

July-August 2014

Our team took three weeks of vacation out of the village during the first part of July, which coincided with the Ramadan fast. But we returned to Cana by the last week, and were invited to the Eid-Al-Fetr celebrations. Colin and I went to George and Ashley's house, where with their children we sat on mats in the yard and enjoyed a feast that included the unusual treat of meat. Together we read the account in the Scriptures of the event commemorated, the sacrifice of Abraham's son to God, rescued at the last moment by the provision of a ram. "See? This is why it is good to read the Bible. It has details we don't get in our holy book," they said.

It was a time when the novelty of hearing and reading Bible stories was gaining traction. Everywhere our team went, we learned to carry with us Bible storybooks and small portions of Scripture we could leave with people. We made a good recording of the Prodigal Son story from Luke 15, and people wanted to hear it over and over. The story of the healing of the Gerasene demoniac also made a big impression and opened many discussions of Jesus' power over demonic spirits. Older people who had been to school but could no longer see the small type in the books came to my house to ask for reading glasses, which I had brought from the USA. Each went home with a gospel of John, too. Whether chatting with guests at our own houses, or visiting with people in their homes, our team was being asked more and more to share stories from the Bible. People who had never been to school were asking to learn to read, and several young women made significant progress in that skill. Esther ran a preschool on her front porch for 25 kids.

There seemed to be an unusual number of funerals that year. When someone died, other work stopped and everyone went to console and sit with the family till their loved one was buried within 24 hours of death. Those days of attending funerals gave us many open doors to converse with people about the mystery of Christ and the promise He gave of eternal life to those who would believe He is the resurrection and the life.

Although there was a lot of interest in God's word, not many had made a profession of faith in Christ and our Sunday meetings were still unattended except by our team. Isaiah lived in another village; Joe had moved with his wife and kids to Dar Es Salaam to avoid persecution; Francis' wife and children had been taken away by her brothers, who were angry at him for becoming a believer and being baptized. Eventually he was able to reconcile with her and persuade her and their teenage children to move with him to a town on the highway to Dar. So we were very excited when our friend Nathaniel, who had been reading the Bible regularly with Joseph, told us he was engaged to be married and had agreed with his fiancée that after the wedding they would be attending church with us.

The wedding was a huge party. All the women were invited to buy the "uniform" for the wedding to show that we were special friends to the bride and groom: in this case, a yellow spotted leopard print dress. As a team, we bought Nathaniel and

Patience a special gift: a solar panel and two lights, one for each room in the house they had rented. It was obvious that through our friendship with Nathaniel, and his with us, we had now been accepted as “insiders” in the family and the community. Our team vehicle was the royal chariot that carried the bride and groom away in splendor after the ceremony. A few days later they came to our worship time on Sunday to ask that we would pray for them as a couple.

Patience came to worship with us several times, and even took Colin and me home to visit her parents one day when they were having problems they wanted us to pray for. She brought her little brother one Sunday and asked us to pray for his health. She listened closely when Deborah explained the gospel, and prayed for salvation from sins. But it was hard to tell whether they had a real relationship with Christ, or just with us. We continued to pray for them.

Fred and Emma had moved to another village, and led a couple of people to Christ. Isaiah was farming out in that community. They offered land to Peter and Deborah, and soon were asking if they could move out there and help them start a church and a school. Peter and Deborah became restless, reluctant to stay with the team till our course of study was finished in 2015. We agreed to ask their AIC leaders if they would be allowed to cut short their studies in order to move. But should they go?

