

April 2013

As the team settled in we began to understand the local culture better, and what areas of people's lives might provide an entrance for the gospel.

On our team, people's personalities began to emerge. Helpful Esther took initiative to ask Colin if he would like her to keep notes of our team meetings, so she became the official team secretary. Courageous Ruth would go anywhere and serve any way she was needed. Kind Naomi became our team nurse. Brilliant Martha became our team treasurer. Tenderhearted Joseph and gracious Mary blessed our team with their little boys, Adam and Samuel. Our Tanzanian teammates, jovial Peter and energetic Deborah, brought along their teenaged niece to nanny their little Abigail. Thoughtful Edward, articulate Susan, and their four school-age children, Lucy, Emma, Michael and Daniel, were the talk of their neighborhood as they lived life and played soccer together in their front yard with other children.

We worried about Edward and Susan's family. They repeatedly came down with malaria, suffered with typhoid fever, struggled to keep up with housework and curriculum. "How in the world will we ever manage to homeschool?" Susan agonized. They felt so discouraged and overwhelmed. Other team members took meals to them and encouraged them. Colin walked to their house to visit them every other day. Our team continued to meet on Fridays for team meetings, and on Sundays for worship. Colin and I met individually with the men and women. Cultural adaptation and language learning advanced slowly. We knew it would be hard for the team to keep persevering because it would take a long time before they could really talk to people and move from being "outsiders" to "belongers."

Thank God our presence in the village continued to receive approval. When the district commissioner came to Cana he had prepared a long speech, mostly on the dismal state of education in Tanzania, especially in our district. In his introductory remarks, however, he announced that he was glad to see some people in the audience who were foreigners and might not even speak the language yet. Then he told the crowd that he had interviewed Colin in his office, he was familiar with our organization and our particular study program, and that in every area where other teams like ours had worked previously, much benefit had come to the community. Therefore, the villagers of Cana should welcome us heartily because we would bring great benefit to the area. Wow! A public endorsement!

Individually we began to have conversations with people in which we learned how they perceived us. We were constantly under observation. "You and your husband love each other a lot, don't you?" Nancy asked me as we harvested her rice together. I explained that it was not because we were white or Americans, but rather because we were Christians who knew and loved Jesus as our Savior. Jesus died on a cross for our sins and rose again. He filled us with His love. She nodded thoughtfully and repeated that it was Jesus who made our marriages different. Then she described to me the common state of alienation, jealousy, and animosity that existed in many marriages there, especially those that were polygamous. "You Christians don't seem

to have these problems.” I smiled and said all people struggled to live together harmoniously, because we were sinful. But Jesus could change our hearts and bring peace.

The next day when I stopped at Nancy’s house, there was a large meeting going on in the yard, with men sitting on one side and women on the other. Everyone was very serious and quiet. When I asked her about it later she shrugged. “That was a divorce case. The couple broke up and each returned to their own family. You see what I mean?” I did. Would people become open to the gospel through their desire for loving marriages? Maybe.

One day Colin and I ate lunch at a small café in town. We invited our former landlord to join us and paid for his inexpensive lunch of rice, beans and spinach. He was clearly pleased to have time together, as friends. In the afternoon when our neighbor children came to visit they said delightedly, “We saw you at the café today, eating lunch!” I wondered would people listen to us share about Jesus as we ate together?

As I washed clothes on the back porch one day, Mama David dropped by to chat. She had planted the field next to ours, so after work she often came by. With a lot of pleasure she retold the story of Ruth and Esther’s visit earlier that day to her house. They had cooked squash and spaghetti together to enjoy. “I love hosting people. I have extended family members who live all over, and they come visit me and eat.” I asked if she had friends who came to visit, too. “No, not really. I had a friend, but she died. Since she died I have not tried to get another one.”

Hmm. This was an interesting turn in the conversation. I began to wonder if my understanding of the word “friend” was wrong. So I asked her what made a person a friend. “Oh, you know, a friend is someone who is not related to you who comes over and shares food. Then you go to their house and share your food with them...like that. If you have someone you can visit with back and forth, and you take each other gifts of food, then you are friends.”

I began to feel very sad for Mama David. In all the world she only had one friend, and that friend had died. The only other people who came to share food were her family, admittedly many of them, but not the same as having a friend who has chosen to love you. Suddenly I thought of something. “Mama David, you have two friends. Ruth and Esther are your friends, aren’t they? They stayed with you and ate your food for four days when they arrived in the village, and now you go visit them and eat their food.” She brightened. “That’s true! I have two American friends!” After that conversation, our team translated Jesus’ invitation in Revelation 3:20, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him, and he with me.” Now we could all share that Jesus, the faithful friend, was waiting for an invitation to eat together.

*Below: Nancy and I harvesting rice; Colin with our quiet landlord at his shop*



