

Lizard Love

I've had the privilege of "nap time" between church services for the last month. Every week after our assembly and lunch in bairro Bugio we make the bus trip over to the Federal University. From there we trek back by foot deep into the heart of bairro Rosa Elze where we assemble in Arolodo's house at 4 pm with another group in that part of the city. It's a nice respite, especially with the prospect that we may be re-opening a third preaching point in Orlando Dantas at 7 pm on Sundays. Arolodo always brings out a hammock for me and strings it up in the mango grove in his back yard. It's shaded and quiet back there and gives me a chance to kick off my boots for about 30 minutes to reflect and yes... nap. In no time they dart among the moss on whitewashed wall to check out the intruder... a collection of iridescent pink and yellow throated lizards. I watch their furtive movements through drowsy eyes. I try talking to them. Five or six of them have shown up "balancando a cabeça" (nodding their heads) in unison. It looks like they understand me. As I stand up, they melt into the shadows or shoot to safety into holes in the stucco and brick. I guess not.

It reminds me of one of the constant struggles that we encounter in our work - balancing evangelism and effective discipleship. Sharing the truth in genuine love is never easy to accomplish.

I remember years ago listening to a really good preacher who was chastising our brotherhood in general for a fault in this area. Specifically that perhaps we had gotten too involved in teaching about the distinctive nature of the church to win a lost and dying world; and less about the distinctive nature of her Lord, Jesus the Christ. That really struck a chord in me and for a long while has marked my teaching style and what I have considered the most important things needed to share with people.

I say all of that to share with you the conclusions that we're coming to here on the mission field. I now have a better understanding of why our preachers and teachers of yesteryear focused so strongly on the distinctive nature of the New Testament church. Simply put, the religious climate of our country forced them to it. There were "churches" on every corner calling out for seekers. Men were creating new denominations and inventing new creeds faster than we were discipling. I don't mention these things to say that I've stumbled onto some earth shattering conclusions that I need to teach our brotherhood. Far from it - there are far wiser and more eloquent men that could do a much better job. What I am saying is that these conclusions are changing the way that we are approaching our work here in Latin America.

We do have a lot of people here who are interested in spiritual things and that is very encouraging. However, my greatest frustrations are directly related to all of bad teaching out there about the nature of the church. Specifically all the creeds and doctrines about salvation, speaking in tongues, miracles, women's role, assemblies and things like that. Some times I have to keep re-teaching the same material. I feel like I'm spending too much of my time putting out fires instead of teaching about the life of Christ and Christian living.

In many respects, the religious climate of Brazil here in the north-east is very similar to the religious fervor in the U.S. from the beginning of the 19th century into the 1950's. Throw in a little of the fake religious commercialism of the 80's to cause

total confusion and you get a good idea of what's going on here.

I appreciate more and more the work of our brothers who have gone before us. They had to re-establish the distinctive voice of the bride of Christ in the middle of all the murmurings of men. They were forced to answer all the denominationalism, divisions, and sectarianism. The philosophies of Calvin, Zwingli, Luther and other champions of reformation had a greater voice than Peter, Paul, John and even Jesus. The distinctive nature of the church had to be preached and taught and yes, pamphletized because the bible wasn't being heard anymore on a great number of subjects. You could almost say that they were forced to write counter-creeds. Maybe they did make mistakes, they were men - but above all, they made a plea in their writings to return to the bible to let it speak for itself. A restoration plea.

I cannot begin to tell you all the good men and women that we personally have lost over the years because errant philosophies had already taken hold in their hearts and minds. The frustration that comes when something is so clear in scripture - yet because of old teachings, the word of God can't be accepted on its own merits. Study after study with people shaking their heads in agreement...just like these lizards. But when a life changing decision is called for based on what we've read - they melt into obscurity or shoot to the safety of long held doctrines. I've gotten used to it, but it can be discouraging for some of the people that we have taught when they try to teach others.

In that vein of reasoning, Marie and I are in the process of working up and translating material for pamphlets that will point back to scripture to teach the elementary truths of Christ, sin, repentance, faith, and baptism. Material that will help multiply our efforts of evangelism as others use them as a jumping off point in their own studies. The writing and translation is really time consuming, but I know it will be worth it in the end. Marie has also taken some other work on herself. She is working on translating the Fishers of Men study with Camargo. That study is going to be a powerful study that will go hand and hand with these evangelism pamphlets. It's so good that I think it will be part of the basic doctrines class for new believers once it's finished. These two things combined with a permanent preaching point in Bugio have really got us excited. Keep on praying! Watching the Son rise in Aracaju -rob

Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.
Proverbs 9:9

Ups and Downs

This has been a time of waiting once again. Can I say that I'm so tired of waiting? Hahahaha I think it's the hardest thing that God asks us to do. We are working on getting a contract to rent the place we found in Bugio. The remodel job is finally finished but he has come out with an initial ridiculous request that we can't meet so we're still negotiating. He has it overpriced for this neighborhood but we were willing to pay it because it was so nice. Now we are all thinking that maybe we need to look for another place. We'll keep you posted on this situation.

I know that it seems crazy by our standards because once you have a verbal agreement in our culture the written contract is basically a formality, but here, there is no background of morality. The owner has either decided that he wants to rent to someone else and won't say that to us or he's trying to see how far he can push us.

In other words, how much money he can get out of us.

As we struggle through this process, I marvel that we didn't have to go through any of this headache to rent our apartment when we first arrived here. We stepped off the plane and were handed the keys to our apartment and we signed a contract a week later. Practically unheard of here in Brazil. It really was a blessing from God that we were able to step right into an apartment here.

Let me explain the process a little bit. Each party must go to a justice of the peace office somewhere in the city and present your visa, your Brazilian S.S. card and your picture ID and you have to register your identity along with your legal signature. The Brazilian S.S. card was a document that we couldn't have obtained from the U.S. so there's no way we could have registered our I.D. and signatures immediately off the airplane. This process would have taken a few weeks. Plus they usually want some kind of deposit and a print out of your last 3 months bank statements as proof that you can pay. Many times if you don't own property here you have to get someone who owns property in Brazil to be your guarantor. Sometimes they put requirements on your guarantor that he must have in his bank account for the past 3 months enough money to pay out your whole contract if you default or to pay 3 months rent if you default or whatever requirements the owner of the place you want to rent wants to require. This process is the reason that many missionaries to Brazil have to stay in a hotel or somewhere temporary as they work to get a contract somewhere more permanent.

So, all in all I feel incredibly blessed that we are only just now dealing with this mess. We just last week received from the owners agent the "terms" of the contract and they were ludicrous. Rob called and made a counter offer and we'll see if he's just testing us or if he doesn't want to rent to us.

We try to stay positive. Life as a missionary is a roller coaster ride. You always have such high hopes for people and then they disappoint you. Rob studied with a man named Ernanie this past month. Ernanie was a Baptist who knew quite a bit of scripture so Rob jumped right to salvation. After a several hour study, Ernanie said that he had never been baptized for the remission of his sins and he needed to do that. He decided against our advice that he would wait until Sunday to be baptized. We never saw him again. We consoled ourselves with the fact that Ernanie now knew the truth and he was rejecting Jesus not us, but it still hurt. We are not discouraged, I just usually don't share these kind of mini-disappointments and I wanted you to have some insight into our journey.

Thank-you for your prayers and encouragement. God is blessing us immensely.

I love you all! Marie