

February 2014

Peter and Deborah were full of news on team day. "Remember the crazy drunk man who once carried away Mary's shoe? He came to our house crying and begging for help for his alcoholism. We let him sleep on the porch and in the morning we shared the gospel with him while he ate breakfast. He accepted Christ! Peter loaned him clean clothes and shoes and he took a bath in the chicken house, then went with us to church. He's like a totally different man. His reason has returned to him, he's not drinking anymore, and everyone in town is asking what has happened to him. He even gave himself a new name...Isaiah. One of the farmers has hired him to work on his farm. We are so amazed at this miracle. We thought when God began saving people it would be in the usual way, such as by healing someone. Or by casting out a demon. For Him to cure a notorious town drunk is incredible!"

We Americans smiled as we heard the "usual ways" our Tanzanian teammates expected God to bring people to faith in Christ, then cautiously rejoiced with them in the news of "Isaiah's" conversion. Time, we felt, would tell whether he really had received a new life in Christ, or if this was simple emotionalism. When we asked Peter about Isaiah he said he was sleeping in their outside kitchen, eating with them, and studying the book of Job together. Why the book of Job? Because it explained the spiritual causes of problems and difficulties. Hmm...not a book we Americans usually turned to when teaching new believers. We listened and learned.

An administrative team came to interview our team one week in February. They found the team was doing pretty well overall, and right on schedule with coursework. Joseph and Mary were having the hardest time, and some suggestions were made to encourage them and lighten their load. Then, on a Sunday morning, Peter and Deborah received news that her father had died, who was not a believer in Christ. She was heartbroken. Joseph drove them out to the main highway, where they caught a bus and began the long journey home for his funeral. Esther agreed to teach Deborah's preschool class while they were gone.

Meanwhile team members continued to organize and meet with "focus groups" in the community, to hear what they perceived the needs of the community to be and how we could help them. The process of gathering information took a long time.

The rains fell and the crops grew. I admired my neighbor Nancy. Her life was difficult. In the mornings she got her three children up early to send them to school, then walked three hours to her remote farm, arriving around 9:00 AM. She drank a cup of tea, then began hoeing her four acres, weeding around her corn and rice and sesame plants. At noon she would stop and eat a meal of greens and cornmeal mush, then continue hoeing till late afternoon. She would walk home, arriving after dark. Made sure the kids had clean clothes for school the next day and ate the meal of rice and beans that her kids had cooked. Bathed, she would send the kids to bed in the house, then spend the night in the "watchman's hut" out in the large field next to her house, keeping the pigs away from the corn planted there.

One night I asked if I could spend the night with her, to see what it was like to keep watch for wild pigs at night. "You'd be scared," she scoffed. "No, I wouldn't," I insisted. Delighted, she took me home with her for dinner, then up the ladder to the shaky narrow platform, where we slept like spoons, each wrapped in a sheet. Every few hours she climbed down the ladder with her flashlight and made her rounds. Then there was brief conversation. "Any pigs?" "One. He went away when I shined my flashlight on him. We still have a lot of hours till dawn. Then your husband will turn on the lights in your living room. What in the world is he doing when he wakes up so early?" "He is reading God's Word, and praying, and he brings me a cup of coffee so I can sit in bed and do the same." "He is so nice." She said this with a sigh. And I answered sympathetically, "Yes, he's very nice."

At 5:30 Colin came to the hut and shined his flashlight on us, asking if we were awake. Yes, we were, just talking. Well, come and have coffee. We did. She said with deep affection as we clambered out of the nest, "I just love my dear friend."

I had flea bites all over my legs and mosquito bites all over my neck, although I had covered myself in insect repellent, much to Nancy's amusement. No conversation about Jesus. She had heard the gospel numerous times by then, and I hoped the seeds were germinating. Whenever I had woken in the night I prayed for her, and for her extended family, that they would be delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son. Like Isaiah.

