

2013-02-27 – The Journey

Some Journeys cannot be planned ...



Sometimes I find myself sitting in these surreal situations and I just have to pinch myself and say “Are you sure”? Today is one of those days. I looked up to find myself sitting on a mat, under a tree, in the bush just down the road from where I stay. As I gazed out, I found I was sitting eye level with the top of the grass. It was a beautiful day, a sky as big as you can imagine, a beautiful cyan blue with the brown of the bush grass waving gently in the breeze. I could see the tops of fences and the tops of mud walled tukals with their grass roofs far off in the distance. I could hear the voices of

children playing and women talking as they made their way up and down the road and stopped to visit on their way from here to there. I could feel the hard, cracked earth underneath my “seat” with the heat radiating up through the mat. I could feel the breeze as it gently made its way through the bush across the way, across the hard baked land as it gently brushed our skin and continued on its journey.

I blinked and found I really was surrounded by African women and we were laughing and having a conversation. A little evangelism work was going on here, so far removed from my intentions when I walked out the door with Elizabeth (my language teacher) this morning that I could not have begun to imagine. The journey began with the intention of finding out why the lady had not come back to finish our stove. It ended with the words of God spoken through a tiny lady on a mat in Akobo, South Sudan...

We arrived at her grass hut in the middle of the bush to find the children playing outside and the girl that helped her on Saturday. But we didn’t see her, so we waited under the tree. Soon she came and brought a spotlessly clean rolled up mat and invited us to sit. We did the usual introductions and continued to talk about the stove.

She began to tell her story. On Saturday, she went to the river to collect the clay to finish the stove. While she was there she found a



shell and so she pulled it from the mud. As she made her way back through the water, she tripped and fell. When she stood up she found she had lost the shell. She looked, those with her looked, but the shell was carried down the river they were convinced.

Since the fall, she has been “spinning”, the motion she made with her hand, and according to Elizabeth, there is not a way to put it but to say, “she falls down like she is dead, but she isn’t”. Ahh, faint! That I understand. The others, and she points in a large circle around her indicating the women in nearby tukals, tell her it is because she tried to take the stone that belongs to the witch so she has been cursed.

I talked to her for a minute about going to the hospital about the fainting. She can’t go because they will give her an injection and those people aren’t trained to give her an injection, they just want to practice on her. I explained they would check her and her baby and make sure they were ok. They would try to find the reason for her spinning and falling down. I tried to tell her that going to the hospital can prevent problems, but I don’t know if she will go or not. It is hard to break a cultural belief.

Elizabeth asked her something I didn’t understand, but she told her that she had been baptized. I asked her if she believed in God, she said she was baptized but she can’t pray because her husband won’t let her go to church anymore. I looked around. I was in this amazing, God given, beautiful land.



All I could think to say was “It looks to me like you have the perfect place to pray. I don’t believe the stone you lost was from the witch.” I picked up a handful of dried, hard, cracked dirt and broke it between my fingers. I know God gave me the words because I wouldn’t have thought them on my own. As the dirt began to crumble and fall back to the ground I said, “God made this earth and God made those heavens, (pointing at the sky)”. She had a similar shell around her neck and I pointed at it and said, “God made that shell and the one like you lost. They are all gifts from God. It was not a curse from the witch.”

Then we began to talk about the ways she could pray, when you are grinding, when you are pounding, when you are shaking the grain or sifting the sand. You can talk to God anywhere, anytime”.

We sat in silence for a while. Each lost in our own thoughts. I realized several other women had gathered while I was talking. A baby girl climbed up in my lap wearing the traditional clothing – a band of beads around her waist, a single strand around her neck. Three more children stood beside her. The baby startled me because most are afraid and run crying from my white skin. She was so trusting, so

soft and so gentle as she settled herself in. One tiny hand reached up and touched my face and then my glasses. And she was happy. And so was I.

Somewhere in there the conversation continued. She was saying God *really* did send me to them. He didn't just send me to the women in the church or the women's group. He said you could come and sit on our mat and can talk to us, even the people who can't go to church.

I just wanted to cry. I walked out the door this morning, in my malaria induced fever, wanting to make sure the stove was finished before I leave for Addis – that is a whole 'nuther story! What I ended up with was a God ordained moment in time in which a tiny woman, sitting on a mat, under a tree in Akobo, South Sudan, delivered the most powerful 23 word sermon I have ever heard in my life...words straight from the mouth of God through the mouth of my tiny little stove builder.

Thanks be to God!

Amen!