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Senior Sermon
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“Jambo ma Rafiki. Mungu Awabariki” or “Hello my friends. God bless you.” Welcome to my senior sermon. First, I want to thank my family for coming today, I am so happy you are here.

As many of you know, I had the privilege to study abroad this January in Tanzania, a developing country in Africa. I will be honest, I did not know much about Tanzania before the trip but did have one reference I knew quite well, “The Lion King”. While singing “Hakuna Matata” in my head. A Swahili phrase that is literally translated as “There are no worries.” I was certain that I would see Simba with Timon and Pumba eating bugs as they discovered they were all “connected through the circle of life.” Amusing, perhaps, but true.

As my 19-day journey began, I realized that the Disney did not give Africa as much credit as it deserved. We went to many villages, visited with the people, and took in the sights and smells of Tanzania’s Heritage- the beautiful jungles and mountains. Traveling in Tanzania is all by coaster or bus, which can be long. But there is nothing better than driving down the road and seeing children outside with their faces all aglow and them shouting “Pepel!” or candy in English.

Half way through our trip, we visited a place that is so phenomenal that I want to share with you. The business is called Neema crafts. The word Neema means, “grace” in Swahili. The business offers jobs to individuals who have disabilities to help them in their dire economic struggle. The founder and our tour guide, Dr. Andy Hart, described the life changing experiences many of the Neema workers. These individuals hand make every article of clothing, jewelry, paper, and other items, which can be bought in the store. It is a remarkable place to visit and to experience. The people touched my heart. We spent our final days on the beautiful beaches of Zanzibar. The Indian Ocean made for peaceful music and scenery as we all sat on the beach and soaked in the hot sun and spent some quality time with my fellow travelers- my new friends. Before I knew it, I was on the airplane making my way back to the United States. I thought long and hard, especially since I had a series of nineteen hours on an airplane, “How in the world can I sum up a nineteen day journey in 8 minutes?” I want people to understand and appreciate the marvelous culture, scenery, and people of Tanzania. So, here is my best effort in doing so.

We walked, drove, and hiked through Tanzania for 19 days, I was amazed at the different kinds of natural beauty! Mount Kilimanjaro has a phenomenal forest area we hiked up to, which gave me a workout to last for the next month. There were magnificent colored flowers everywhere, especially the purple floral, my favorite. The cities, towns, and villages had a different infrastructure every place we went and each destination had it’s own unique attractiveness. The people we met had their own, special kind of beauty. Each displayed their beauty by singing songs, speaking, and being in the moment with us; making me feel like a worldwide celebrity. Along with the beauty, there is chaos. The driving styles were quite different; we often made our own paths in many different situations to get to our destinations. You could easily look around and see a different style of homes that do not look “suitable” for living in. And we were some of the only mzungu or white people in Tanzania. With 28 of us (mostly women) we turned many heads, which can be extremely chaotic.

Through my reflections, I found that one of God's greatest gifts is the different type of beauties covering the world. Yet, it may be hard to understand or to find beauty in Chaos. I now spend time thinking about how the world is a jumble mess of homework, social problems, finding time to relax, and being able to enjoy time to myself. When I was in Tanzania, the people helped me realize it is the "things" that do not matter. Hellen Keller describes, "The best and most beautiful things in life cannot be seen, nor touched... but felt in the heart." And the things I witnessed and felt will stay in my heart forever.

The scripture I chose for today helps me realize that God is the one who "knows best". The only One who, like the Bible has told us, has made the Earth according to him. The wonderful people of Tanzania reminded me that God will be there and we should all be listening for the messages that may show up when we least expect it. I am happy with the relationship I have with God. Why? Because I am blessed. I am blessed with a wonderful support system, oxygen, clean water and abundance of food. I have a chance to go to a prestigious school, earn a degree and have the job I have wanted for a long time. Most of all, I have a wonderful world that surrounds me with God's love and each part and person of God's world is beautiful.

Tanzania, United States of America, or no matter where you are, God's beauty surrounds us. Whether it be the mountainous air, the sound of children's laughter, a smile spread across an elder's face, or the beautiful snow which covers our barren lands; take time to absorb the beauty. That is what I challenge you with today. I challenge you, my family and friends, to look at something that may not be beautiful and find that one thing to change your mind. Perhaps to find beauty in your own chaos. Finally, I want to leave you with one final quote. Ralph Waldo Emerson writes, "Never lose an opportunity of seeing anything that is beautiful; for beauty is God's handwriting - a wayside sacrament. Welcome it in every fair face, in every fair sky, in every fair flower, and thank God for it as a cup of blessing. "

-Hakuna Matata