The Mkhondo Story

(9-11 March 2023)

Introduction

This story had many names: initially, Anneke, then Piet Retief, then Mkhondo and finally HIStory. I experienced the first contact with Anneke Rabe before the April 2022 Europe/Africa 'Nations Redeemed' prayer seminars in Cape Town and Pretoria. Both Leon of UPF and Daniel of Jericho Walls would have loved to have Anneke part of the Nations Redeemed initiative. Her national reconciliation focus and resultant fruit were well known. It was not to be, but we came closer as ministries as our members started praying together in various national / global prayer projects.

Beginnings

I plugged up courage to whatsapp Anneke, whom I did not know personally, with well wishes / prayers for the Pilgrimage of Grace in the Cape in September 2022. I shared a bit about our November 2021 Moravian prayer journey and the vision we received while praying at the President's residence, Genadendal. - "Can I maybe visit on the farm to talk about a possible Piet Retief prayer outreach?" Husband, Ralph's heart emergency and recovery in December 2022 held up the visit. "Let's talk in the new year."

Planning

A fresh discussion started in February 2023 and brought the dates 8-10 March, not in the weekend, like we had suggested, but a Thursday and a Friday to give housewives the weekend break with their children. By 22 February a Mkhondo Visit planning group of three had been formed, the visit purpose established and suddenly there was urgency. Piet Retief and Pretoria started praying for each other. Anneke: 'please pray for us - miracles happening here'. Eberhard: 'please pray for our Monday team meeting' – the first and only one we could fit in. And Monday evening, 3 days before the journey, the team did meet – some only on Zoom (Luba from Ukraine –she married a missionary from South Africa and her 14year old son, Sean-Duncan), Yorke and Christien, participants of a 2021 prayer outreach to Moravian mission stations in the Cape, Pontsho Shilenge, on previous prayer journeys to France and fluent in Zulu, Leon Coetzee, leader of the UPF ministry and myself).

From Wednesday midnight a Mkhondo prayer chain prayed through the night. The stage was set for the journey.

The Journey

And so, the journey began from my home, Haven Village, at 05:10 am on Thursday morning, only ten minutes late - a small miracle in itself. Luba and son in the car with Yorke and Christien, Pontsho in front in my car and Leon, with back pain already for weeks, in pillows on my back seat. We had fortunately chosen the right route, via Carolina, longer, but fewer coal trucks. The 10 km of potholes, that Anneke's husband had mentioned, were not even noticed in the excitement.

From the highway turnoff, Leon led the two cars in blind prayer. What was God saying to each one of us in terms of words, images and scriptures? At 10:10am we made the Wimpy in Mkhondo, where Anneke had been waiting. God had gone before us! She led us through a township to where her Esther prayer group were waiting. How good it was to start off in this wonderful prayer environment. It was Mama Johanna's birthday and over tea and cake we soon got to know each other – even ready to pray for each other. From there it was one stop after another, with no idea where it would all end – even dropping things for school children at sports events in between. The Mkhondo House of Prayer – in an old Swedish mission house – a place of many miracles for the town, ably led by Ronelle - on fire for the Lord. From a delightful lunch at a Christian 'Mama Mia', we had a view of the splendid Dutch Reformed Church, the landmark of Piet Retief. After a brief rest at Anneke's farm, we were shepherded to a coffee and cake meeting with the German community; 'What is going on here – pastors, brass bands?' Then people started moving into the big church next door? And suddenly all seven of us were seated in the front row. The miracle that followed, is shared in the section below.

I remember little of moving out of the church at the end of the service and of the night drive to the farm. I do remember the cosy rooms we each got, the wonderful hospitality around the dinner table and the joyful spirit that was upon everybody.

The next morning I was up early, out on the lawns and natural beauty surroundings. Ralph jogged past, out of the farm gate, followed by all the dogs. Was there a word for the day? 'How great You are LORD!' Breakfast was amazing – all the fruits, paps and yogourts of this earth.

Then on to Anke's farm in two 4x4s – Leon, despite his back, driving one! In Anke's farm house, all the German farmers of Piet Retief and their wives were gathered and instructed by 'General' Anneke, before driving up the mountain. The mountain is also part of the 'Miracle' - below. Everyone who was up on the mountain that day, will never forget it. It was like Moses speaking to the Israelites.

It needed the typical German coffee and cake at Vaderland (Braunschweig church) below to relax again. Many group photos were taken. We were one! The oneness continued at the braai on Anneke's farm. People just arrived – whole families – got served with endless drinks and delicious food. That evening many shared their God stories. I remember one comment from Anneke to us afterwards – a small miracle how your team seemed to operate on quiet orders to harmonise individually into every little group of people. Yes, it was the presence of the Holy Spirit that was felt by everyone present.

Departure is usually something not so pleasant, to be dealt with as quickly as possible. Not so for us. 'Breakfast will be only at eight', but everybody was around long before to continue to share. Anneke, opening her little presents from everyone, was a joy to behold. The donation envelope brought a moment's hesitation from Anneke and then the Spirit said 'O' this is for Zulu bibles'! The Zulu ladies in the kitchen were not forgotten and became part of the prayer that just did not want to end – with Pontsho leading. Then we prayed for Ralph and Anneke and she, in turn, prayed and prophesied over each of us. For Pontsho it was washing her feet. Many a tear of recognition and of joy flowed that morning.

About the journey home I wrote somewhere else: 'We talked non-stop for 5½ hours'. The last ,safely home' message was from Pontsho in Tembiesa!

The Miracle

St. Marks Church, Piet Retief – Markus Gemeinde; There I was in the front row, sitting on the edge / side and looking around in wonder; the cross in front; the Germany and South Africa flag image and Galatians 6:9 scripture on the notice board; people still streaming in; Germans around me; my brothers and sisters –the team - we had made it; welcome by Pastor Mark Meier – friendly and very normal – no miracle here; Anneke more honest – had shied away from this German thing at first; Leon –strong words of encouragement – our purpose shared; and then the combined brass bands setting in: "Großer Gott wir loben Dich, Herr wir preisen Deine Stärke; Vor dir neigt die Erde sich und bewundert Deine Werke". I started to shake uncontrollable and tears just rolled. Tissues were passed down the line. What was this moment? Recognition of the miracle? Recognition of my salvation – from unbelieving East Germany to first singing this praise as a 10 year old in the Christus Kirche in Windhoek? Just an unbelievable joy in the beauty of God and in worshipping Him – in German? All these together in these beautiful moments!

Anneke had asked us, a week before already, to pray for Johnny Engelbrecht, who was putting the German missionary history of the region together for this meeting. And visibly nervous he was. And nervous a whole church got as has his narrative just did not want to end. His final question: "I am sure many of you gathered here can add to my story or have a question which I will gladly answer." Yorke's intervention from the front fortunately said it all: "*The fruit of mission ...We experienced some of this fruit on Thursday morning at the Esther prayer group and the wonderful fellowship this evening at the Markus Gemeinde, ... South Africa needs God movements like this in each town and village and it was made possible only through the work of missionaries touching people here with the Gospel. There is such a need for Hope, real tangible witness of hope, like we experience here in Piet Retief/Mkhondo. O Praise the Lord and let us proclaim this good news!"*

The next morning on Tafelberg, the miracle continued. The magnificent Pongola Valley beyond us stretches in all directions to far horizons and with hundreds of different land marks. The changing cloud spectacle above tells its own story. This time it is families, black and white, but mainly German, wonderfully relaxed and in many relationships. Johnny Engelbrecht, in farmer shorts is also so much more relaxed. His history lesson continues, this time beyond our very eyes – Zulus and Swazis, Boers from Wakkerstroom, German missionaries and artisans arriving – the Filters, the Gevers and the Engelbrechts. Then the British redcoats move through the town in the Zulu War. Little Lüneburg and its church below us becomes a fortress. Johnny is still hurt by the hurt that mission director Hardenberg brought into the small German missionary and artisan community. It had become man's way instead of God's way. To cap it all, man introduced the church split

from the newly unified Germany of around 1880 into every missionary community into Natal and beyond – 'Freikirche, 'Unierte Kirche', Hermannsburgers, we still don't understand it all?

The image of praying on top of Tafelberg for the Mkhondo community leadership present, will be with me forever. We took the miracle from the mountain into little Braunschweig church below. Here the story continued, but the significant part was the corporate prayer of commitment to take the miracle forward. Leon's prayer about the Lord's communion table was prophetic and was surely heard by everyone present.

What was the miracle? It emerged already *days before* we even had a team together or set foot in Mkhondo.
2.3.23 06:00 am Anneke: Please pray. Things are stirring in the spirit. May He be glorified!
2.3.23 07:13 pm Anneke: Praise GOD! We needed somebody from the outside to come. We have been praying for this for so many years!!!

It was God's purpose for which we had prayed and ultimately agreed with Anneke after a first Zoom call together and was also used for the first invitation to join the journey (22.2.23):
"An Unlimited Prayer Frontiers (UPFSA) team (6-8) from Pretoria/Tshwane will visit the Mkhondo community on a prayer outreach.
Purpose: To uncover the missionary and gospel heritage of the Mkondo region (especially the German connection) and gain a divine perspective of the multi-generational purposes of God.
To pray for present kingdom processes,
To encourage and strengthen local believers in their prayer investments for different levels of reconciliation.
We hope to meet a wide spectrum of the community and experience mutual blessing as God connects us in love and fresh understanding of each other and of His kingdom purpose."

Gradually, from different bits of information and from different persons, a picture of past hurt and of the miracle came together. The German Lutheran churches in the area, in fact in the whole South Africa, had split, already towards the end of the 19th century, in response to a deep split in Germany as a result of major political changes there. Children in one church could not have communion with their parents in another church. Just take Lüneburg and Wittenberg, a few kilometers from each other, having different dogmas, splitting families. The hurt is now! And sadly, this split, followed by Apartheid separation, is keeping the White and Black Lutheran churches apart. The Gospel heritage that German missionaries brought here (for Piet Retief it was the last wave – the one from Hermannnsburg) had been almost forgotten.

And so, the miracle: that Thursday evening, 8th March 2023, members and pastors from different Lutheran churches, all around gathered in one church, and five brass bands playing together, without having had a chance to practice together beforehand. How appropriate that they sang "Holy God, We Praise Thy Name" – in German, Zulu and English. More of the miracle is still unfolding. The pastors themselves had a follow-up meeting two weeks later. There was acknowledgement of initial skepticism and even resistance. But even more there was acknowledgement that it was "from God" when they experienced the amazing outcome that Thursday night. And so – 'this must continue, maybe every half year, the first one in early October 2023. And let the proceeds go to instruments for the Black brass bands. And most importantly – let us do something about our differences!'

God's miracle is not finished yet! We are expectant!

Eberhard Braune 27.3.23

(attached in the folder is the story put together in images by talented Luba and son)