



The willingness to fail

Steve Vinton, September 4, 2007

Last night on the path I ran into Rachel, one of our missionary teachers here, our niece. One of the little babies they had brought to the door died this weekend and Rachel was crying.

Sometimes uncles aren't good for much other than giving hugs and letting their nieces cry.

All I could say was that we do our best, that if you were back in America your heart wouldn't ache for this little baby who died on you, but your heart also would never have had the chance to rejoice over all of the other babies around you who you've nursed back to health. Staying in America where you'd never feel this kind of pain over and over is no solution. Living here in Tanzania but then locking yourself in your classroom during the day and in your house by night and deciding not to help those who come to you because there might be one day a child who doesn't make it, that too is no solution. We compassionately do all that we possibly can. Our own house has been a steady parade this morning of person after person coming, some of them sick themselves, some of them with their children. Madisi technically I guess is a school, but right now all that people in these villages know is that on this little hill there are people who care, who will do the best they know how, and who will receive you into their homes and and listen to you and talk with you and be kind to you and show concern for your children. Wakristo wa kweli. For those who aren't Christians and don't have a clue yet what one is, I guess I'm glad that it's a nice introduction to eventually knowing God that they associate kindness to those who are sick and in need as what Wakristo wa kweli (true Christians) are. Sure beats having a reputation for being mean and nasty! So we weep with those who weep, we share our food and our homes and our lives, we worry about those who

don't go to school, and we try to be helpful in any way we can.

We do our best in a world that shouldn't be the way it is. With all the wealth that there is on this planet today, so many women in villages all across Africa shouldn't be dying in childbirth, so many kids shouldn't be missing out on even learning to read and write because their parents know they don't have the resources to send them to primary school, so many families shouldn't be living without even access to clean drinking water. It's our fear that paralyzes us. There shouldn't be this much pain on this planet anymore. We feel God nudging us to go to Africa and teach, but we're afraid we might fail, that living in a little village with poor people might be too hard for us, and so we convince ourselves we really didn't hear anything from God. And that's why I'm thankful that on Monday we have 14 more teachers coming from America -- because I know they're afraid, because they'd be crazy not to be, but they aren't letting their fears paralyze them. We sense God nudging us to do something to help the sick around us, but we're afraid that some of them will be too far gone and that we might get hurt when a baby dies and our fear of failure paralyzes us and we tell ourselves that it's too overwhelming anyway. And that's why I'm thankful that Rachel is right back in there with Susan today doing what she can to help -- because I know she's afraid when there is sickness and death all around us that her heart will ache again, because she'd be crazy to think that there will be no more funerals to go to here in the village for little babies, but she's not letting her fears paralyze her. We hear God saying to try to build all these school and these classrooms, but we're human and so we're afraid that we might fail and so we don't. And so the world says the

problem of children in Africa not getting to go to school is just too big and so nothing can be done and so we roll over and do nothing. And that's why I'm thankful that Godfrey and Emmanueli and Janerose and Pauline and the whole rest of the team here just simply don't stop no matter what. They got the chance in life to study and they're committed to make sure everyone else does as well. Of course we're going to have failures! The freak rainstorms will come and destroy hundreds of thousands of bricks as they just did last week in the village of Mtambula and people will cry out in discouragement that failure has come upon them. But if we give into our discouragements and our fears of further failures we will become paralyzed, the salt will have lost its savor, the good works that God was going to give us the chance to do, we won't end up doing and He'll have to send someone else to do them.

The British Airways in-flight magazine called it "Best of British" so Susan and I decided to watch the movie *Amazing Grace* on our travels this summer. Seldom do I see any movies, and even more seldom, do I see any movies that are anything that I'd want to show to my friends I work with in Tanzania. There is so much wonderful to learn about in watching the story of Wilberforce -- and I relish the idea of talking with Godfrey and Emmanueli, Janerose and Pauline, about these things. What will be certainly of great value to us is not so much the fight against injustice (we already have the cause that unites us), the inspiration of a man whose beliefs spurred him to action (because I think as a group we are already there), it's the fact that although the righteousness of his cause was never in doubt, Wilberforce suffered defeat after defeat for fifteen years! The courage of being willing to fail! That is what my grandfather gave to me -- that is what I hope to impart to our group. The fear of failing is paralyzing. We have no guarantee that every time we have an open door to starting a school that we will succeed in getting it started -- all I know is the certainty of the righteousness of our cause to ensure that one day every child gets at the very least the chance to go to school

-- and all we know is that we have a conviction that this is our calling in life. Wilberforce brought before Parliament hundreds of thousands of signatures, each person calling for the abolition of the slave trade as an abomination before God and a blot on humanity! For us, we raise the nickels and the dimes of people who believe that every child should at least get to go to school. But it is that willingness to fail. The reason was that although Wilberforce sought success, as indeed we do, what is of primary importance is never giving up no matter how hopeless the cause might seem. Most people probably didn't notice what to me was that all important scene when Wilberforce was asked to join the abolitionist cause and he refused to answer them right away and retreated to find out deep within his soul if this was what God Himself wanted Wilberforce to do! Once he knew that, there was no way of retreating, no way of allowing the fear of defeat to paralyze him, no way in fact of allowing defeat itself, time and again, of deterring him from pressing forward.

Will the day ever come when every child in every village in Tanzania gets to go to school? Probably not within my lifetime. (There are just too many villages, and we are simply too few in number). But failure is not to be feared.

Every speech we give in a village saying that we want every kid to come to school only ensures our defeat on another front -- how can we possibly have enough desks for them all? Where we will possibly get enough teachers for them all?

Is it a lost cause? Perhaps. But we're sure going to try.

If Rachel can help another mother today with her sick child knowing full well that the baby might already be too far gone but that she still has to try, then we can tell those people in Mtambula village to just make more bricks and not let the fear that it might rain again at the wrong time paralyze them.