



Meeting the Pioneers

Wouldn't you love to talk with the great pioneers throughout history, like Christopher Columbus, and David Livingstone? Or to visit with Zhenghe, the ancient Chinese admiral who spent half his life leading a trading fleet throughout Asia and Africa? I have always wondered what it must have been like to be the first person to go where they went, and do what they did.

This month I met the pioneers of two great movements separated by half the world and half a century. WWII not only brought America to economic and military prominence, but also began a great cross-cultural movement which has impacted almost every nation. We recently had dinner with the first couple sent out by our organization, back in 1952. They came here on a whirlwind tour to visit many whom they had trained, and scout places to send even more. They celebrated their fifty-eighth wedding anniversary with breakfast in Seoul, lunch in Hong Kong, and dinner in Beijing, and weren't even tired!

Of course we were eager to hear any words of wisdom from their long experience, but they didn't share about the hard lessons from their early years, or their great triumphs. Norm shared rather about his weakness, about every man's weakness, and about how important it was for him to have a few close friends who remembered him and kept up with him, even when he spent most of the time away from home, even when he lapsed in his devotionals, even when he didn't feel so close to the Father. Even now, scattered around the world, he has a few men that always know where he is and keep him accountable. Muriel shared about one time as a veteran when she struggled with culture shock far more than all the greenhorns on her team. She learned that she still needed to put aside her self-centeredness and keep her eyes on the one who can bring us victory in any situation.

Soon after that we got to pass on their advice to pioneers in a brand new movement, flowing westward out of this nation. Amos and Jabez's humility and commitment remind me of Norm and Muriel, but there the similarities stopped. Eighty-year-old Norm has a PhD and spent decades chairing a cross-cultural ministry department; Eighteen-year-old Amos didn't graduate from junior high, and both he and Jabez come from a farming village. When their leader asked us to help them get to a neighboring Muslim nation to teach language in our coworker Kenny's training school, telling us they were the best qualified he had, we raised our eyebrows. After spending weeks with them as my personal tutors, and sharing some educational, cross-cultural, and higher lessons along the way, I couldn't agree more with the leader's recommendation.

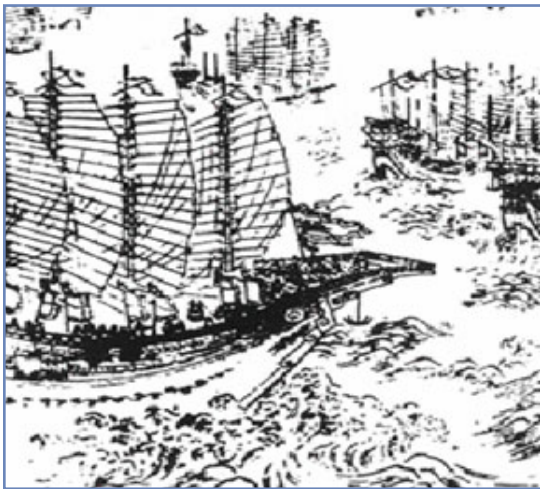
They have great pronunciation, and set higher standards for me than any teachers I have ever had. It is not enough for me to get the sounds and intonation right, they drill me until my rhythm and emphasis is right as well. They love to try new techniques, and teach Emmanuel and Shenae even more enthusiastically than they teach me. They spent hours studying the textbooks and making a list of supplies and teaching resources they will take with them.



Bringing gifts.

Their greatest tangible service, however, may not be in the language they bring, but the goods. In the country they are going to, one-fifth of the people are migrants working in Russia, and the rest survive mostly on what they send home. They import much of what they need from China, and much is still not available. When Amos and Jabez weren't studying with me they interned at a brother's international trade company, which has agreed to ship them anything they want to sell. While there they spent hours searching online for everything our coworker suggested they bring, and their farm background was far more useful than we could have dreamed. Kenny wrote us about the peoples' desperation there; the price of natural gas has increased sevenfold, they can't afford to heat their homes through the frigid winters or even cook. He asked if Amos had heard about capturing cow flatulence as a fuel source, and Amos replied, "Sure, my aunt does that and it's really cheap!" Kenny told us about the food shortages there, with prices doubling, and asked about the hothouses they use to grow winter vegetables here. Of course, they knew all about the best and cheapest technology, it seems half the fields here are covered in plastic! He also asked about the solar panels and electric farm carts they use here, as gasoline prices have also soared, and of course Amos and Jabez had the scoop.

Meeting people's educational and physical needs, earning income for themselves and for local brethren are all vitally important in that desperate nation, but of course insufficient alone. The most precious part of my time with Amos and Jabez was seeing the integrity of their walk, and their fervency to see others share their joy. Their mission is to spend



Envoy of peace.

one year there as pioneers, and then help train a long-term team to return under their leadership. Please remember them, asking that their friendship will strengthen and spur them on to good works, and that they will keep their focus on Him through the hard times that surely lie ahead. Please ask also that their skills, experience, and character will bring them favor with the people they serve, and those people will also see their favor with our Father.

This August I hope you will see many images of China, and maybe even the newly handcrafted replica of Zhenghe's 200-foot treasure ships. They are being celebrated as a symbol of China's peaceful rise as a trade superpower. If you hear any stories of this ancient envoy of peace, remember the less celebrated pioneers like Amos and Jabez, who are carrying news of true peace on earth, and good will toward men.

Bert, Ruth, Emmanuel, and Stenae