

Haiti Update 2/03/09

Bon swa from Haiti,

Hope this finds folks well and blessed. I was sitting in church Sunday morning and a tiny little girl with huge eyes walked up to me and stood directly in front of me. She's 4 and knows how to talk but she didn't say a word. She stared up at me, her eyes locking onto mine. She did not reach up to me. She was just waiting for me to pick her up. No smile, no emotion, just a presence. She would have been easy enough to ignore or brush aside but I picked her up and put her on my knee. She burrowed her head into my chest. There she stayed for quite some time. Occasionally she would look up into my eyes. Still no words, no emotions. Just a look. I felt that her eyes were beckoning to me and I wanted to go. I tried to lose myself in the tunnel of her gaze. For a few moments time and space were inconsequential. I was tuning into her world. There wasn't much to her world. Actually, there was nothing to her world. No father. Busy mother that tries to scratch out enough scraps to keep her and the kids alive. They move around a lot and for now she lives in a mud hut far back in the woods. There is nothing stable about her world. No family roots. No special toys. Her mind is not developed enough yet to know all the things in life that she doesn't have but I see the grey void in the place of these missing elements. The place for a father's love, empty. Joy of loving a doll, empty. Feeling she has a safe place to sleep, empty. Knowing that you will eat every day, empty. Peace, love, and security, all empty spaces. Her body is growing but her mind is not growing with her body.

Eventually I began to recognize the look in her eyes. She was hungry. Hungry as in having likely not eaten for a day or two. I had nothing with me to give her. There's not enough to her to fight very hard to live. She is not yet determined to live. This kind of state is hard for me to grasp. There is a body there, but the soul is just not functioning. I'm not trying to say anything weird here, I'm just trying to put something into words that did not come to me in words. There are so many stories of zombies in Haitian folklore and even in many fearful minds today. The zombie is a mindless slave that will work tirelessly in your garden and never complain or ask wages. I feel like I have seen many little hunger zombies. Prolonged malnourishment in these early years can cause long term damage. It greatly impedes learning and mental development. Kristela, the little girl, represents so many of the children in this country, half of whose population is 15 years and under. She is in one of our schools but we are really struggling to keep the food program going there. I wonder how many like her never get spotted and quietly wither away. So this is one of those things that's going to be in my heart for a while till we figure out something we can do.

Gas and Teacher Shortages

As to news in Haiti, things have been relatively calm but are starting to heat up over a couple of issues. In our town, Petit Goave, the government high school has fallen many months behind on paying their teachers. The teachers finally decided to quit coming to work. After several days of students coming to classes without teachers, students decided to protest in the streets. This is a very important time for them. They are in the last years of school, something very few kids here ever get to see. They will have to take some government tests to be certified as graduates, and they are losing a lot of time not having teachers to prepare them for those tests. They started chanting and marching in the streets yelling that they want teachers. This by itself doesn't really stir up enough trouble to get

the government's serious attention. Now, they start going around to all the private schools and demanding that these students leave their classes and join the protest. They want all the schools shut down. Schools that don't comply get bombarded with rocks and bottles. For the last few days all of the schools in town here have been sending kids home early and in some cases canceling school. Maxo, Ismael, Francette, and Dafne have all missed a lot of school this week. This has all happened plenty of times before. It's not a dangerous time to be here unless you wear a uniform and try to go to school. This does not affect our schools outside of town. Don't know yet when this will get fixed, probably as the Haitians say, "le poul gen dan" aka when chickens have teeth. It's hard to even find the roots of these problems. Why weren't the teachers paid. Who pays the people that pay the teachers.

At the same time, starting a couple of weeks ago, all of the gas stations all over Haiti started running out of gasoline. We can still get diesel, but gasoline is scarce. All of the gas companies ran out together. Supposedly they were late getting their orders in. Then some tankers came in and the gas that they brought was quickly finished. Then all of a sudden there are people selling gasoline from 50 gallon drums on the side of the highway all the way into PAP. They were selling it for 3 times the going rate. This has lasted for a couple of weeks now and we don't see it's end yet, though hopefully this won't be able to go on for too long. The police in our town went around and confiscated the gasoline being sold at the roadside stands. And then there was none.

Facebook

I am not trying to advertise for Facebook but I have encouraged readers of this newsletter to get on it so that they can better see what's going on here. I have been putting new pictures on it every couple of days. It's free, great way to communicate, easy to post pictures and videos. Kristela's picture is already on there. Also there is a lot of news on there in smaller bites than these newsletters. Sometimes it's just normal news. The Happy House has 2 dogs now. Janine and Rudolph. We are not having electricity tonight. Also other folks come down and take pictures and make comments and you would have access to a lot of that as well. The other night I gathered a bunch of kids around and we went to a bunch of different Facebook pages and the kids here were able to see pictures of folks in the States. They loved it. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out how to use it. It's very basic.

Gonna stop here for now because it's very tired and I'm very late.
There is MUCH more going on. We've been going to several new places.
We have some new promising opportunities. Will try to get out more next week and of course there will be plenty of nuggets on Facebook.
Please keep us in your prayers and we'll be keeping you in ours. Take care and Bon Dieu beni ou!

Until we get Home,
Fre Ed

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