 20 years old. I was sponsored by Brian and Jo Muehl. I joined the Kerio Valley Partnership Program after finishing my 8th grade studies. My mum had difficulties in paying my fees. There were some challenges at home. My dad had just passed away and I have two other sisters, who are also studying. My mom had a difficult time paying for the school fees. It became a problem. But, with the Kerio Valley Scholarship program, I was able to continue with my studies.

After 8th grade, I joined Moi Girls High School in Eldoret. Moi Girls is a good school. It is a national school. The Kerio Valley Scholarship program helped me in my four years of studies paying my school fees. I was able to study well and I finished my four year study and passed very well.

Currently, I am at Chuka University studying Bachelor of Law. I am currently in my second year. I would like to say thank you very much to my sponsors and to the partnership group who came to my school with the Kerio Valley Scholarship program committee. Thank you so much for helping me achieve my goals and for helping me through my studies.

Back home at Kerio Valley, we have many challenges such as cattle rustling, but with the help of the Scholarship program, many of the students are able to go to school and pursue their dreams.

Thank you very much for helping us by nurturing our dreams and may you continue helping other students from the Kerio Valley so that they may be able to achieve their goals and be good people and to have a good education. Bye!

A Letter from Titus, read by Luke LaViolette:

Hello, Jambo, I am Titus Kiptoo. I am one of the beneficiaries of the Kerio Valley Scholarship Program. I just want to take this opportunity to Thank God for the gift of life and the gift of good health. I also want to thank my sponsors Ted and Ann Sanderson who really supported me when I was in my secondary level education. I also want to mention John and Caroline Brandenbergers who supported me through my education journey in Masai Mara University. I want to say that it really assisted me so much in quite a lot of ways. I come from a humble background, whereby I was raised by a single parent because in my early age I lost my father to an illness. It became very difficult for my mum to raise my school fees. You came through and assisted me. It really helped me to complete my studies.

Now, I am volunteering to teach in Sambalat Junior School and giving back to the society. Here in Kerio Valley, we have a lot of challenges that we face, ranging from insecurity, drought and so many other challenges. A lot of school children are dropping out of school because of the insecurity because insecurity has really caused a lot of challenges here in the Kerio Valley. Some children have become orphans. We have families whereby children are becoming parents at a very early age. I would really wish to request more of your support to the people of the Kerio Valley because people are becoming vulnerable to these challenges and people are opting to leave school.

Your program has really helped a lot in this place and we really thank God for your support. Thank you very much for your kindhearted support and also we humbly request you continue giving us support in the same measures that you have been supporting us. It has really changed our lives here in the Kerio Valley, having been a part of this program. Without you, I could not have achieved this goal of becoming a teacher and also I could not have had an opportunity of giving back to the society.

A letter from Lulu, read by Elena Eubank

Hi, My name is Lulu Jeruto Kipyatich, My Sponsor's name is Lorene and Susan Forsythe. I have come to talk to you about the school routine. Butere Girls High School is located in Kakamega County. There are about 1642 girls who attend this girls boarding school.

We start our routine early in the morning at 5 am where we attend our morning studies and preparations. I usually start mine at 4 am, because I prefer 4 am so that I can get more time to interact with my books. 6 am is when our preparation ends. We then go and take our chia tea with bread. After that we go and do our manual work which usually involves sweeping or mopping. At exactly 6:50 am we attend our usual assembly, if it is on a Monday or a Friday. During the week on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday we attend several meetings for either the Freshman (Form 1), Sophomore (Form 2), Juniors (Form 3) and Seniors (Form 4). Our lessons usually start at 8 am. We attend two lessons have a 30 minute break and then attend another two lessons. We have a long break at 11:50 am. We attend more lessons then we go for lunch at 1:10 pm and finish lunch at 2:00 pm. We then attend three more lessons and our day ends at 4:00 pm. We then play games or we can attend several games. We take our dinner at 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm. Then our preparation and revision starts from 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm. Teachers are usually available from 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm. At 10:00 pm we go to sleep. But usually on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays we end our preparation at 9:00 pm, then we go to sleep. On Saturday and Sundays we usually wake up at 6:00 am. That's our school routine.

A letter from Brian, read by Logan LaViolette

Hello, My name is Brian Rutto Torolitch, I am a student and a former beneficiary of the Kerio Valley Partnership Program. My sponsor's names were Susan and John McFadden. I am currently a university student studying software engineering. I was a student at Kapsabet Boys High School. If it was not for you, I am sure I would not have completed my high school studies because of the high school fees. I am also delighted to inform you that when you came to visit me at Kapsabet, you encouraged me and inspired me to work hard and to give back to my community. I am also delighted to inform you that today, I am doing a course that is very competitive and few people have been able to join this course because of the required marks.

This program has impacted my life as a person, that of my family, that of my community. One way that has impacted my life is because academically and spiritually it has developed me as a person. You came through for us as a family. My other siblings were able to go to school because my parents could now be able to focus on them. I'm happy to tell you that some of my siblings have been able to complete their studies and we are following suit. My younger siblings are doing their KCPE this year. We are sure they are will do well and be able to join High School.

My heartfelt gratitude comes to you as a team and also to the McFadden Family because you came through for me. You helped me through my studies and I am promising you that I am going to do well. I am going to work hard to make sure that I succeed in life and that I am helpful to society. I have been able to go to many primary schools and encourage students. These students saw me in the village. They look up to me because of what I scored in my KCSE. I have been able to mentor many of them and during this past holiday. I volunteer to teach in nearby school mathematics and physics. This is due to what you taught me as a person. You taught me to show charity and to show generosity to other people.

I remember a letter Susan wrote to me about their help to the people with dementia and even the elderly. This has always encouraged me to be a person who can also volunteer to help other people in the society. I am hoping to join this program to be a sponsor to other students in Kenya or in even other parts of the

world. I have my friends who are part of this program. We are always grateful because you came through in a miraculous way for us. I remember when I was in Form 1, before I joined this program, I was sent home many times for not having paid the school fees. I used to go to pray often. This program came to me as a miracle. I was able to get this good news. I remembered what I was praying for and surely I saw God's hand coming through you. This has helped me to build my spirituality and faith as a person. I am still working hard to be a person of influence and a person who can help the society. Me as a person, I am forever grateful. My friends are also grateful because we always speak about this program. We see it as God sent this program to us. We thank you and we promise to keep working hard and hard again. Thank you very much. God bless you.

RESPONSES: Spoken: Pastor Mary Jo

Thank you Elena, Luke and Logan! Thank you for reading about the "miracles" that Metrine, Titus, Lulu and Brian have lived. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians 2:10, he writes: Common English Bible
(¹⁰ Instead,) *we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives.*

May we all be blessed as we continue our mission of outreach! Amen

Sung: *The Miracle Working God* A traditional song from our Kenya Partners
*Introduced by the Choir, **and then sung twice by ALL:***
I saw the miracle working God. I saw the miracle working God.
He is Alpha and Omega. I saw the miracle working God.

PRE-BENEDICTION: Thank you to all who have joined in this time of worship both far and near: musicians, technicians, ushers and servers, greeters, story-writers and readers. You are all invited to stay for coffee hour, hosted by our Kenya travelers who will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Next week, Pastor Nick will be begin a two-part sermon series, entitled
"In Hope of Becoming the Church." You won't want to miss it!

***BENEDICTION**

Pastor Mary Jo Laabs

Go now in peace, and when you get home, return God's call,
and help to make love grow from here to everywhere. (Paraphrased and edited from Pope John XXIII)

This hour's worship has ended. Let our service continue!