A TRIBUTE TO A HERO OF MEDICAL MISSIONS

The Bible says that we are “surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses” who are the heroes of the Faith. I love to read biographies of great saints and I draw inspiration and strength from their lives. One of my heroes is the Scottish missionary Dr. David Torrance. I knew nothing of David Torrance until our trip to the Holy Land last year. Maci and I were checking in to our hotel on the shores of the Sea of Galilee when I realized that the hotel had once been a hospital, and the grave of its founder, Dr. Torrance, was on the grounds of the hotel. As I stood by that grave only yards from the shores of the Sea of Galilee, I thought about how David Torrance had tried to emulate the ministry of Jesus.

130 years ago Dr. Torrance left his home in Scotland and built a hospital in Galilee to serve the people of Palestine. Until his death 40 years later, he labored among the Muslims and Jews of the region attending to the appalling medical conditions he found there. He loved these people and he shared the Good News with them in their own language. He dealt with malevolent bureaucracy, language difficulties, superstition, bigotry, bandits and horrible health conditions. His eulogy stated that “with patience and justice, and the exercise of Christian love he could work miracles, and with steady perseverance and invincible faith he overcame all difficulties.”

As I stood there looking out over Galilee where Jesus conducted so much of his earthly ministry, I thought about the parallels of David Torrance’s life and the lives of our team members here in the Sierra Madre. He left a comfortable home and a well-paid position, and traveled to a distant land where he built a hospital and worked among a stubborn people resistant to the Gospel. I read a biography of Torrance’s life and couldn’t help but notice the similarities between the 19th century Arabs that inhabited Galilee and the Tarahumaras who inhabit the Sierra Madre of Mexico. With perseverance, love and hard work Dr. Torrance made inroads for the Gospel among those people, as we hope we are doing here among the Tarahumaras.

After years of work, all the missionaries in “the Sierra” agree that we are seeing a softening of the Tarahumara heart and increased openness to the Gospel. Matthew 4:24 says, “He went throughout all Galilee... proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick... and he healed them.” This verse describes the ministry of Jesus, and also the ministry of Dr. David Torrance, and I hope and pray that in some small way it describes our team’s work among the Tarahumaras.

In September, Doctors David and Teena Doka from El Paso, Texas, returned to Hospital Misión Tarahumara for another cataclysm and strabismus surgery outreach. We saw hundreds of outpatient consults and did 28 surgeries. David and Teena have been coming to Sanmiquel for 14 years and have performed hundreds of surgeries.

During each outreach it seems that one special patient steals our heart. In this case it was actually two patients, a husband and wife. Guadalupe was completely blind in both eyes and had to be led by her husband who was only blind in one eye. The striking thing about Guadalupe was that she seemed to have a perpetual frown, and when the patches were taken off her eyes the day after surgery, she had perfect vision but she still persisted with her frown.

Guadalupe is the perfect example of how someone from an animistic culture such as the Tarahumaras reacts when something good happens. You or I would jump for joy if we suddenly went from completely blind to seeing perfectly. But animists have a fearful and pessimistic view of the world. In the U.S. we don’t often speak of Animism but it is actually one of the world’s most common religions. It comes in many forms and variations but there are two beliefs common to this world view. The first is that there is a powerful creator god, but he is distant, capricious and not particularly loving. The second is that the world is populated by spirits that don’t interact much with the real world. The Bible says that every good and perfect gift comes from God and can be received with joy and gratitude – not fear. This is the message that we have to share with our Tarahumara neighbors. And the same message you have to share with your neighbors of a great and loving God who pours out grace and mercy on His people. Our hospital’s “patron” verse comes from Jeremiah 29:11: “I know for I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” What a wonderful news — that Jesus was God Incarnate who laid down his own life so “that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

When Guadalupe returned to see me a week after her surgery, she was still frowning. I told her, “Guadalupe, a great and good God has healed you!”...and she smiled.
Delores arrived at the hospital three weeks after rupturing her appendix in her remote village. Amazingly she was able to survive but, besides having high fevers, she was dyeing of malnutrition having been unable to eat since her illness began. She arrived terrified and in terrible pain, as well as being unable to communicate in Spanish with the doctors. The witch doctor in her isolated village must have imposed unimaginable psychological and spiritual control in order to delay her from seeking our help.

Dr. Chuck took her surgery and for over eight hours he tried to clean out the most impossible mess that infection had wrecked on this 46 year old woman's entire abdomen. Dr. Chuck, with his decades of experience, said that he had never seen anything comparable and marvelled that she had made it to the hospital.

Around the clock for the next eight days, everyone fought to keep Delores alive--her husband was never far from her bedside. Dr. Chuck told her husband that he did not think she had long to live and begged the extent of the damage, and suggested he bring their children to see their mother for the last time.

The ambulance drove three hours over almost impossible roads. Delores' husband and three of their children. She rallied and was able to speak to all of them.

The next morning, I got word that the children were being driven back to school. So soon! It was so far back to their village that they certainly wouldn't be able to return.

I went to the Intensive Care Unit with her before they left, but when I got there she was changed--saw something different. Looking into her still beautiful face and eyes, the transformation was amazing: peace, warmth, connection and even joy. Through one of the days that week, when asked if she wanted the children to stay longer, we would make sure they were well cared for and she could see them whenever she wanted and still get the rest she needed. She spoke to the children in Tarahumara, saying she felt very much at home and among family here and thought it the children should return to school. The nurse added, "And you know she is now our sister in Christ!" "Oh, I do know, I can see it!" I replied, "But, please tell her (and I gestured what I was saying) that from one mather to another, that I am praying for more time with her children."

The ambulance with the husband and children rallied out, and Dr. Chuck took Delores back to surgery one more time, but she never woke up. By the time the husband returned from their village, Delores' body was prepared for burial. Although heaven was reclaiming, it was serene and sweet.

Caring for the Santiago Tarahumara must have all fought so very hard. However, their valiant fight had bought Delores the days she needed to hear about God and who she was and to live her days to the fullest.

When she died, she believed in Jesus with her whole heart and she was completely at peace.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW - DR. MIKE BERKLEY

What a year! So much has happened and the work here in the Sierra Madre has grown so much. The arrival of nurse anesthetist Eric Kramer with his wife Sheena in January meant that 2016 was the first year that hospital Misión Tarahumara had full time anesthesia services. Dr. Chuck and I didn't have to wait to do surgery when seriously ill or injured patients arrived, and we were able to attend to the needs of far more surgical patients.

Pastor Jacob and Raquel Sotelo continued expanding the Community Health Evangelism team which works in remote villages providing health and agricultural assistance to the Tarahumara people, all the while working with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Agricultural missionary Andrew Bornman purchased a property on which to develop a demonstration farm. He will be working with Tarahumara farmers to develop better crop growing techniques, as well as have the ability to test better high altitude plant varieties.

Our generous supporters bought two new ambulances and a heavy hauler Ford truck to replace ageing unreliable vehicles. Now we can move sick and injured patients, haul supplies and transport health workers safely and reliably.

In 2016 pilot Brent Dodd and his wife Hollie Macar arrived as a result of our new partnership with United Indian Missions to provide aviation services. We sold our Cessna 185 and are awaiting delivery of a UM Cessna 206. We are planning on purchasing a Piper Super Cub which can land in many of the shorter, more rugged strips that the larger Cessna 206 cannot use.

This is the first year of having two midwives on staff. Michelle Hopkins and Lizzie Meglich were kept busy delivering more Tarahumara babies than any previous year while providing a safe, compassionate environment for the mother and her baby.

Our new Intensive Care Unit was inaugurated and in this newsletter you can read about how it has been used to deliver kind-hearted, technically advanced care and present the love of Christ to seriously ill and injured patients. The Mexican government recognized our work yet again.

The Chihuahua State government rated us in the top 2% of charities for effectiveness and financial transparency. The Mexican Federal government awarded me the "Innovator of the Year" award in recognition of the wonder full work that the MMP team does here among the Tarahumara.

We are also excited to have finished our first semester of Tarahumara language classes. Linguists Andy and Debbie Kramer developed the first ever comprehensive Tarahumara language curriculum and we spent the fall studying this difficult Native American language. In January we will resume our studies.

October brought renewed conflict between the drug cartels in our area as they fought for control of the drug smuggling routes. Our area of Mexico is now called the "Golden Triangle" because of extensive opium poppy cultivation. So much has changed in our corner of Mexico since we began this work 15 years ago. The peaceful serene Sierra Madre has now gone and the residents must share their territory with violent drug runners. Our commitment to meet the spiritual and physical needs of the Tarahumara remains unchanged, but we must tread more carefully than ever.

We covet your prayers for the protection of our team.

CARING FOR MERCENARIES

Do you know that Jesus died for your sins" our sweet, young Mexican nurse asked the seriously wounded drug cartel mercenary in the corner of his hospital bed. "Rosa," really a rebel Misión Tarahumara. Suddenly our hospital had been converted into a MASH unit and was filled with horribly wounded drug cartel mercenary soldiers, the result of a violent clash between the two cartels that fight to control our area.

Without our permission, one of the cartels had adopted us as their hospital; and what else could we do as heavily armed mercenaries brought in on a truckload of their wounded? For the next 24 hours our resources were stretched to the limit as we struggled to save life and limb.

Doctors Chuck and Mike operated all night to save the lives of two men who were close to death due to the terrible wounds that powerful military weapons can produce.

Both of these men, knowing that they were close to death, were willing to hear the Gospel, and both made professions of faith in Jesus Christ. They both survived the night and were in our ICU for the few days when the few soldiers left for them and shared with them the love of Christ. Eventually they even joined us for morning devotions, knowing full well that God had spared their lives.

Caring for cartel mercenaries was hazardous for the hospital and its staff. There is the ever-present danger of retaliation by the other side, or even the risk that the Mexican government might charge us with collusion with criminal organizations. We breathed a sigh of relief when the cartel finally took the ambulance to take these men away.

We don't know what happened to these two men. Their injuries will prevent them from returning to work as mercenaries. "Before God can use a man greatly he must wound him deeply," (Osvald Chambers) We can only hope and pray that the seed of the Gospel takes root in their hearts and that God will use these men's terrible wounds to work a miracle in their lives.

TREATING ELVIA

Elvia is a sweet 9 year old Tarahumara girl who lives in a remote village. She showed up at Hospital Misión Tarahumara complaining of swelling in the right side of her neck. She had massive enlargement of the lymph nodes in her neck and she was losing weight. All this was a sure sign of lymphoma and we were concerned the chemotherapy that this girl was going to have to go through in Chihuahua City. Chemotherapy for lymphoma is just not something we can do here in Samaquiche.

Dr. Chuck did a lymph node biopsy to check the diagnosis and we anxiously awaited the results - it wasn't lymphoma but rather it was tuberculosis! We were all so grateful - at least this little girl had a curable disease that we could treat here.

Two hundred years ago, one in seven deaths in Europe and the United States were due to tuberculosis. The disease has now largely been eradicated in the first world, but in other parts of the world, including the Sierra Madre, the disease remains a common affliction of the people. The treatment is long and arduous, but a cure can be expected if the patient will stick with the treatment.

We will be working with Elvia and her family for the next year as we help her get through the treatment. We will tell her of a God who spared her life and therefore must have plans for her - good plans.

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans of welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." Jeremiah 29:11

Thank God - it's only tuberculosis.

Tuberculosis is a threat to all health care workers in the Sierra Madre and all staff must be monitored for the disease. Dr. Mike Bentley contracted tuberculosis 10 years ago and recovered after going through the treatment regime.
The Fight for Dolores
-Mac Berkeley

Dolores arrived at the hospital three weeks after rupturing her appendix in her rural village. Amazingly she was able to survive, but, besides having fevers, she was dying of malnutrition having been unable to eat since her illness began. She arrived tired and in terrible pain, as well as being unable to communicate in Spanish with the doctors. The witch doctor in her isolated village must have imposed unimaginable psychological and spiritual control in order to delay her from seeking help.

Dr. Chuck took her surgery and for over eight hours he tried to clean out the impossible mess that infection had wrecked on this 46 year old woman's entire abdomen. Dr. Chuck, with his decades of experience, said that he had never seen anything comparable and marvelled that she had made it to the hospital.

Around the clock for the next eight days, everyone fought to keep Dolores alive—her husband was never far from her bedside. Dr. Chuck told her husband that he did not think she had long to live. He was the extent of the damage, and suggested he bring their children to see their mother for the last time.

The ambulance drove three hours over almost impossible roads to get Dolores and her family and three of her children. She rallied and was able to speak to all of them. The next morning, I got word that the children were being driven back to school. So zoom! It was so far back to her village that they certainly wouldn't be able to return.

I went to the Intensive Care Unit to visit with her before they left, but when I got there she was changed—somehow different. Looking into her still beautiful face and eyes, the transformation was amazing; peace, warmth, connection and even joy. Through one of the nurses who I asked if she wanted the children to stay longer; we would make sure they were well cared for and she could see them whenever she wanted and still get the rest she needed. She spoke softly in Tarahumara, saying she felt very much at home and among family here and thought the children should return to school. The nurse added, "And you know she is now our sister in Christ!" "Oh, I do know, I can see it!" I replied. "But, please tell her (and I gestured what I was saying) that from one mother to another, that I am praying for more time with her children."

The ambulance with the husband and children rallied out, and Dr. Chuck took Dolores back to surgery one more time, but she never woke up. By the time the husband returned from their village, Dolores's body was prepared for burial. Although heaven was receiving, it was serious. The hospital staff must have all fought so very hard. However, their valiant fight had bought Dolores the days she needed to hear about God and how much she was loved. When she died, she believed in Jesus with her whole heart and she was completely at peace.

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-M. K. Berkeley

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Caring for Mercenaries

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Treating Elva

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Mexico Medical Missions is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to proclaim the transforming love of Jesus Christ through the provision of compassionate, integrated healthcare to the indigenous people of the Sierra Madre Mountains of Northern Mexico.

MEXICO MEDICAL MISSIONS  1302 Waugh Drive #685  Houston, TX 77019
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NEWS FROM MEXICO MEDICAL MISSIONS

CHRISTMAS 2014

And the angel said to them... “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people

In September, Doctors David and Teena Daka from El Paso, Texas, returned to Hospital Misión Tarahumara for another cataract and strabismus surgery outreach. We saw hundreds of outpatient consults and did 28 surgeries. David and Teena have been coming to Sanmachi for 14 years and have performed hundreds of surgeries.

During each outreach it seems that one special patient steals our heart. In this case it was actually two patients, a husband and wife. Guadalupe was completely blind in both eyes and had to be led by her husband who was only blind in one eye. The striking thing about Guadalupe was that she seemed to have a perpetual frown, and when the patches were taken off her eyes the day after surgery, she had perfect vision but she still persisted with her frown.

Guadalupe is the perfect example of how someone from an animistic culture such as the Tarahumaras reacts when something good happens. You or I would jump for joy if we suddenly went from completely blind to seeing perfectly. But animists have a fearful and pessimistic view of the world. In the U.S. they don’t even speak of Animism but it is actually one of the world’s most common religions. It comes in many forms and variations but there are two beliefs central to this world view. The first is that there is a powerful creator god, but he is distant, capricious and not particularly loving. The second is that the world is populated by spirits that haunt almost everything such as trees, rivers, mountains and even rainbows and some animals. Because the creator god is distant and the spirits are close, an animist must concentrate on appeasing the spirits which control the various aspects of life such as the health of one’s family, the rains, the harvest, childbirth, and marriage.

Fear and pessimism dominate an animist’s life, and since the spirits are powerful, temerarious and uncaring they can take away whatever good thing might happen in life - even the restoration of eyesight. Therefore it is wise not to cling too tightly to any good thing and certainly one must never attract the spirits’ attention by expressing joy.

It is all too easy to make fun of or even pity the “primitive” beliefs of the Tarahumaras, but cannot we who call ourselves Christian fall into the same kind of behavior? Do we not sometimes think that if we carefully follow all the rules then God will not punish us? Do we give to God in order that He gives back to us? Do we try to manipulate God by being “religious”? Do we believe that if something goes wrong in our lives, then God must be punishing us for past sins?

Working with Tarahumaras and their radically different world view has helped me to clarify my own world view. And the one thing that dominates a Christian’s world view is GRACE. Animism says that the spirits will punish us for our sins and that we will get exactly what we deserve if not worse. Grace says that we get exactly the opposite of what we deserve from an all-powerful and loving God. We sinned but Jesus bore the wrath and punishment for our sins. The Bible says that Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for sin and that those who believe in Him will never face the wrath of God (or spirits). We might face trials but they are part of a loving God’s perfect plan to make us more like Jesus.

The Bible says that every good and perfect gift comes from God and can be received with joy and gratitude - not fear. This is the message that we have to share with our Tarahumaras neighbors, the same message you have to share with your neighbors of a great and loving God who pours out grace and mercy on His people. Our hospital’s “patron” verse comes from Jeremiah 29:11. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

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