

Dear Friends in Christ,

Norton Newsletter, August 2007

"From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." (Jn. 6:66). I am writing to report a failure. After four months of evangelism, of day and night persuasion, of patiently explaining the Word of God, and of humbly modeling His love, our evangelist Sacko Koulibaly came back from his sojourn in a village 160 kilometers away. At the end of his time no one said they wanted to follow Jesus, no one said they trust in Him as their Savior; in short there were no "results."

As missionaries we are often tempted to always send good reports back home, about the marvelous things that are happening. Of course we give God the glory, but there is always that temptation to glorify ourselves through "successes." In reality, things aren't always wonderful. As long there is a loving God, there will be freedom to reject that love, since love can't be forced. I think we can take comfort in the fact that, at the point in Jesus' ministry when this verse was written (Jn. 6:66), Jesus had already turned water into wine, fed the 5000 and healed many people including a paralytic of 38 years. Even so, his so-called disciples turned away from him, rejecting him and his message. How then could Sacko and I (who haven't done any miracles) expect anything different?

We also take comfort in the fact that although no one said anything at this point about receiving the LORD's forgiveness, there is still time. The seeds were planted. So I use the word failure loosely. In the world's eyes this was a waste of time, four months spent, much time invested to teach, encourage, persuade, and nothing to show for it. But since ultimately it is God who gives faith, it is only our job to witness, and I can report that we have done that job, with the help of the Holy Spirit to the best of our abilities.

So what to do next you may ask. Firstly we are not planning on continuing teaching there, even though some people would like us to continue with literacy (in fact, they've progressed far enough to be classified as "functionally literate"). Secondly, we do plan on visiting from time to time, to keep the contact, and give occasion for anyone to express a newfound faith. Thirdly, we pray. Perhaps someone else will come along, and witness, and find the terrain a little more receptive than we did, or perhaps someone in the village upon further reflection, will change course.

As I mentioned in my last newsletter, we were traveling during the month of July. We went to the U.S. for our tri-annual Ablaze! missionary summit, held this year in Houston, Texas. It was a great blessing to meet with colleagues from around the world and enjoy the wisdom of guest speakers. We followed this meeting with a short two-week vacation to visit family and friends. We were also able to share what God is doing in Guinea in two places, Camp Lutherhaven, Coeur d'Alene Idaho, and Makah Lutheran, Neah Bay, Washington. During that time Heidi's grandmother, Dorothy Muhly, went to her heavenly home. We felt incredibly blessed to be able to attend the funeral and be with all the family, as it may not have happened if we had been here in Africa. We thank God for the faith he gave her, and for sustaining her in that faith to the end.

This year, we have been coming and going a lot, with political upheaval, teaching in Togo, and this meeting/vacation in the U.S. We are now looking forward to a time of some stability to continue the work of church planting, training leaders, and translating theological education materials. Thank you for your prayers during all of this. Please pray with us for these things:

- Pray that the people in village "T.N." would be convinced of their need for a Savior.
- Pray that God would give us wisdom in mentoring the young leaders of the church who have emerged.
- Praise God for the help of Abou Sano who moved to Siguiri with his family in June and will help with church planting, and translation of materials for theological education, and discipleship.
- Praise God for the life of Dorothy Muhly, the paternal grandmother of Heidi, who fell asleep in Jesus on July 21st, to the end she kept her faith in Christ.

In Christ,

Tim, Heidi, Philip & Leslie Norton  
LCMS World Mission  
Guinea, West Africa