

August 16, 2006

Witchcraft Darkness

On a car ride home after a Bible study, I listened to a conversation about witchcraft among Zulu people.

Sangomas, or spiritists, are everywhere, my foreigner friends said. Basic jobs of *sangomas* include providing “medicines,” curing and casting spells, and pleasing ancestors. Babies, for example, often wear bags of herbal “medicines” around their necks and woven bands around their waists to protect them from curses. In order to keep ancestors pleased, words like “AIDS” are seldom mentioned for fear an ancestor would be disappointed. In extreme cases, children receive scars on their cheeks or sternums, or even have portions of fingers cut off to please ancestors.

How can anyone believe this stuff? In the cozy safety of our car full of Christians, I wanted to blurt out, “Why can’t I just tell everybody, ‘Look at me, I’m doing silly stuff to please ancestors, and I’m just fine!’”

Then I got home. Zeke is recovering from pinkeye and Phoebe is getting it, and Zeke has a diaper rash and is teething. For nearly an hour after the children’s bedtimes, they took turns waking up wailing. Seeing Zeke’s face scrunched up in agony in the eerie darkness, I couldn’t help remembering witchcraft. My children never wake up at night. Who sent this curse on me?

In a country where illnesses from worms to tuberculosis and AIDS run rampant, where many people don’t pass high school, and many of those people light their homes by eerie candlelight, it’s not to guess how ideas of witchcraft flourish.

The next morning, reading my Bible, where all was warm and bright, it was easy to fall back on the logical explanations of my children’s illnesses. I read in Matthew 6:22-23, “If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then, the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”

When things go wrong, especially when there’s mystery and physical darkness involved, it’s easy to start seeing the world through dark eyes. But whatever dark spirits there may be out there (and I do believe they exist), I have no doubt that the Light of the world can outshine them all. May we remember that in whatever darkness comes our way.

August 19, 2006

Jabula

Today I made a woman say “ngiya-jabula!” I know that phrase. It means “I’m happy.” I responded “siya-jabula!” We are happy.

I was working in my new garden with a woman whose name, Jabu, stems from the same word—happiness. After awkward discussions about what I should pay her for the day of labor breaking up the soil and constructing fencing for the garden, an idea hit me. She had told me, in our strange mix of broken English and broken Zulu, that she finds it impossible to keep chickens and cows out of her own garden, and hasn’t even planted anything this year out of frustration. “Jabu,” I said, “What if we share the garden?”

It was then that she leaped a bit and said it. “Ngiya-jabula!”

I still paid her for today’s work as I had promised, but I feel I have moved one step closer to knowing my Zulu neighbors as neighbors instead of potential employees. This is a big step. Until today I was planning to write a somewhat more discouraging update about our relationships—or lack of relationships—with Zulu people.

It’s hard. We live twenty minutes from the black area where we work, and although I have black neighbors, I see them only when they’re working for my landlord or when I whiz by in my car. I don’t blame them for not striking up instant friendship with me. I’m just another in the stream of whites, who are either locals who learned long ago not to care for blacks, or foreigners who never stay long.

Adam and I have talked about ways to move closer to the area where we’ll work, or at get involved in a Zulu church, or at the very least make some Zulu friends. We really believe successful “development” work needs to start with understanding the local people. We can only get so far toward that goal talking only to other white people, or a couple black people who regard us so formally they say whatever they think we want to hear.

So finally, for Jabu a new gardening friend, Ngiya-jabula!

August 20, 2006

Happy Sunday!

In less than an hour we plan to meet with Lynn, our “boss” from the U.S., who is here for the next three weeks. We’re sort of on pins and needles waiting to finally talk with her and ease some of the tension that’s been building around this visit. We’ve had one miscommunication after another with her in the last couple weeks. Then when Lynn got to the country, Betsy forgot to remind the hotel to meet her at the airport so she arrived from 48 hours of travel without a greeting, and then yesterday apparently her bus ride to our area was hot and miserable.

So Lord, bless Lynn and all of us as we sort through the past wrongs and get down to business. There’s more than enough to sort through just in our talks about the future of Microfinance for Youth. It’s quite a crossroads time to enter this work. Over half the

students with loans no longer have businesses, either because they spent all their loan money or they ate all the foods they were supposed to sell. So we either need to figure out ways to teach self-control with their profits, or reword the whole idea. In any case, I think it's perfect timing to have us coming in with fresh ideas and motivation.

Aside from work, things have been looking up. Zeke and Phoebe both had conjunctivitis, but after consulting the web and our doctor friend here, we let it work its course and they're both nearly better. Zeke has perfected standing himself up without pulling on anything, and he's quite a proficient walker. Phoebe's current favorite activity is collecting little red and green seeds from the trees around our house and filling her pockets. She leaves trails of seeds everywhere she goes.

We also seem to have found a Zulu church that we'll go to (at least most of the time). You may remember us asking for prayers back in January for a man called Welcome (his Zulu name has clicks in it and is tough to say). He's the pastor of a church in eMangue, the black area where we work. He has found a group of people to sponsor his salary, meaning he can stay in this area, which is GREAT. He preaches in English while someone translates to Zulu, but most everything else is in Zulu. He speaks great English, and Adam and he have met a couple times. Adam says he feels like he's already a closer cross-cultural friend than he ever had in China or Nicaragua.

We went to Welcome's church this morning. My favorite part was when an old lady got up and said a bunch of stuff that made people laugh and also nod their heads, something about the need for mothers to be role models. Then a lady started singing spontaneously, and all the mothers and grandmothers in the church stood up and danced to the front and danced around in a circle, singing and grooving. (I didn't have the courage to join, in case you're wondering). I can't imagine that happening in most North American churches I know.

About these Musings

I read a poem recently that describing a war veteran, and how his outward appearance had changed over years at war. The final line of the poem said that in all his battles, what changed him most was finding "so much *truth*."

I suppose that's why we enter all our life's battles—or at least it's one of the few noble causes for battle. It rings true with me here. I feel I can face any difficulty or duldrum if only I find there *truth*. Having this website is one of the ways I sort out truth, which is often hard to see in life's daily close-up grind.

We have LOVED hearing even quick messages from many of you saying you're reading this website or the newspaper articles. Thanks for taking the time to care, and we pray these musings are a blessing to you.

August 21, 2006

Thanks for the prayers! Last night we hashed out all the details of the past misunderstandings amongst our organization's staff. Wow, what a difference clear communication can make! Hurt feelings are healed all around, and we're starting our three weeks of meetings with clean forgiven relationships.