

About One of our Refugee Brothers Joseph Tarlue



Dear Friends of Hillside,

Joseph Tarlue leads a Hillside Bible study on Thursday evenings on Chicago's north-side. As a Liberian refugee, one of his favorite songs is "Jesus - My Only Friend." The lyrics are simple: "Jesus my only friend. He has been there for me. He fills my heart with joy. I will ever praise Him." He is considering pursuing a ministry path and is taking steps to become a Licensed Local Minister at Hillside.

Before the civil war demolished his life, he worked for the Liberian government organizing and teaching Liberian traditional dance to towns throughout his region. When his village was raided by rebels, he and his four children fled under the cover of night. He was shot three times, once in the ankle, thigh and chest. His wife was shot to death.

He managed to carry his four children, the oldest being his 10 year old son, into the bush. He spent two weeks with no food, no money, nothing but his children and faith - seeking the river which separated Liberia from Ivory Coast. To cross the river meant safety, but it was a big river. He prayed for God to show him a way, and after a couple of days he found half a canoe. The bow of the canoe, he discovered, could be positioned to float if only he and one child could balance just right.

Though he had lost use of his right arm, and a great deal of blood, due to the bullet wound in his chest, he managed to paddle with a large stick across the river. It took for trips, one with each child. He was too drained on the last trip to paddle any longer, and his last passenger, his 10 year old son, used his hands to paddle the water.

Joseph praised God upon crossing the river. His wife had died at the hands of rebels, but he thanked God that he had been spared to watch over his children. He thanked God when they stumbled into a small village where people were cooking sweet potatoes. He begged in order to get food for his children, and was believed when the villagers saw his bullet-ridden story and children hiding in the outskirts of town. They helped him. Eventually, God led them to a refugee camp in Ivory Coast. Joseph was able to come to the United States, but his children are left behind until he finds employment solid enough to support their reunification.

Joseph told his story as we studied Psalm 61. "Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe" (1-3). Often, Hillsiders who have grown up in America look for the metaphors in Scripture, but when Hillsiders with refugee backgrounds read and pray the Scripture, their experiences are fully aligned with the suffering of displaced Israel looking for the "rock higher than I."

Joseph rather lost hope and his way after coming to the United States. Yet, last year, he rededicated his life to Jesus Christ in a different Hillside Bible study aimed at African refugees. He has yet to be baptized, and plans to do so with the Hillside annual Baptism Sunday in August.

Hillside Church does many things. We are privileged to be able, among these things, to see a true Kingdom Community develop in our midst as people - rich and poor; red, yellow, black and white - come to be set free in Christ to worship God, grow in faith, and serve others in love.

Sincerely,
Pastor Mark