

November 30, 2012

Colin and I were preparing to return to the USA in December for his mother's memorial service. Andrew would return with us and be married. Enoch would go for Christmas to his family and home area, and Nathaniel would spend the month with friends from the USA who worked in another part of the country.

I explained to Jill that we'd be gone for a month. She asked slyly, "Wouldn't you like to hire my husband and me to guard the house while you are gone?" I chuckled and said, "No, you can keep an eye on it as a neighbor and a good friend." She gave up trying to get money out of me and laughed along. "Okay, if anyone tries to break in I'll shout, ' Stop stealing Mama Mary's stuff!'"

For Thanksgiving we invited Nathaniel to feast with us, along with Philip and Melissa and their kids. Andrew and Tom cooked six pounds of potatoes in their largest pot, then mashed them. I made rice and rolls and gravy and a pineapple upside-down cake, and Colin butchered two chickens. Enoch had been gone for a few days to see his wife, but was due back on the afternoon bus.

As Philip and Melissa arrived with their two youngest kids, we sensed tension between them. Philip had gone to Dar es Salaam to buy supplies for this store, and while he was gone, their two year old had pulled hot cereal onto himself and burned his arm. Philip was coldly angry with Melissa for not watching him more carefully. "Oh boy," I thought to myself, "this could be a long meal."

Fortunately Nathaniel had eaten with us many times, and Andrew and Tom were comfortable. Colin gave a little introductory speech before we started the meal. "In the USA, today is a national holiday. We remember that when our ancestors arrived in the country as immigrants, they were welcomed and saved from starvation by the native people who lived there. We invited you to come celebrate our Thanksgiving feast because when we arrived here in this village, we prayed to God and asked Him to give us people who would welcome us and teach us to survive here. You have done that for us, and we thank you." He then prayed and thanked the Lord for the food, and we began eating.

Oh dear, mashed potatoes with the skins still on was too weird. No one but the Americans ate it. Chicken and rice and rolls were okay, but gravy they had no idea what to do with, and the pineapple upside-down cake was too sweet for their taste. I reassured them they did not need to eat anything they did not like. We made stilted conversation till Enoch arrived, calling greetings and

overflowing with good cheer and stories of his travels. Everyone relaxed, and the event turned out to be a success after all.

In those days a boy named Moses would stop by our house frequently to sell me fruit and vegetables from his family's farm. He had a sweet smile and an endearing manner that I could not resist. A papaya? Two? Three at a time? How about eggs or bananas or mangoes or avocados? Would I like to try cassava?

In the afternoons the school children would come sit on the porch and look at my Bible story book. They wanted me to tell them the stories, although sometimes there were readers in the group who could actually read out loud to the others. I asked Moses if he could help me write out the story of creation. He was instant in his translation, but got impatient with my slow writing. When he got tired I would stop, put it away, then pick up again where we left off when he came another day.

Could Colin finish all the bathrooms on all the houses before we left to go to the USA? Or at least five of them? The men continued to work hard on the construction of the houses, and we all continued meeting and having conversation with people. One of the contractors sat with Colin and the elementary teacher a couple of times to read and discuss the gospels.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and don't lean on your own understanding...How would you translate that in your language?" I asked Jill and another neighbor one day. They discussed it for a while together, gave me some options. Jill said scornfully, "We thought you were talking about your husband. We don't call our God 'Lord' like you Christians do. You say, 'The Lord Jesus Christ.' I did not explain that the verse was from the Old Testament, written long before Jesus' birth and referring to God. I simply smiled and thanked her for helping me.

But the other woman was more receptive. Later she asked if I would teach her to write. "I only went to school through fourth grade. I'd like to practice and get good at writing." I offered to help her, and she bought a notebook. I wrote Bible verses from Proverbs about wisdom, which she copied.

"I love these sayings! Like this one about the wise woman building her house, but the foolish one tearing it down with her own hands. It means that if I love my husband and take care of my family, we'll have a strong home, but if I am

careless, it will break apart.” Before we left for the USA, she came and asked if I could write more verses for her to copy while I was gone. On the front of her notebook she wrote, “This is my notebook. God helping me I will succeed in learning to write.”



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