

November 1, 2012

From time to time we left Cana. A day in Bethany for shopping. A week in Dar es Salaam for AIM's yearly spiritual life conference. A trip down the coast.

Whenever we came back, we found we had missed something important in the life of the village. A wedding, a funeral, a baby's birth. A political rally, a scandal, a big rainstorm or a pig hunt. A dance to appease the demonic spirits in someone who was tortured by them. A trip to the hospital for someone who got sick. The fact that people wanted to make sure we got caught up on the latest news helped us feel they were beginning to consider us members of the community.

But there were plenty of things that made us feel like outsiders, too. The color of our skin, hair and eyes. The language. The nonverbal cues we couldn't catch. And their questions. Constantly they asked questions about what we wanted and were doing in that village. Why had we come? We must be going to make money off them somehow. But how?

We rented houses, then dug pits beside them. Hmm....maybe we were digging for gold? Precious stones? No? Well then, how about natural gas or oil? Maybe we were digging for those? The landlady of one house came to watch our guys as they shoveled and hauled the dirt up by the bucketful.

"Are you going to knock my house down if you find oil?"

Colin was surprised. "No, we want to use your house for our students."

"Hmm...well, if you find oil what will you do?"

By this time Colin had gotten tired of denying he was looking for oil. "I tell you what, if I find oil, I'll split it with you."

A cunning look from her. "You can't split oil, it's liquid."

"Okay, here's what I'll do. I'll buy ten drums and fill five for me and five for you."

She nodded in satisfaction. "It's a deal."

Of course there was no oil found. The pit was for a latrine. In a few months, when people saw that latrines could be dug next to the houses and enclosed, some of them began to add bathrooms to their houses like we did.

It was hard for Colin to know how many houses to rent and renovate. We weren't sure how many of our teammates were actually going to get all the support they needed in order to join our team. Did we need five houses? Six? Seven? Four single women, two men, one family with four elementary age children, one family with two

babies, and one Tanzanian family with four children were all assigned to our team. If everyone actually came in early March, we would need to have seven houses ready. If they did not all come, what then? A rented house with no occupants? So much extra work for nothing?

“Are you going to take our pictures and sell them?”

“Are you trying to learn our language so you can go teach it in America?”

“How are you making money from being here? Why have you come?”

Again and again we patiently explained we were renting and renovating houses because a team of Christian students was coming for graduate studies. Our students knew little about living in an African village; they wanted the language skills and practical training necessary to do so and thrive. People listened in disbelief. The motive we had in coming must, somehow, have a business angle; they were sure they simply had not discovered it yet.

Where could we find a house large enough for team meetings? Almost all the houses in Cana were 20 feet wide by 40 feet long. How in the world would we fit all those adults in a tiny living room when we met once a week for study, business and prayer? The sheriff had a cement-block house on his family's property he wanted us to come see. It was quite large, with plenty of rooms. Would we like to rent it? As we talked to him and his brother, they asked a few questions about our coming team. Were we going to cook pork? Would our women be wearing miniskirts? Would we be praying out loud and singing hallelujah with our team in the house? To the last question we answered yes. Ah....so sorry, then it would not be possible for us to rent it. Their family were heavily involved in the practice of Islam and provided certain religious “community services” that would make it very awkward for them if we were praising Jesus in their house as people passed by.

Houses # 3, 4 and 5 were rented. Should we rent one more or two? We climbed the hill regularly to send and receive emails. We wrote and urged the team to recruit prayer partners, people who would pray regularly for them while they were in our program. “Be prepared,” we warned, “You are coming into a place where you will not have good internet connection, but you can send prayer requests by email if you climb the mountain. Think of your future living accommodations as fancy camping. Pack your bags with things that will be useful in a very rustic setting. The Lord is faithful; He will support you in this endeavor, but it will be hard. “



Laundry, washed and rinsed and hung by hand, took me two mornings a week. Eventually Colin saw how heavy the task was and helped me do it, cutting the time in half.