

April 2014

When we went to Lindi we took a young woman with us who had come to visit her mom in the village, but was returning to her husband and work in that large town. On the way she listened to our team sing our songs, seemed amazed at the joyful atmosphere, and eventually said, "I want to come to church to hear you sing Sunday." To our disappointment, she did not come.

In fact, not one neighbor came to the Easter service. (Oh, there were people in attendance. But they were all Christians who had initially come from other parts of the country to work in Lindi.) The neighbors all stared at our group as we walked single file on the narrow paths between houses to the little cement block church. Some greeted us, others were silent. "Come to hear our choir tomorrow," we invited them. "Sure," they responded, but did not come. We sang, "Celebrate Jesus, celebrate!" as heartily as we could, knowing they might be listening through the windows.

It was touching to be fed by the pastor's family in the evenings; touching to see how he and his wife persevered in trying to share Christ with people who were not open to the gospel. In the days we spent there, four of the team saw a doctor, four of us went and got our drivers' licenses, all of us ate ice cream and had walks on the beach. We also bought Bibles and other beautiful books at the Christian bookstore, knowing that anything we brought to Cana people would gladly read. We pondered the lessons we were learning: how privileged we were to live among people who were not afraid to listen to God's Word, how much we wanted any eventual church to be full of those who had come to Christ out of Islam.

Torrential rains had left unpaved roads slick and slimy with mud. Half the team drove to Dar to pick up a computer that had been repaired, and to have a car repaired. They reported horrendous conditions on part of the road. The rest of us slid into Cana and had another week of intensive language learning.

We discovered that if we took a passage of Scripture to our friends, read the story, and then asked them to tell it back to us in their language, they loved doing it. One day I took the short account of Jesus raising the widow of Nain's son and read it to Kellie and Nancy. When I read that the son sat up, both of them said simultaneously, "KWEH!" in astonishment. Just imagine, someone about to be buried was raised from the dead and returned to his mother! They discussed it together for a long time. "That is amazing. Jesus is very powerful," they concluded.

Another neighbor, Ann, whose two boys had been coming to read books and receive tutoring, asked if I would teach her to read, so we began studying the reading primer together. She was distracted by her housework and by people passing on the road calling greetings, but made a little progress, and our friendship flourished. I discovered that she loved to hear a Bible story and then record it for me in her

language, showing remarkable ability to translate quickly. She also seemed to remember the stories later.

After long discussions, with passionate deliberations, the team was ready to send Ruth and Esther to Nazareth to live in the house there. The process forced us all to wrestle with the question of how people could recognize God's call, to relinquish some privileges and dreams, to appreciate and value one another, and to conflict without destroying one another. Colin and I hoped that all team members would be so committed to the spread and progress of the gospel that we would be willing to do whatever was necessary to help Ruth and Esther succeed.

It was encouraging to see how Isaiah was growing in Christ. He joined us for Sunday worship from time to time when he walked into the village from his farm. "So people like us who have never seen Jesus but believe in Him are more blessed than people like Thomas who saw Him alive?" One day he told us he wanted to be baptized. That gave us a lot to talk through. When? Where? Who would baptize him?

