



**Lutheran Bible
Translators**

Far Trekkin'

News from Rob and Eshinee Veith

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Marking the Moment

By Eshinee

On a Monday in November, I ordered an awesome set of markers for students to use in the upcoming discourse analysis class I planned to teach in Ethiopia later that month.

On Tuesday, rapidly changing conditions in Ethiopia meant I would probably not be going there after all. That afternoon, the markers arrived.

On Wednesday, I cancelled my ticket.

The markers sat on the couch for weeks next to my fully packed bags. I couldn't bring myself to admit that these markers would not be used as intended.

At the time, I wrote that everything I did to try to wrap up this cancelled trip felt like a throat punch. And that felt

self-indulgent to write. Cancelling this trip mostly benefitted me. The colleagues and friends that I care about were still in Ethiopia. They were still facing the challenges which had arisen there. In fact, I was giving them one more challenge in that someone would have to do the thing I had agreed to do.

One of my LBT colleagues, Chris, agreed to teach the course for me using the materials I had developed. But he was only able to teach the first week, before he returned to the US for a planned Christmas trip.

From that point on, I taught the class using the Zoom program.

It was a wild ride.

First, Ethiopia is 11 hours

Improv in an Era of Changing Plans

By Rob

The other day I was listening to randomly shuffling songs on my computer. If you know me, you know my musical tastes are all over the place. It's not uncommon to hear vintage gospel alongside classic house, baroque guitar, folk country, and post-punk in a single sitting. I was working on something else, only half listening, when a prog-jazz piece caught my ear. I was digging it, so I flipped to iTunes to see who the artist was. Mekane Yesus Seminary Jazz Band.

I recorded this November, 2019. Hearing the song again took me back to the session. Eshinee and I had been several weeks in Ethiopia at that point. Eshinee was making one of her regular trips, teaching some classes, recruiting some new teachers for the Bible Translation track at the seminary. I was there in a more exploratory capacity, meeting with some local leaders to discuss future projects. The recording session happened suddenly, unexpectedly. I had taught a seminar at the music school on how to mix live sound. Then a few days later, the director of the music school asked me to come to campus and do something with live sound. I didn't quite understand what he was saying... a confusion generated by a poor connection over the cell phone mixed with our very different dialects of English. When I got to the campus, I discovered they were heading to a local radio station to perform a live set. The band wanted to be sure to have someone on hand who could mix a 12-piece jazz band which had acoustic,

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MOMENT

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later, so I had to shift my sleep schedule. Their morning classes happen between 9:00 PM and 2:00 AM Pacific Northwest time.

Second, I am used to teaching with high levels of student interaction. Imagine lots of group work with me peeking my head in to guide discussion. Imagine me asking questions, making eye contact with individual students, reading the room (facial expressions, body language...). Markers. None of that works on Zoom.

I lectured more than I would like, trusting that my tactics of state, rephrase, restate would be enough to have some of the information stick. I used a lot of powerpoint and I recorded the Zoom classes so that students would have access to the presentation and videos to rewatch after class by their request. There were days when the internet was so unstable that I taught (recorded) classes with no one able to hear clearly what I was saying during class time.

And then I started to receive the assignments. I had them identifying logical relationships in a few verses from Romans 8, drafting those excerpts in their language, and back translating those drafts into English (so that I could get a sense of what they had done).

There are at least 6 different Ethiopian languages spoken by these 15 students. Most of the students have some access to Scripture in their primary language; some students are studying so that they can assist other language communities in their country who do not have access. Still, only 2 of these languages have a full Bible translation available. For one of the students, their language has only some portions translated... not even a full Testament, Old or New.

Which means that, as I read through that student's translation of various verses from Romans 8, I suddenly realize that I am most likely reading the first written translation that has ever been done of these verses into that language... including this verse.

All of the students did very well on the final exam; some even achieved perfect scores.

All the feels.



The Mekane Yesus Seminary Jazz Band performs live on the air at an Addis Ababa radio station.

IMPROV

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electric, and electronic sounds. So, they wanted me at the mixing console.

I had my portable stereo recorder with me, so I set that up in the room as well.

The performances by the band were nothing short of extraordinary. The only less than stellar moment was something you don't hear in the recording. I'd seen them rehearse and knew the guitar player had worked out an impressive solo for one of the songs, but the song was shortened by the station announcers, so the guitar solo wasn't played on the air.

I presented the master disc to the director of the music school. He was pleased to have a record of the performance, but said he had no intention of releasing it as such. These were all cover tunes; he wanted to encourage the ensemble to compose, perform, and record their own original material. Perhaps I would help with that in the future.

I barely mentioned this project in a newsletter two years ago. It felt a small thing. A moment. A thing, less of itself and more something which would lead to a bigger story later.

The experience felt salient to me today for two reasons. One: this was my last overseas recording before the pandemic hit. And two: there are few things I love more than being in the room when the magic happens... when a new song is composed or performed or recorded.

Everything for 2020 was cancelled. No one even scheduled anything for 2021. But thus far in 2022, things scheduled for this spring have mostly been postponed. And postponed is better than cancelled. I am looking forward to being on the ground again when the magic happens. Please pray with me that, Lord willing, it will happen and that I can be a part of it.
