

### **“The New Face of Mission in Africa”**

(A U.S. Christian prays in preparation for a short-term mission trip in Africa and begins the process of transformation)

God: So, my child, you're going to Africa.

American: That's right, Lord! Our church is beginning a partnership in Africa and it has really energized us! We're excited about going where no one's gone before, to plant the church, and help it to grow.

G: You'll do well with my children in Africa, son.

A: You mean African Christians? Are there many of them?

G: (Laughs gently) Yes, I'd say so. There are already more Christians in Africa than in either of North America or Europe.

A: But we thought we were carrying your Gospel to the Dark Continent!

G: It was only dark in European history books. The Church in Africa has been growing tremendously in the last fifty years. Through famine and war, despite extreme poverty and oppression, there are many, many women, men and children who continually call upon my name and who know me as their God.

Your own church, the Presbyterian Church USA planted seeds more than a century ago which today have grown into large, mature churches: the Presbyterian Churches of Cameroon, Congo, and Sudan and the Mekane Yesus Church of Ethiopia together have more than 10 million Christians. Today, you work with partners in 20 countries across the African continent in evangelism, social justice, pastor training, health, development, and education.

A: Well, We know they need our help. We've seen pictures of Africa --starving people, corrupt governments, strange superstitions...

G: What is it exactly that you plan to do, my child?

A: We're going to teach a class on prayer!

G: Hmmm, you may be surprised to learn that prayer is extremely important in the life of almost all of the African churches. Many Christian communities fast and pray when they want to know my will in a difficult time. African Christians often pray for healing, and thank me when I answer their prayers. Women's groups and youth groups across the continent have frequent "vigils", spending the entire night together praying. I don't seem to remember your church doing much of that...

A: (Falters) Uh, well, no... I guess we don't pray quite like that. (Pause) But maybe we could teach them the importance of sacrifice in the Christian life!

G: (with great pain) Oh, my son! If only you'd seen what I've seen...

- an Ethiopian mother uses her last bit of flour to make injera bread for a sick neighbor;
- 50 of my children in Congo dared to give up their very lives in a march to protest the government's continued oppression;
- a refugee in southern Sudan took 4 lost orphans into his own family, sharing the little food they have;

... You may be surprised to find out you're learning more than you're teaching on the subject of sacrifice in the Christian life in Africa.

A: But don't they need skilled people – missionary doctors to staff all the hospitals, missionary evangelists and pastors to plant and strengthen the churches, teachers and administrators to prepare for the church of tomorrow?

G: Of course, the African churches are asking for many more mission workers. But they need mission workers who understand how to work with my children there and not for them...who know how to work in partnership in a way that honors the dignity in each person.

A: (Confesses) Well gosh, Lord! We weren't thinking about the gifts of African partners... But you seem to think that we have nothing to offer our partners there.

G: (loving smile) No, my son. Africa cannot fully be the Church by itself anymore than North America can fully be the Church by itself. You are merely branches of the same, life-giving vine in Jesus Christ and you desperately need each other, even though you may not know it now. My child?

A: Yes, Lord?

G: Would you be willing to go to Africa and walk alongside Christians there:

- to listen to their hopes and dreams,
- to wipe their tears away and to cry some of your own with them,
- to bless their struggle to find the abundant life I promised them?

Are you willing to be changed and to have your own faith stretched beyond anything you had imagined? Are you ready?

A: (Pause) I don't know if I'm ready for that Lord. Will you go with me?

G: Of course, my son. (Takes his hand) Let's go!