

September 2013

The team left Cana at the end of May and traveled for vacation and external studies during June and July. Several people became seriously ill during that time, so the team was not all able to return home together, but dribbled back. It took some time for us to regain momentum and rhythm.

Those were dusty days in that village. From May 17 till September there was no rain. While we were absent, the harvest had been brought in, and the yearly fast of Ramadan had passed. By the time our team returned for our next unit of study, the demon dances had begun.

One day the air was full of ash. Two shops in town had caught fire and a man who was sleeping inside was badly burned. He was probably drugged or drunk. At night we could hear the drums relentlessly thrumming for hours as people whose demons were tormenting them gathered with their friends and families to dance in order to placate the spirits. Everyone knew which people in the community had demonic spirits living in them, and wanted to support them in their quest for relief from the debilitating illnesses, terrorizing nightmares, or the terrible choking sensations. If not placated, they believed, the spirits could actually kill people. The demonized person danced wildly, sometimes for as long as 24 hours, with the witch doctor and other family members. There were drugs and alcohol involved, and the people dancing were in a trancelike state. The witch doctor would call out the spirit and find out what it wanted in order to be satisfied. A white chicken's blood to drink? A box of cookies? A soda? The lists were random and weirdly incongruous. Later, the demonized person would not remember that they had ingested anything.

Everyone accepted that demons would not exit someone permanently. But maybe they would leave the person alone for a year or two. A number of us on our team were invited to attend a demon dance for Melissa. We did not know what to do. Of course we could not participate in a dance to placate demons. A wedding or a circumcision or a funeral were all part of life, but this...no, we could not join in. I had passed by Philip's shop as he closed it to go attend his wife's demon dance. "If you knew the Lord Jesus Christ, you would not need to placate the demons. Jesus has authority over demons, and casts them out." He shrugged hopelessly, and Melissa's younger sister asserted confidently, "This kind of spirit can't be cast out." Philip looked very sad.

Several of us walked by the event at different times that day, and grieved as we saw many of our neighbors and friends whirling with the crowd. A woman stood on the road beside me and gazed at the group. "It is better to make friend with Jesus the Savior than placate demonic spirits," I said passionately.

Our efforts seemed so small in the face of the huge wave of involvement with evil spirits. Occasionally we would have a little glimmer of hope. One little girl asked for and took home a gospel of John, and her father agreed to let her keep it and read it.

Three little boys read Bible stories every day and asked questions like, “Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Is He really coming back again? Can we see the picture of the angel who sat on His tombstone? If someone has Jesus in their heart, will He keep demons out?” Later there was an opportunity to take the book to their house and read it with their mom. The dad asked, “So, what do you people have to do in your religion?” When he heard from John 6 that those who want to work the works of God must believe in the One whom He sent, he lost interest.

Our studies for the term covered the topic of spiritual warfare. How apropos. Our team prayer times were fervent, our sleep painfully interrupted. We all longed for the Spirit to work in people’s hearts, and for the strong Savior to deliver those we already loved dearly who were in such bondage to Satan, dancing to his tune.

