

December 14, 2015 – Third Sunday of Advent
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Isaiah 61:1-2a, 10-11; Psalm: Luke 1:46-48, 49-50, 53-54; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

The soda bread was all the three of us had for breakfast the next morning. I thought, “What should I do?” Esther, our neighbor in the village of Kung’ombe, Tanzania had just brought us water from the spring, a precious gift as our rain barrels had run dry. I had always thought myself generous in sharing with others but at that moment I realized it was always from what I had over and above. Now I was being challenged to give from the little we had. As I cut that bread in half and handed it to Esther sharing became a new reality for me.

Isaiah speaks today in our first reading about Good News for the poor. I knew I was the “poor” here having the Good News preached to me in this event. My eight years living in Kung’ombe was a gift - a learning experience in sharing as a way of life.

How often when I gave a cookie to a child playing in our courtyard, she would immediately break it and share it with her brother. A meal was a shared moment as a family gathered around a common dish. There were no separate bowls or plates for individuals. When I suggested to mothers that it would be good for a small child to have his own bowl to ensure his getting the nourishment needed, I was met with resistance. They feared if the child was not sharing food with others it would result in him becoming greedy. There was no place for a greedy person in village life.

In recent years we've all been awakened to the fact that the economic and many of the social problems we are facing as a people have their roots in greed. Conspicuous consumption is all around us. The more we have the happier we'll be, we think. But of course we never have enough. So it just becomes more and more and more.

Again, living a life of sharing tells me I am never alone. I depend on my neighbor and my neighbor depends on me. We wait for the rains knowing without them there'll be no harvest. Hunger would be our lot. But today we are together and we have what we need for right now. We sit chatting, laughing and singing as we prepare the maize for the evening meal. Yes, there's always laughter. Why not, we are alive and God is caring for us.

And so St. Paul tells us today to be happy – Rejoice! How privileged I was to live with people who knew how to rejoice. They had not been touched by consumerism. Their preparation for Christmas centered on the reason for this feast.

How often I've shared the experiences of my life in Tanzania with friends and family here in the U.S. There's interest but somehow the core of the message was always missed. Rejoicing in the day...the moment with no surety about tomorrow could not really be comprehended.

“A voice in the wilderness” is what John the Baptist calls himself in today's Gospel. Somehow this message of sharing and living in communion with one another may seem to be lost in the wilderness. We are surrounded by consumerism and greed as people desire to accumulate more riches.

The RECYCLE image is a familiar one for all of us. We see it on the bottom of plastic bottles and as a logo on shopping bags. At times we'll see the words Reduce, Reuse, Recycle on each of the arrows. But I wonder how often we pay attention to it. “A voice in the wilderness;” its message is in total contrast to the consumer message.

As we continue our Advent journey let us hold this symbol before us – a reminder we are one community, sharing our bread with one another. Together we can “make straight the way of the Lord” by walking hand in hand gently upon our beautiful planet, Earth.

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