

Day 8

Sunday, August 18th

Have you ever church shopped? I have. I've taken time to find the church that is right for me. The one that was going to meet my needs. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but after today I can see that that is another aspect of my privilege. Today we went to two churches.

The first one was about 45 minutes to an hour away from our hotel. The scenes on the way and even the building itself have become familiar enough. We climbed slightly uneven stairs to an upper room. The sanctuary was filled with plastic outdoor chairs. A rough wooden cross hung on the back wall and there was a pulpit with a home made banner hanging on it. We were greeted with the phrase, "Praise the Lord." The smiling faces welcomed us in, excited to have the Bishop with them. We asked if we could use the washroom before the service started and our host pastor's (Mohan) face fell. With embarrassment he asked us to wait as he disappeared downstairs, returning minutes later to say it was okay. He had to go and ask permission—his church isn't allowed to use the toilet in the building where they rent space. Over lunch he told us of times where the police had come in during his worship service and shut it down. He has to commute a long way to his church and he doesn't get paid. Then he told us that his goal for the next time the Bishop comes to visit is to have six more churches in operation (seven in total). It was a simple, beautiful service, and we were welcomed to fully participate with them.



After lunch we went to pick up Pastor Pramila to visit her church in the afternoon and evening. This required a couple of hours drive up to the top of a mountain in Dolosbagb. The journey was over pretty rough and winding roads that turned into hair pin turns. There was a time when we had to reverse to allow a bus to cross a bridge so we could move forward. At one point Sister Pramila commented that this was where she would have to end the ride and walk the rest of the way to the church because the road was so bad. We were incredulous and asked how far a walk it was to the church. She casually replied that it was only half an hour. She had done that for six years before the government put in a new road. Pramila makes this trip twice a week. She has no regrets and she smilingly told me that she lives for going to the church.



Once we arrived it was easier to understand. The children were lined up at the door waiting for us with welcome and flowers. We were ushered in to sit in places of honour and the youth led the congregation in music and prayer. It was clear that the people loved the Lord and each other. We spent time praying with members of the congregation after the service. We also played with the youth and the children. We could see an even split of adults and children/youth. As we walked back to our taxi (who had waited and driven us all day) a group of the girls walked with us. They called

goodbye as they walked on. The sky was darkening and it had been raining heavily during the service, now they were walking the 15 kilometres home from church.

We headed back to Kandy to get some dinner. We went back to the mall where our driver joined us at



the food court for dinner. This was a little different. You scanned a card to enter. Picked a menu: Indian, Chinese, Thai, or Italian. Go to the appropriate vendor, order, scan your card, pick up your food, and sit down to eat. Based on the decor in the taxi I'm assuming our driver was Buddhist so it was neat to share a meal with him where we said grace in Jesus's name and debriefed our day amidst laughter. Then we headed back to our hotel where we were able to connect with our families and then get some rest.

These folks also church shop. They are looking for a church that will meet their needs too. They need husbands to come to church, children to get good education, illnesses healed, and a community that loves each other. That is what we have been encountering in the Free Methodist churches we have been visiting; new families. They are families who love Jesus and care for each other, which spills over into worship. They certainly aren't there for the frills. Just love and hope.