

March 27, 2007

The City of Joy

Biswanath Mondal and Pratul Das. Not exactly household names in Canada. Yet these men are among the Kingdom elite ! Biswanath is a young man who has one withered leg from polio in his childhood. Pratul is middle aged, a minister most of his life. He was a passenger in a bus in north-east India and fell asleep with his arm out the window. The bus was side-swiped by a truck and his arm was torn off.



Both of these men have ample reason to be bitter. They have physical limitations and live in an area of the world where even the healthy have difficulty surviving. Yet the amazing grace of God was evident in their faces. Their lives are spent helping others in the remote islands of the Ganges Delta in the Bay of Bengal. They are two men who are part of the team of Partners International in West Bengal.

Jack Ninaber, Pastor of the Southside Community Church in Milton and I are traveling through West Bengal, India for 12 days. The first few days are in the City of Joy, Calcutta, now known as Kolkata in India. We spent the day yesterday with these two men, visiting their work among the destitute in the southern islands.

Kolkata was a balmy 38 C and we had 4 hours of ‘driving’ among in the filth of diesel fumes and unending humanity that is Kolkata. The end of the road traveling south, brought us to a ferry terminal where we had to walk the plank to avoid falling into the holy Ganges, onto to an ancient wooden boat with a one cylinder diesel engine.

The island we arrived at was no Mackinaw Island, even though there are no motorized vehicles. We had to sit on wooden planks affixed to the back of a bicycle while a 50kg Bengali hauled about 250 kg of Canadian bacon (there were 2 of us !!) to a 45 minute distant village.

Jack, training for a triathlon, decided to show what Canadians can do on the pedals. It worked well for a few moments on the cobblestone path until he decided to take an unexpected detour down an 8 foot embankment into a rice paddy. No one was hurt and it provided the best entertainment in weeks for the local kids.



In the village, we experienced something I have been privileged to feel in many countries of the world; the unusual sense of kinship with people who are as far apart economically, culturally and experientially as could be imagined. We had great fun with the kids; ate and sang with believers in a mud hut and were fed royally by people who have nothing by the world's standards.

In these islands, there are some areas where there are more women than men. The reason for that is, it is also the home of the royal Bengal tiger. These tigers frequently dine on men working the fields. Kids have to be aware of crocodiles in the many waterways as well.


Christianity is not an easy sell in this area of the world. They have thousands of years of cultural and religious history. They have many institutional and cultural impediments. They experience spiritual realities in their lives which are very real to them. When the good news comes to them, it often has to be with a power of its own.

One lady in the village told how these ministers, with physical disabilities of their own, came and prayed for her when she had cancer. She had been told by the doctors in Kolkata that she had weeks to live. She was healed of her cancer. We, of course could not verify many details with the doctors of her experience. Her family recognized it as divine intervention and her six brothers and sisters and their families, acknowledged God's hand on her life and joined the church.

We are on our way today to meet many thousands of kids in the slums of Kolkata through the ministry of our Partner Touch the Lives. This evening, we will be taking the overnight train to Assam. First stop Malda for you Google Earth aficionados.

Thanks for your interest and concern

Phil Dempster and Jack Ninaber

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