

Saturday 8th September 2018



Give thanks to the Lord

Ten years ago this week, I arrived in The Gambia, West Africa, to work as a teacher with the Methodist church. It was a very different world to the one I was used to and yet I came to love the people. It took a lot of adapting to – getting up at 5.00am to collect water, cold showers, dusty roads and open sewers. Yet nothing reached me more than going into schools to teach – 70 children in a class, not enough chairs and tables (and those that were there were falling apart), not enough paper or pencils, many children without shoes.

The people I met every day, often very poor people, were also the happiest people that I have ever met. Life is a privilege, not a right. These people taught me about life, faith, hope and about God. One of the biggest lessons I learnt was true humility – no matter how little these people had, they still gave some of that to help someone less fortunate than themselves. No matter how little food they had, they would share it with anyone who came around. No matter the day they had, the challenges they faced, they always praised God for the day and found something to be thankful for. They often sang 'suma Yalla bana' (Wollof language, meaning 'my God is good') or 'una Alla bettay yatta' (Mandinka for 'my God is good').

Our hymn books are full of hymns giving thanks to God, and I like to try and read or sing one every day to remind me that no matter what my life is like at the time, there is always something to give thanks to God for. Some of my favourites include: 'Give thanks with a grateful heart' (Don Moen), 'Give thanks to the Lord' (Chris Tomlin), and 'This is the day that the Lord has made' (Les Garrett). Alternatively, read Psalm 118, which many of these hymns are based on. All of them give thanks to God for the wonder of life.

*Gracious God,
I give you thanks for this new day, for all its joys and challenges
I give you thanks for life in all its fullness
I give thanks for the blessings that I have in my life
I ask that you help me to find the blessings amongst the challenges,
the joys amongst the sorrows, the hope in the shadows
That I may spend every day singing praises and thanks to you
God of all blessings, Creator of all life
I praise and thank you
Amen*

Photo: Claire in The Gambia learning a traditional piece of music, song and dance of thanks with some Gambian women (© Claire Rawlinson)

Prayers for September written by Claire Rawlinson