

# FUNERAL OUT IN ZULULAND

**29-30 APRIL 2016**

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## FUNERAL OF RT REV MANAS BUTHELEZI

### FIRST STOP IN WELBEDACHT

We left Pretoria on Friday afternoon just after lunch at the Seminary and headed south-east to the Northern parts of KwaZulu to stay overnight with my parents in Welbedacht. Making breaks as early as the Ultra City in Middleburg and then again in Piet Retief at Wimpy before getting to Welbedacht via Lüneburg and Ekhombela lying at the foot of Ncaga just around 20h30. The moon was not yet out, but we enjoyed the starry night over the peaceful farm- and woodlands.

### GETTING THERE ON TIME

On Saturday we left early for Mahlabathini in Zululand. Stopping again for a pit stop in Ulundi, I enjoyed retracing the roads we cycled along in the early eighties. It was a cloudy and rather chilly day, but it started off quite dry even as the wind was picking up slowly. Looking for a Lutheran church in Mahlabathini was quite a mission, so we inquired at the police station. The cops were very friendly and helpful. They informed us that there is no Lutheran church there in the village and that Mahlabathini was really an entire district. They were not aware of any funeral in the area either. So I took up the SMS of another friendly guide, who had written, that the burial service was to be in KwaCeza at the Ezidwadweni homestead. The police doubted that there was a

place like that at all in this district, but after confirming the message on the telephone, they then contacted the police station in Ceza via short-way radio to find out more. However, their colleagues didn't know more either. So we decided to drive there anyway and see, how we could proceed from there. In Ceza we found the Evangelical Lutheran Church deserted. At the post office a friendly police officer knew about the place called "Ezidwadweni" and pointed out the road with his arm: "Go up this mountain, at shop take a short left and drive over the mountain and down at the river and you'll see it on the left." Well, it was easier said than done. Several times we were just about ready to give up and go home without finding, what we had set out to find. There was just too little to go on. Still in the end, the little was enough.

On the way we found three other funeral services going on. One was in the distance, but obviously a small family affair. Another one, was very much going on, but this was not from the Buthelezi tribe, but rather coloureds called van Wyk. That meant reversing five hundred meters through the bush as there was no space for turning on the overcrowded smallholding before we got back on track and on to the dirt road. The final, but still not our funeral was one alongside the road, but the friendly family members informed us quickly that it wasn't a bishop, who was being laid to rest there either. Many friendly people alongside the road were kind and helpful, but most did not have a clue about the bishop's funeral. One person carrying a bible and fluent in English, knew what we were inquiring about. He had heard about this bishop's funeral and pointed us on and ahead. Still it took several turns and even some turnarounds before we found the mentioned shop, the exact track down the right mountain and the final river (Sikwebezi) to cross before we actually got to Sizana Combined School not far from the Buthelezi homestead in Ezidwadweni. You can imagine

It was a beautiful trip up and down the most scenic mountains and lush valleys too. There was no cellphone coverage however and so the google maps on my iPhone were not accessible. My GPS is an outdated model from Garmin, which always needs a street name before actually getting down to searching the destination, so we just had the map function and knew at least the road we were travelling on was indeed a road.

When we got down the mountain and across the low river, we were still in good time for the funeral proceedings were to get started at 11h00 and that was with the procession of pastors & bishops from the homestead to the large tents, where the ceremony was to take place. This might sound quite simple, but it actually was a miracle in my eyes, that we eventually found our destination and were in good time for the proceedings of the memorial service in the huge tents.

#### **DIVINE SERVICE OF WORD AND SACRAMENT**

It was good to meet bishops and pastors and take part in the elaborate service according to the liturgy practiced in the S.E. Circuit. There were a lot of liturgical colours, many chasubles, mitres, crosses, plenty incense, flowers and candles. The lead singer had an excellent voice and even more sure of the notes than any organist. She never failed in all those hymns we sang – and that was for more than 5 hours! Old bishop Sibiya led the liturgy and old bishop Zulu preached on Jesus stilling the storm according to the gospel of St. Mark. This was the most delightful highlight of the day, because the Lord's supper was of course out of bounds for me coming from where I come from.

#### **MEMORIAL SERVICE AND BURIAL**

There were several messages from relatives and friends and powers that be – from the Mhlungus, the Buthelezis – brothers, uncles, sons. They all remembered this honourable descendant of

Mkhandumba kaMnyamana, kaNqengelele, ka Mvulana Buthelezi with more or less praise and recognition for the illustrious career of this globally renown Lutheran theologian before he was carried to his last resting place next to the graves of his forefathers within walking distance of his home, where he was born 81 years ago. He was the son of evangelist Absalom and Kesallina Buthelezi of the Swedish Mission. He has come full-circle and now awaits the return of the One, whom he believed and trusted in and who promised, that He will return to judge the quick and the dead. Until then he now rests from his labours. There are not many places that seem to me as well suited to wait for this 2<sup>nd</sup> coming than this graveyard alongside the Sikwebezi river and below the Ntendeka wilderness area in the company of old Zulu Lutherans, who served our Lord and God in great faithfulness all their lives.



### **FELLOWSHIP ON ROADS, IN TENTS AND ALONGSIDE GRAVES**

Standing too long was not possible for my friend Heinrich and so we left when the coffin had been buried and returned to the tents to partake in the great cooking of beef and chicken plus rice,

beetroot and bread too, which was all served in great abundance, hospitality and with wonderful fellowship amongst visitors, family, guests from far and many locals as well. The three students Nkoskhona, Dumisani and Mokone attended with wide open eyes and ears. It was a remarkable celebration all around and memorable for us in many ways. I'll gladly think back on this road trip to this far off Ezidwadweni and they probably will also do that.

### GETTING HOME BEFORE MIDNIGHT

At around 16h00 it started raining. A good sign in S.Africa, but especially amongst the amaZulu. We had finished the good food and had enough to think about for more than just one journey home. It was late, but we were determined to get home still. This was rather daunting to me, but Heinrich seemed keen and the students too. So we left in the soft rain and enjoyed the homeward journey especially the first stretch winding along the Sikwebezi river and up the valley until we got to the R618 in the vicinity of Sihlengeni and then onto the well-known R69, which leads from Vryheid to Itala and Magudu. That was familiar to me and after we filled up once again in Paulpietersburg at Anesco, we were all set to take on the final stretch of our trip. I was grateful that we didn't have too thick mist and most lorries we could overtake without much delay. Around 22h00 Heinrich was happily back in the Equestria Retirement Village, Dumisani was still to take a taxi down in Vermeulen to Attridgeville and the remaining Seminarrians were in good time to see the end of the game between Kaizer Chiefs and Sundowns playing at Loftus until quarter past ten. Not much later I too was glad to back home with my wife and children too and looking forward to a restful Sunday after such an eventful weekend. Thank God for travel mercies and a safe return home after more than 1200 km travelled and not quite as many hours sitting in the car and tent. The German saying rings true: "*Wer eine Reise tut, der kann was erzählen*" i.e. if you travel, you've got something to tell.