

August 10, 2006

The Prayers that Rise to Heaven

Often people ask me why I want to live in Africa. The best answer I've come up with is this: I believe the prayers of Africans are rising to heaven, and if God wants to use me as a small part of the answer of those prayers, I will go.

Last Sunday I had a chance to hear the sound of those prayers.

Zulus, like many people in the world, pray aloud in groups, all at the same time. Sometimes the sound is like a seething murmuring, other times it rises to a frantic riotousness. Listening to the sound, it isn't hard to imagine the sound of multitudes in heaven, worshipping before the throne of God in all languages and words.

I attended church last Sunday with Betsy and a Zulu woman named Ana. Ana is a young mother with AIDS who came within inches of death a year ago before she got antiretroviral drugs. I would have liked a video camera to record moments of the service, for lazy churches across the world to see.

Even before the prayers, there was much to record. The deep voice of the old grandmother beginning a song and the rest of the congregation joining. The slouched backs of other grandmothers beside her bowing on their knees in prayer. The faces of toddlers chewing potato chips they held to keep them quiet. The face of a teenage girl, haloed in light from a cracked windowpane behind her, leading the Sunday school classes in song. The feel of my translator swaying into my shoulder as she sang. The stack of worn-out, torn-out pages making a Bible for the grey-haired man who preached. The single light bulb hanging from a wire in the center of the room. The light bulb is off, but another Light shines in this room.

It's a room that has likely never been recorded by a camera, with voices likely never heard by a foreigner. What a privilege to enter yet another of the rooms where God is listening.