

Finding a Man of Peace

I hadn't seen or heard from Eduardo in months and then out of the blue, I get a phone call asking to meet me to come eat cuscus (koo eez koos - a typical northeastern cornmeal dish mixed with shredded chicken and covered with a white liquid cheese and sometimes served with beans... mmmmm!). It's one of his favorite dishes plus, this gives us an excuse to sit and work through some things together. I owed it to him to at least hear him out, because he sounded so sincere.

And we talked. Eduardo repented from being so divisive. I took the opportunity to open his bible to Titus 3:10-11 where Paul says, "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned." I told him that I didn't want him to become that man and I would do everything to help him. He wept, and I think it was good for both of us.

For his part, the time of separation made him see the need for the true church of the gospel as he kicked around from one group to another over the last year looking for a place where the doctrine taught matched the scriptures he held in his hand. More than that, he missed the fellowship of brothers who genuinely cared for him.

For my part, the time of separation made me stronger in my ability to do personal work in Brazil without a crutch and to invest in new crop of non-Christian relationships.

In the weeks that have followed, Eduardo and I have developed a new Thursday night study in the neighborhood where he now lives right across from the Federal University of Sergipe. That study meets in the home of a family man named Haroldo Savio a police sergeant that I first met way back in 2007. At the time he was attending a Pentecostal church where he invited me to speak on a Sunday night with the permission of the "pastora" or woman preacher of their group. That was a wild night where I preached the truths of the resurrection and necessity of repentance. Immediately afterwards a large group came forward and shook and screamed, danced jerkily, and threw themselves to the floor - being "slain by the spirit" to confirm my message. I had never seen anything like that, but Haroldo didn't seem in the least bit surprised. The pastora on the other hand was not pleased at all.

Now I understand why. Haroldo's entire family came from a low-spiritist or black magic background - this didn't seem strange to him at all. The "pastora" had also come from the same background and had in essence just put up a new sign on her home/church - went from being a high-priestess in Macumbeira black magic to a preacherette of a homegrown Pentecostal sect overnight. Reason? It was more profitable in the growing evangelical climate in Aracaju because the "old religions" aren't as popular anymore. Apparently, I had taught more bible in 30 minutes than they had heard all year. And that isn't saying much considering my Portuguese skills at the time.

As a result, the pastora forbad them to have contact with me or face expulsion. And they obeyed.

Now, three years later, summer sweat soaking our shirts Eduardo and I are co-teaching the Sermon on the Mount in his friend's house. Haroldo's family and friends are gathered on the large cement porch in their backyard. The trees are heavy with mangoes that fall from time to time among us, but every seat that Haroldo has in his humble home, is pulled out and full.

Right now I am focusing on Haroldo and his family on Thursday nights. I think I have found my man of peace in bairro Rosa Elze; it's just taken 3 years for the seeds to germinate. Eduardo and I are starting to fight side by side again and that is encouraging.

Watching the Son rise in Aracaju -rob

As a side note, Haroldo and his family have been dis-fellowshipped from their former church because they have been letting a "false teacher" come into their home. Keep them in your prayers as they have a ways to go leaving longtime friends, family and beliefs behind.