

RinJ Visit to South Sudan, March 2013

Hilary Buckingham

As I look back over the last month I rejoice, with grateful thanks to God, following my first Rooted in Jesus (RinJ) visit to South Sudan. Our small RinJ team of five, led by Mike Cotterell, ran three Christian discipleship conferences back to back in the neighbouring dioceses of Yambio and Nzara, within ten miles of the Congolese border. I was acutely aware and thankful for your prayer support as we faced the many challenges of encouraging and sharing the interactive programme with people who have survived decades of civil-war, political conflict and terrorist attacks.



The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) regularly disrupt all aspects of life in South Sudan as they organize their cross border raids from the Congo looking for food, solar panels, and porters. Listening to people tell their stories of running away into the forest for weeks at a time in the past and the atrocious acts of the LRA was heartbreaking, though I also heard accounts of miraculous escapes from impending death from several people. The effects of the violent conflict continue to affect generations of the Zande people today and it will do for years to come due to the effects of, for example, prolonged poor nutrition and lack of education.

Our RinJ programme included two 4 day Introductory Conferences for Yambio and Nzara Diocese, a 3 day Follow-up Conference for Nzara Diocese and I was invited to preach at St Peter's parish church in Yambio and St Timothy's Cathedral in Nzara (to mark the Women's World Day of Prayer) on Sundays. This then meant that we were able to have our 2 rest days together before returning home. During the conferences we were all involved in leading times of morning devotions, teaching and practical sessions, workshops and the ministry times. In Yambio diocese particularly I sensed an air of oppression as if the spiders were in charge not the people. During the four day conference I felt that we helped others to light lamps and sweep through the 'house'. Having carefully searched, people found what was lost and the smiles of joy lit up what had been in darkness.

'Our brothers and sister have come from the UK and opened our minds. Thank you and please come again. It was God's timing for you to come at this time in our Diocesan history. Thanks to those who sent you and thanks to those who are praying and please continue to pray for us. We Africans are human beings who have been through difficult troubles. Please forgive us if we have been abrupt and if our attitude has been difficult for you.' Love

'My father died when I was a child so I never learnt to read or write but because I have been part of a MU Literacy and Development programme here in Yambio I will now be able to lead a RinJ group. I am so happy, so happy I could dance. Joyce

'Seventeen year old Zephaniah came one evening to our compound; we fed him and offered him a place to sleep for the night. He has now been with us for 2 years serving us in many ways. Zephaniah is one of the millions of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in South Sudan.' +Samuel

'I had swollen legs and could not ride my bike. I asked for prayers and now I can run and cycle!' Francis

'I was empty and now the Holy Spirit is reminding me of all the praise songs I had forgotten.' Margaret