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*Those who fashion an idol are all futile,
and their treasured things are of no
benefit; even their own witnesses fail
to see or know, so that they will be put
to shame. Who has fashioned a god
or cast an idol to no benefit?
(Isaiah 44:9-10)*

APRIL 2023
DEAR FRIENDS AND PARTNERS OF
THE REACH BEYOND
MINISTRY TO THE PEOPLES
OF CZECHIA AND SLOVAKIA



DEAR GOD'S SERVANTS

Just a reminder that our last printed and electronic communication was combined into one edition. Every winter we long to escape to warm places to recharge after a period of very little sunshine or blue sky. This time we realized our wish and left for a 15-day vacation with our younger son Vit. The last time we were together was just before Covid in 2019. We arrived together from opposite directions of the world and met in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia. This year, two major religious events took place at the same time. Muslims in Malaysia, Brunei, and Borneo celebrated the month of Ramadan. Christians celebrated Easter in the Philippines.

MALAYSIA AND BRUNEI

Muslims observe Ramadan fasting without eating and drinking water from dawn to sunset for a whole month; after daylight fasting comes a communal evening feast ... It is no wonder that after that they sleep or rest through the day to conserve energy. Therefore, non-believers, believers of other religions, or tourists are not allowed to eat and drink in public.

Street food restaurants are closed. Large hotels provide meals to their guests in inconspicuous separate areas. After sunset it is time for family gatherings and the hotels prepare lavish receptions; we had no part of it. Ramadan ends with the breaking of the fast with the triage of Eid al-Fitr when the believer is obliged to give the most generous alms to compensate for his unintentional transgressions during Ramadan.

From Kuala Lumpur, our journey took us to Brunei, an exotic mini-state on the island of Borneo. Zero taxes, health care provided, no industry, just plenty of oil. The Sultan of Brunei is one of the richest men in the world. He lives in a mansion with over 1400 rooms, and in his garage are parked over 400 Rolls Royces, helicopters, and a private Boeing He likes toys for big boys and buys planes as birthday presents. In this "wonderland," over 10% of the population prefers to live in the floating village of Kampong Ayer. How do living in wooden huts on stilts and the world's richest monarch go together? A wise man knows that riches, no matter how much you have, do not bring happiness and tranquility into the hearts of men. We had an opportunity to visit one of the homes above water. On the outside, this place looked like a wooden shack or cottage; inside were AC, crystal chandeliers, large screen TV, and many boat racing trophies. Everything else was simple and normal. What else you can desire when all you can have on your wish list is at your fingertips? His winning boat was stored in stilt "storage" like many other wrecks of fancy toys and all kinds of junk.

The Sultan of Brunei, Omar Ali Saifuddin III, is one of the last absolute monarchs. He became the Sultan of Brunei in 1967. He has been married three times, fathered five sons and seven daughters, and has 18 grandchildren.

The world is open for young citizens of Brunei who have the desire to advance their studies at the most prestigious universities. The monarchy takes care of the tuition and expenses. The job opportunities are in governmental services ... however, the workforce of professionals and the domestic worker is reserved for foreigners. No wonder some of the local citizens prefer a simple life overall.

PHILIPPINES

On the other hand, Catholic believers used to observe the time of Lent, fasting for 40 days before Easter. During that time one meal a day could be eaten; no meat, fish, eggs, or dairy products. Abstinence and simple living used to be part of the Lent observation. For the believers, it was an opportunity to meditate and listen to the Word of God. For the rest of the believers, it was an opportunity to repent and submit their lives to God. Lent culminates with the Easter Triduum: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Saturday, ending with Resurrection Sunday. The Maundy Thursday legend has a wider scope of Easter observance traditions; it is a time of cleansing, washing, and procession of the Veronica leading to Good Friday; repentance is expressed by an Easter bloody flogging procession ...

Believers in Catholic countries observe many different pagan traditions. After our

return home, we noticed that Passion Play observance now goes on in Slovakia as well as in Czechia, just with more professional staging. The presentation is attended and cherished by nonbelievers as well. Sadly, not many people understand how significant Christ's crucifixion and resurrection are. The following lines are how our son Vit described the Easter event of "Christ's crucifixion" in the Philippines:

"We got up super early this morning and made our way to the city of San Fernando to witness a reenactment of the crucifixion of Christ. The multi-hour procession (in 97°F / heat index 104°) started with young men beating themselves by self-flagellation (the bleeding was real but it was induced). The presentation culminated with the crucifixion in which the actor was "actually" nailed to the cross (I have my doubts). I have mixed feelings about the whole staged event. The crucifixion was necessary; it is what gives us hope by providing the way to salvation. What breaks my heart is the whole thing had the appearance of a ritual performance. Only God knows what is truly in their hearts. To me, communion has far more meaning, because that is what we are commanded to do in remembrance of Him. My focus is on the resurrection and finished work of the cross."

The country of Philippines consists of thousands of islands. We spent most of the time on the island of Luzon. Touristy promo pictures show white beaches, coconut palms, blue skies, and beautiful places to stay; well we spent only half a day on the beach.

The next adventure took us to the mountainous part of the island of Luzon where we encountered the Ifugao tribe hidden in the northern Central Cordillera, a rough and mountainous wilderness over 1.7 miles above sea level. The distance of 80 miles took us over 8 hours on a treacherous road. Here is our son's entry:

"Today was an unforgettable experience, and I learned so much. We started by going to an Ifugao village. This tribe formerly practiced headhunting. We were able to see a ritual sacrifice of a chicken by shamans. Their practice is to bury their elders in little houses after a mummification of bodies (we were able to peek into one). It just makes me think how small my world is, and how many people there are around the entire world. Every single person is a soul loved and not forgotten by God."

Every day our guide reminded us that we are "adventure hunters." How true. It was a very special time being together with our son and a small group of Czech and Slovak well-seasoned travelers. Saying good-bye to Vit was hard since only God knows when we will see each other in person again. The dark side of travel nowadays is airlines. Planes are packed, economy class is inhumane crowded, and long flights are agonizing. Yes, I know that the last 15 days were physically demanding, however, flying back home 9+7 hours with one 3-hour overlay in one day was exhausting. After being all day on one's feet in Manila, starting our flight at midnight, takes more courage and endurance than spending many hours on narrow and winding roads of treacherous terrain to reach

the headhunter tribe or jungle sites of orangutans.

PRAISE AND PRAYERS

- Just before we left we took part in our renewed traditional "winter conference". Attendance was very good, especially seeing the new generation was encouraging and rewarding. Hard work brings fruit.
- Three days after our return our dear friend, pastor, and mentor Geoff Volker from AZ came to conduct another theological conference in Ústí. The Sunday after the conference, we had in Kladno church "four tenors" (visiting US pastors).
- Before we left for vacation, we sent to over 100 e-mail addresses of our friends and family members, mostly unbelievers, Paul Washer's sermon "Do you know Christ" with subtitles. In the introduction, he says that he expects some hostile reactions to what he is going to say. We were curious about what the reaction would be. Most of them are atheists and agnostics; a few were baptized as children, and more or less follow the Ten Commandments. Generally speaking, there are a few lukewarm believers, and several devout Catholics. They attend and celebrate annual funeral masses Those are our nice, polite and long-time friends, classmates and a few faithful believers. Moreover, the reaction – none; just one believer criticized the message, saying that we should not scare people, one believer

thanked us for the proper reminder to examine our faith, and that is all.

- Please pray for lost people of the Czech and Slovak Republics and the media ministry we participate in. A few more books were translated and published.
- The second half of May and first half of June, Lord willing, we will be in AZ and NH. We will try to see as many as we can fit in this short home ministry.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRAYERS,
SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATION
IN OUR LIFE AND
THE CZECH & SLOVAK
MINISTRIES**

**In His Sovereign Grace,
Pavel and Klara Steiger**
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