

Bangladesh Reflection- Anna Gnann

While we were in Mirpur, in the house of Rajia, the tea lady, we sat on her bed, as she offered it to us and there was no other place for us to sit. The men sat on one bed, and the women on the other - across from each other, about 6 feet, in the one small room that made up her house. And while we were there we had a fan blowing on us, running from electricity pirated from the building behind us, to help provide some cool in the small room made of jute mats and a tin roof, with many holes in between. And Rajia and her daughters came to us, with ice cold bottles of sprite and ice cold bottles of water, and packaged cookies on a plate. And when we protested, and said “no no, this is too much, please don't open another bottle” she said “this is my house, and these things I will share with you because I want to. You are my guests and my friends, and I will care for you.”

And while we were in Dhaka, in the Nayeem Colony, one of the poorest colonies in Dhaka, we went to the house of Salma a 15 year old girl who lived with 5 other people in one small room. We stood outside of her house while Dr. Morgan (Les) talked with her about the severe head-lice and fungal infection that covered her neck and back, for which she was so ashamed she could not even lift her head. And while we waited in this small courtyard outside her house, surrounded by 12 other one room houses, an elderly woman with a beautiful smile, waded through water that was deeper than her ankles to give us a bench to sit on, so we could be comfortable and rest. And when we looked around trying to find a safe place to put our feet (a place that was not covered in mud, water, and human waste) another woman brought a piece of wood for us to put our feet on, so we wouldn't have to put them down amongst the waste. We were their guests, and they were caring for us.

And while we were in Mirpur, in the Synod offices for the Church of Bangladesh, we heard about the many programs sponsored and supported by this Church. We heard about social development programs that provide after-school tutoring to children; a sewing center to teach basic sewing skills to young women who can then help support their families; a program for homeless children (mostly boys) that gives them a place to sleep, a meal, and opportunities for learning; girls and boys hostels that provide poor children with an opportunity live and go to school in a safe environment; a program providing legal advice and support to young women lost in abusive marriages for which there seems no way out; two nursing schools that offer an

opportunity for Christian men and women to become nurses in a government approved program; two hospitals that provide safe, clean, caring, and healthy environments for treatment and healing, with special funds available to those who have nothing to pay; and a Seminary that provides religious education to young men and women who feel called to serve God and God's people in some of the Christian churches in Bangladesh. These are not all of the programs of the Church of Bangladesh, nor are they all the ones that my friends and I heard about or visited. But while we were there, we heard the story of the Church of Bangladesh. We were hosted by many of these programs and many of the people that serve as their directors and leaders. And while we were there, among these people, we were cared for. We were given tea and cookies, bottled water, and chunachura. We were danced for, and sung to, and given flowers and gifts. We were given meat everyday, and desserts for many meals, and always a place to sit. We were welcomed into the lives of this Church, and into the lives of the people of Bangladesh. We were hosted, and cared for because we were their guests, and because we were, we ARE in relationship with them.

You see, while we were in Shreveport, in the Sunday school room of the Sojourners class, we sat with Les and Cindy Morgan, we shared a meal, and we began a relationship. We were told about this journey, this pilgrimage that we were beginning. And we were told “you are not coming to save the world; you are not coming to put in clean water systems or to build schools; you are coming to be hosted by the Children of God. You are coming as guests to be hosted by others. Mission work is a willingness to be hosted.” I don't think I really understood what that meant, until I was there, and was given the hospitality and care that the people of Bangladesh shared with us. And I don't think I understood the importance of letting them host us. You see, it was often uncomfortable to be given such special foods as meat and eggs each day, when we knew these were things they had only one time per week. It was often uncomfortable to sit in a chair being provided to you by someone who was much, much older than yourself, and who seemed much more frail. It was even frustrating when the table was being cleared and we were told “no no no, please sit” instead of being allowed to help. But you see, we weren't there to save people from their poverty, or gather up their dishes or trash, or even to tell stories of Jesus Christ. We were there as guests, to be in relationship with people in their place and their situation, to accept the seat and the food and the love that they were giving. We were there to love as Jesus loved, to visit the house of the girl with severe head-lice who was so ashamed she could not lift her head, to have dinner with a Christian family who's young boys sang “we shall overcome” in Bangla, as they had learned it in

Sunday school, to have tea with the Muslim tailor who was supporting an extended family with more people than I could count, to pray with the elderly woman in the hospital who was no longer able to care for her self, to give silly bands to young boys who lived rejected and tormented lives on the streets w/o knowing when or if they would find food to eat, to listen as young women shared stories of being beaten and humiliated and shoved to the side by abusive husbands, and for which there is little way out, to have our feet washed by a young woman who is part of a tribe of people known as the lowest of the low, the poorest of the poor.

In the story, the Bible passage that we heard today, Jesus sat, as a guest, in the house of Simon the leper, and was hosted by the woman with the alabaster jar of nard; Jesus was willing to receive the love that she offered to him.

I believe that was one of the most important things that we did in Bangladesh....we were willing to receive the love that was being shared with us....we were willing to witness the love that the Church of Bangladesh shares with all the people that it serves and to witness how it lives as an instrument of God's grace...we were willing to be a part of the mission that Les and Cindy Morgan live out, each and every day of their awe-inspiring lives. It wasn't always easy, it was occasionally scary, frequently smelly, and could even be a little frustrating; but it was BEAUTIFUL to witness the glorious work and the presence of God's amazing grace and love, in Bangladesh.

And to take it one step further, I truly believe that is what we are all called to do, each day of OUR lives.....to meet people in their place, in their situation, to share love, and receive the love they offer to us. As Jesus received love, and shared love, in the house of Simon the Leper, with the woman with the alabaster jar of nard, AND with each one of us.