

Christmas

Right while we're in the midst of all the shopping and other hectic activities that make the Christmas season in the US such a frantic and pressure filled time, I'm reminded of my time in third world countries. Especially coming to mind is time in the African countries. By any standard, and certainly by that of the US, African countries are poor. Many who live there exist on annual income that is less than one week's income for the average American.

But I remember how happy the people were to see me. How wide the smile of the man who met me in Kinshasa in the country then called Zaire. How so many applauded a speech I made in tortured French there. How warm the people in Zimbabwe and those in Malawi and even war ravaged Mozambique in the late 80's. And Ghana, and Egypt, even the Sudan. And Ethiopia under the communists, again in the late 80's. Even poor Sierra Leone and other places as well. There was the sales manager in Zaire with the ear to ear smile. He later died of AIDS, contracted from his wife who had received the disease from a bad blood transfusion in a hospital. A man in a similar position in Liberia was quiet and warm. He was later killed in front of his family in one of the Liberian civil wars.

Just recently, as some know, I was unexpectedly visited in the office by a Ghanaian missionary to the US, and his very manner and style reminded me so much of how I liked the people there.

Wonder why? Why? I still don't know. My sister says I "light up" when I talk about Africa. Well, they don't have much. Not much at all. Americans might say nothing.

But they smile. They laugh. They are warm. And they don't have anything by our standards. That's it. I've always been amazed at the happiness in the midst of nothing.

And then I think of our overworked country, with everyone so frantically engaged, running to and fro with nary a minute to stop and enjoy the moment. And what is the level of happiness here? Not material possession. No, we win that. But happiness? How about that more important word, joy? How much joy is there out there in the land?

"Jesus, please help us all keep our eyes on you, Lord. It is all about you. It is not about all the activities and things, not even at Christmas. It is all about you."

Take a moment this season if you can find one, and reflect on Jesus, who he is and what he did, and then on who you are, and your relationship with your Lord.

God bless you all, John Newlin

(December 12, 2006)