

## **In the Shadow #10**

Yesterday I went with Papa and Mama Timo to a family get-together. It was an anniversary of sorts. Mama Timo's mother passed away in 2018 and had been buried at the homeplace. I'm not sure if it was the anniversary of her birthday or her death, but that is irrelevant.

We drove up into the mountains to the village of Gihoroka, parked the car, and Etienne and I prepared to walk to the "garden" that he and Mama Timo own. Almost immediately it began raining, so we ducked into a small store and waited out the thunderstorm. It was a long, hard rain. When it finally let up, we proceeded up the hill past field after field of potatoes and beans. I would guess we walked about a kilometer until we were in an location where one could look around a very large area and not see any houses or buildings. This is very rare in Rwanda. It was still raining lightly and quite muddy, which made it a little harder to appreciate the beauty. But the black rich volcanic soil yields incredible crops. The potatoes on Papa Timo's plot of an acre or so were incredibly lush looking. I don't know the whole story, but from what I perceive, he provides the inputs and hires workers to do the planting, tending, etc. As mentioned in an earlier post, that is a common scenario.



We walked part of the way back to the previous village, then made a left and walked a path up over the hill towards another village, all the while passing farming patches of potatoes and a few other crops. Even in the rain, there were people working in the fields, not a lot, but there were a few. 50 kg sacks of potatoes were being carried out on the backs of men to be loaded on bicycles or trucks in the village, a kilometer away. A few cows were seen grazing crop residue and grassy non-farmed spots.

We arrived at a small village of maybe a dozen houses. There might have been a small shop or two, in the front room of a home. A road of sorts went through the village which Papa Timo says was passable by car many years ago. I'm sure that a motorcycle could get in, but a car or truck would be out of the question. Other than the electric wires passing through, it had a rather remote feel.

On the south side of the village we walked a narrow path to a small house among some fields and rocks. Nearby was a grave site with a white-painted metal fence and a porcelain tile cross. We entered the house and sat down, being greeted by Mama Timo's family members. I typically have trouble understanding who is related to who and how they are related (language problem). For instance, as we walked past the grave site, Etienne said his grandmother was buried there, later he told me it was his mother-in-law (it was, of course, his mother-in-law). As I met the relatives though, many were easy to identify as Mama Timo's clan by their features.

Mama Timo is part of a really amazing family. I'm not at all certain how many are pastors or married to pastors, but there are quite a few. One of her younger brothers led a brief service where we sang – it is awesome to be in a small room with 15 other men singing hymns together (the women participated, but were singing from an adjoining room) - Scripture was read, prayers were offered and some words of testimony, encouragement and admonishment were spoken. We went outside to the grave site with a wreath of flowers, sang another hymn and Mama Timo prayed. It was all very moving.

Once back in the house more words were shared about the family's godly heritage. We ate a hearty meal together. There were huge kettles of rice, beans, peas, isombe, potatoes, yams, pumpkin, and beef. I was offered a third bottle of soft drink, but refused it (two is already more than I care to drink in one day).

As the day was coming to a close, a few more testimonies came out. The family talked about the farm, which apparently had been large, by Rwandan standards. Each family member received a share of the property, but the house is held jointly. They are keeping it as



what we in the US might call a cabin or retreat, but they are referring to it by the Old Testament term "City of Refuge," a place to step away from the world's cares for a time. A final prayer was spoken and we went outside for a group photo.

It was an incredible privilege for me to with Mama Timo's family for the day. I doubt that you would find very many families anywhere of the globe with such a heritage of service to God. It truly was as if I was on holy ground.

For the Master, Chris Elliott with the Church of the Brethren Rwanda.