

## A Father's Love

There was a rondoval in front of the tuck shop where people from the village went to buy treats and supplies . Often there were older men sitting there visiting perhaps drinking a pop. There was one day that there seemed to be nobody sitting there. Out of the tuck shop came a distraught woman who was limping badly and looked about to collapse from weariness. She had been up much in the night with her twin boys who had measles and were as well teething. Her husband had stayed up late in the evening to give her a break as it had been several long days and nights since she had a good sleep, hmmm even a bad sleep... but again he had to leave early in the morning because that was the best time to catch fish and they did not have money for food that day. He knew his wife was using the last of their money for medicine for the twins. He needed a good catch badly. The father was concerned for his wife as she was having little sleep and the boys were really sick so on the way to the river he stopped by his sister's house to ask her to help.. Thankfully his sister was willing and her husband said she did not have to go to the garden that day. The tired mom knew she had to get medicine for the twins as they had very high fevers.

As soon as her sister-in-law arrived, the harried mother left to go to the tuck shop which was about 20 minutes walking. Today it had taken her longer as her slippers had worn through on the bottoms and she had stepped on a thorn which she couldn't get out of her foot. She went in to get the medicine, limping as her now badly swollen foot throbbed with pain she leaned on the counter making her purchase with thankfulness that the medicine was available. With relief that she had been able to get the medicine she looked around for someone to take it to her sister-in-law while she rested for a time before she returned home. She headed for the roundovel. She called to a boy nearby who was known to be faithful and asked him to take the medicine to her house for the twins, with instructions for her sister-in-law to give it to the twins now. When she turned to go into the rondoval she was startled... as she hadn't noticed the old man sitting there when she went in the tuck shop. He was a tall man with comfortable clothing for the heat normal in this area. His face was framed in shaggy, longish, silver-grey hair and a long dark-streaked beard. Somehow he didn't look unkempt; it seemed to suit him well..... he had a presence about him that seemed to bring an unusual peace. Thinking it would not be good to sit with a stranger, she turned to begin her walk home when she heard him call her name.

"Mary, why don't you come and sit a while?"

His voice was kind and gentle but had an authority that invited obedience. Her mind raced trying to place who he was and how he knew her name. As Mary sat down beside the old man, she was taken by the depth of character she could see in the face before her, and when she looked into his eyes, it felt like she was looking into deep pools of gentleness, with features accented by deep wrinkles and darkened skin, like old leather which seemed to speak of a life-time spent in the hot African sun.

"You are so tired, dear child. Why not rest a while?"

Mary almost cried when she heard the kindness in his voice. She was so tired and her foot was throbbing as she tiredly replied, " Bambo, I can't. My children are so sick and I have to go home."

"I'm sure they will be ok with their Auntie. She cares much for those two boys."

Mary was taken aback. How did this old man know her sister-in-law was with her children and how did he know they were boys? He looked kind and... ..it would feel so good to rest just for a few minutes. She had walked the distance so many times but her swollen foot now demanded attention which meant money for the clinic officer to cut it out, money she didn't have. It would have to wait. She was exhausted the days and nights of caring for the twins, her strength was drained away.

"So Bambo, how did you know my name, who was with my boys and even that I had boys? " she asked with a tired voice. She was perplexed and even a bit defensive....

The old man smiled and replied, "Mary, is that really what you would like answered? Perhaps there are more troubling things you would like to share? "

"What do you mean?" she shot back becoming a bit more upset. What right did he have to be asking her anything?

"Dear child, I don't mean to upset you. You have questions that are troubling your heart deeply, such as why has your Heavenly Father forgotten you? Why have your prayers not been heard and answered? Why have you have felt so alone when you know you love Yesu? Why has he allowed this dark season of doubts? You know your husband loves you and it's pretty normal for boys to be sick when they have measles and teething at the same time. Even your friends have been bringing cooked dishes to help out, so why do you feel your father has forgotten you? "

Mary's mouth dropped open with surprise...how did he know these things and why did he keep calling her 'dear child?' Mary was no longer tired and she even forgot about the throbbing of her foot.

The old man went on to say, "You have loved Yesu since you were a little girl and now you wonder if the Father even cares about you. You even feel bad for having those thoughts."

Mary's eyes began to fill with tears and her throat started tightening up. "Abambo, who are you?" she stammered in a quiet voice.

"Mary, it doesn't matter who I am but it does matter that you have an answer to your question, don't you think?"

Mary knew that was the most important thing was the question he was referring to and the desperation she had been going through because of it... " Yes, that is what matters most, it's true."

The old man then asked her, "Mary, if someone was telling you they would kill you if you didn't turn away from Yesu, would you do it?"

Mary didn't pause for even a moment before answering, "No, I would not do it. He is so good and he loves me so much!"

The old man smiled, his deep brown eyes sparkling even more. "I know that Mary. What if they tortured you and were very cruel? What would you do?"

Mary paused and then quietly said, "Steven was stoned and so many Christians have died different terrible ways. I believe Holy Spirit would be giving me the grace to stay strong even in those

circumstances.” She went on, “ Even if I failed and denied him, he still loves me so much he would forgive me. I know that!”

The old man put his arm on the back of the bench towards Mary and touched her shoulder very gently saying, “Mary, what if it were your two little boys ? Would you still believe Holy Spirit would give you that grace?”

Mary’s eyes widened and fear stunned her senses. She shuddered! She had just had a flash of memory about a story told her years before, how a mother had been made to watch her three boys be fried on a large, red-hot steel-plated altar... screaming, struggling against their bonds... their skin tearing off as it stuck to the ungreased surface....then silence, broken only by the sizzling and sickly stench which filled the temple. Even the ones who had killed so cruelly were no longer laughing as the horror of what they had done came to them through the grisly scene that they now witnessed. The leader was a man well-schooled in torturing those who claimed to follow this one called the son of God, yet even this evil man had the question, how could the woman watch her children suffer so and even when she was put on the altar she did not cry or murmur... all because she would not turn away from the one she claimed was her savior..... she herself then hurled on the same altar of hate as her children, her flesh bursting into flame and yet .... just eyes of mercy as she looked towards her persecutors, a gentle smile where there should have been terror and screams!

Mary’s shoulders heaved, her heart pounding almost to bursting from her chest..... Why was this so real? Her senses screamed out... she experienced the terror... she could smell the burning flesh ...how did that woman....how could people be so cruel... who was this old man?

The old man placed his hand tenderly on her shoulder again and Mary felt peace flow sweetly through her whole body. She had never experienced such safety and well-being. The old man spoke quietly as if just for her to hear.

“Mary, that woman you were just thinking about was forced to watch her boys die so horribly. She had no choice.”

Mary nodded her head... still feeling the peace flow through her.

“Another parent, a father, had a choice when he watched his only begotten son be betrayed, beaten, whipped, and mocked, finally an unrecognizable pulp of broken, bloody flesh, and cruelly nailed to a cross... displayed for all to see his agony and aloneness.” The old man was weeping openly now, his voice breaking. “That father could have sent thousands of angels at a moment’s notice to stop all of it..... but he didn’t. He loves each of his children that much! It doesn’t matter if they love him or even if they deny him. He still loves them. Because of his love, all can come through the son .. if they are willing.” The old man paused, “The father watched it all, his heart breaking as only one of such great love could do.”

Mary smiled through the engulfing peace and love that poured over and through her... there were no questions left unanswered except.... Who was this old man and how had he known so much about her?

The old man stood up as if to go, looking deeply into her eyes. “Dear child, we must not forget the Son. He could have called those angels as well and he didn’t.”

He turned his face from her his eyes looking somewhere far away. “Even now the Son waits. Do you see? Look... a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war.

His eyes are like a blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.

The armies of heaven are following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.

Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter.’ He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS...”

Mary burst into tears of thankfulness, her eyes filling, her head bowed. When she stopped sobbing she was alone with only a package on the bench where the old man had been sitting. Her name was on the package! ‘My Dear Child Mary,’ it read. She was alone... but not alone ever again. Mary did not realize until she was putting on her new beautifully tooled leather sandals, even her foot was healed.

As she hurried home to see how her boys were doing, she met them running towards her with shouts of joy as only her boys could make. Mary found her husband at home waiting with a story of how he caught more fish than he had ever caught and even had to call to his friends to help draw in the net.

So friends...does it matter who the old man was or even is? Perhaps it is more important to know the great love our Father in Heaven has for each of his children...you and I.

What an incredibly wonderful Father.... Abba Daddy with thanksgiving Will Phillips April 19, 2014  
Bible quotes from the New International Version.