



Proverbs 25:25

"Good news from a distant land"

Issue No. 1

Saturday December 1, 2007

Life to Dry Bones: Resurrecting Akalo

"I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God." Revelation 3:1,2

T

he place is Akalo, sub-county of Apac.

In most regards, this is a place of peace and wonder to the wide-eyed visitor; a place of friendly welcome and generous hospitality.

The early morning sun rises over the dusty orange road, casting light into the dim little shops (but can't reach the joking boda drivers who lounge idly under the mango trees). Along this road you will see children on their way to school --children in different colored uniforms: royal blue, maroon, pastel green for the nursery schoolers, pale blue; a different color for each different school.



The children are polite and shy as you pass them on the road, sometimes they laugh if you greet them, surprised that you know bits of the local language.

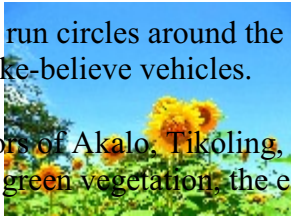


As you ride into Tikoling, however, the children are wonderfully benevolent and genuinely excited at your arrival. The younger ones rush out of their houses to meet you, and chase after your motorbike.

So, the sun continues to make its way across the sky.

Around midday, taking lunch in your room, you will hear the delightful pitter-patter of little bare feet on the concrete as

children run circles around the compound with loud motorcycle noises, flying past your open doorway on their make-believe vehicles.



The colors of Akalo, Tikoling, Barakalo shine vibrantly in the happy sunlight –the stunning blue skies, the lush green vegetation, the earthy orange dirt road, the gorgeous and cheerful yellows of the sunflower patches. It is a wonder to behold.

As the sun begins to settle in its western destination, you begin to prepare for the night: bathing, gathering the candles off the shelf, readying everything now before darkness comes. Now, be warned, traveler, that if you come to Akalo, you might find the darkness of night to be lonely and miserable at first, but that trepidation will pass.



Your gracious hosts gather after the day's work in the kitchen (which is also a hallway, a courtyard, a common room, a laundry room, and dining room, depending on its current context).

Sitting under the ever-darkening sky, eyes sparkling in the light of the kerosene lamp, you answer questions about your homeland and watch as the stars make their appearance one by one.

The stars themselves are like the children of Tikoling. Once one or two have spotted you, they shout for joy to all their friends until they all emerge and you find yourself staring into the very heavens themselves –like the heaven you see in the faces of all those young children.

Looking up, you see a mixture of shooting stars and fireflies adding their magic to the peaceful night air.

The sun rises again.

But even the bright Akalo sun casts its shadows on the community. For what human habitation exists without human error? Here it is no secret. Since there are no closets in those thatch-roof establishments, where else can one hide their skeletons but out in the open?

We begin again with daybreak.

The sun rises late compared with the hardworking mothers who awake early to prepare food, tend the garden, and send their children off to school.

The men rise too, eating the food that has been prepared for them. They go to the fields.

Meanwhile, the children in their array of school uniforms make their pilgrimage.

The women work as the men do, until around midday when there is a parting of the ways.

The men leave the fields and the women behind and make their own pilgrimage –to the town center. There they fill their flasks with the local brew and join the idle boda drivers under the mango trees. The men are through with their work by midday! Or so they claim, in some feeble justification for their “booze” break.

However, this isn't an indictment against all the men of Akalo. Though they are many, they are not all. And far be it from me to suggest that there aren't some women who join in too. Though they are fewer, they are still there.

Like Rose. A mother to five children, though rarely seen with them, and rarely seen sober. She staggers across the road to greet you, and you can't help but feel sorry for her, for them, this community buckling under the weight of their chains.

For plainly those who drink so persistently are slaves to the bottle. It calls to them and they obediently abandon their fields, their work, their families, to do their master's bidding.

Those who are left sober are also left to pick up the slack; to work like slaves to make their humble community function.

In this patriarchal society, how can the tired, overworked wives liberate their husbands from the bonds of idleness and drunkenness?

That is where Food For the Hungry shines brightest.

Within the last three years, FHI in Apac has organized opportunities for women-empowerment –teaching the women a profitable trade so they no longer have to rely solely on the wages of their husbands.



Not only are these women learning tailoring and citrus farming skills, but they meet together just to fellowship and pray and praise God together. They are learning to fight the evils in their community not only with cultivating oranges and sewing school uniforms, but more importantly through prayer and the powerful testimony of the convening of women.

And when those women get together!

I remember a particularly overcast afternoon in Tikoling, with a lively group of Catholic women. We had me under a mango tree, but were

driven into the church by a fierce rain storm.

The rain beating loudly on the tin roof was enough to drown out talk of business or of last meeting's minutes, but nothing— nothing— can drown out the sounds of those women when they start singing.

Luckily, we weren't the only ones seeking shelter when the rain came. It would've been like seeds scattered on the roadside if no one else had witnessed the praise that rang out that day!

The oldest women vigorously jumping and dancing was enough to captivate a group of rain-swept schoolchildren. It was like an alluring fire to their shivering bones; they came closer and closer to the warmth and light radiating from those women.





I sat in amazement. Amazement of the strength and jubilation displayed before me. If only we all danced like that before our Maker!

With a joy and a freedom so inviting, so contagious, it's only a matter of time before all of Akalo is drawn into the dance.

In spite of the determination of those men who work so hard to make sure they don't have to work hard at all, there is a very imminent threat of salvation on the

horizon.

These women, who already possess a fiery zeal for their Lord, are the conduit for the liberation of souls.

I blink through the rising cloud of dust that the women are stirring up with their zealous and unashamed praise. And I rest easy that night, knowing that Christ the Savior, Jesus the Redeemer, is here also, reconciling Akalo to Himself.