

Brian and I have been retired for about 10 years. Our retirement plan included the intention to travel and, to couple this with volunteering. It worked and this past Winter we returned to Lesotho. I was with Help Lesotho : a charity based in Ottawa. Lesotho is located smack dab in the middle of South Africa. It is a mountainous country, rural and impoverished. Winter can be brutal, especially in the highlands.

I read the book too. (*Compassion as a Subversive Activity*) What spoke to me, as related to our Lesotho experience, was the idea of **Community and Healing**.

The author described the Community to which Jesus belonged as being rural and impoverished.

He described its inhabitants as being marginalized and ignored.....for a variety of reasons.... including illness, affliction , gender , religion.

But Jesus walked among them...touched them , healed them and by doing so , the author suggests the Community itself became a better place...'healed'.

I will talk briefly about 3 Communities I experienced in Lesotho.

1.

I was assigned to deliver a Literacy program at the new Seotlong Centre HL opened in 2008. The building houses a meeting hall, a small library, a kitchen, office and living quarters. It's fairly remote... in the middle of a field surrounded by barbed wire. The goal was to reach out to that Community through its children and youth. We did this by utilizing a series of books... a series incidentally out of Canada , written by Kathy Knowles ,who lived in Africa for several years. Her books depict African childrens' lives and the issues they are now facing... the photographs are wonderfulthe children really could identify...no Dora the Explorer this time round . Perhaps the term bibliotherapy is appropriate..... the stories spoke to their concerns, interests and issues. Books were read, conversations ensued with the help of youth leaders , games were played and almost daily, many of the kids went home with piece of artwork...we began to feel a connection with the Community and our numbers grew.

2.

One day I heard beautiful singing as I approached the Centre. It turned out to be Grandmothers Day. Very special. HL has tapped into this powerful Community of women as many organizations have. 65% of the thousands and thousands of orphans in Lesotho are cared for by these grandmothers. In 4 areas, chiefs are requested to select about 50 of the poorest of the poor to meet monthly within the larger Community. They sing, they pray, they dance, they eat, they study, ask questions and learn about living and teaching a healthy lifestyle. They share a meal

and tea. They return homeuplifted....clutching bags of lentils and we raised our arms in solidarity/showing off our red HL bracelets...as grandmothers and as part of a growing community.

3.

Lastly, the Community of Phelisanong. Our friends Peggy and Peter asked us to deliver a package for them. Its remote they said. ...but remarkable. Correct on both counts. Since 2001, in the foothills of the Maluti mountains, a committed group of disabled and HIV +volunteers have been nurturing a small group of children...abandoned, ostracized, and excluded from school and work because of their mental and physical disabilities. This Community has grown ... there is now a preschool, a regular school, regular health visits, a large organic garden, a playground... and now 55 kids live there and an outreach program is in place. What is even more remarkable is how P and P have twinned this Community with a Community of disabled adults in Victoria BC. Last year alone \$10 000 was raised for Phelisanong through a recycling program carried out by these guys. And the relationship deepens as they exchange letters, pictures, videos and pieces of artwork.

Individuals...all poor....all experiencing a degree of marginalization for one reason or another...

...**then invited** to belong to the larger Community through a variety of activities

Sound familiar?

Are these individuals healing?

Are the larger Communities these individuals belong to, healing?