

Dear Friends and Family,

May Grace and peace be yours in full measure (1 Peter 1:2). Greetings from warm Africa. It seems strange that most of you have experienced warmer weather than we have during the month of July. We are in the rainy season which helps cool things down. Don't worry, fall is around the corner for you and we will climb back into the hot and dry season.

No repeat of the month's news is complete without a mention of the Fourth of July, at least for the Americans in the audience. This used to be a big family tradition for my father's family, one of two when most of the cousins and uncles and aunts came together. The weather was warm and there were games to play on the farm, maybe even a wade in the branch down in the woods. Lemonade and fried chicken and watermelon... Wow, I managed to make myself hungry and homesick at the same time.

My late wife was one to try to keep traditions alive, even though our African friends and family may not have fully understood our holidays. I could never recreate the big events as she could, but we could and did break out the grill for hotdogs with trimmings. This has to be one of the kids' favorite memories. Any time they can mix fire and food is a magical moment. Even without the fireworks, we had a good time.

I always use the holiday (hence the value of traditions) to try to talk about the folks that sacrificed so much so that we could enjoy a measure of political freedom. Some years I have read aloud the account of what happened to the men who gathered in Philadelphia that warm July so many years ago. I was fortunate to have visited Independence Hall where the Declaration of Independence was debated and agreed upon, forever changing world history. In the actual site, it was easy to imagine those who pledged, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, their lives, fortunes and sacred Honor. What an extraordinary group of people, and how much we owe them.

When I think of them, I also am drawn to remember those who have sacrificed so that we may enjoy spiritual freedom, something to be treasured even more. Those who taught and nurtured us in God's Word, those restoration and reformation preachers, those martyrs of the centuries, and most of all Jesus Himself. Where would we be without them. What a debt we owe to countless unknown heroes.

You are to be included in that group, that special blend of men and women who have committed to supporting the sharing of God's love through us to so many. I want to believe some of what we may do in Heaven is going around and learning of those who sowed seeds of blessings in our lives, then having the chance to sincerely thank them.

We have been here 29 years, years of toil and struggle. Yet through this all we have recognized the life sustaining blessings that God provides through you. The only meaningful way I know how to say thank you is to try to make good and prudent use of your gifts of friendship, to bless the lives of as many as possible, especially the orphaned and widowed. Thank you all sincerely.

The events of the month were many, some good and some bad. The best of the good was the beginning of our work together with Br. Edem and his family. They have had to courage to come and begin with such a young and less mature congregation. This was after leaving serving a congregation of 300 members in Lagos. While we have half that number, many are children or young adults or widows or very poor families. We pray for growth and maturity and that this humble beginning will continue to increase to the Glory of God.

We were blessed to welcome three new sisters to our midst. That is always a happy occasion, witnessing the courage and obedience of those who want to turn their lives over to God to redeem and direct. Two young women in their twenties and one single mom with small children confessed their faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah, and were immersed in the watery grave of baptism. The seed of God's Word had been planted in their hearts over quiet a period of time, before bearing the intended fruit. Please pray for sisters Grace, Mercy and First, and for the small congregation that meets in our home.

One of the things we enjoy doing is having a meal together after services, for those who choose to participate. This month we left our usual meal of rice and stew and had sandwiches instead. It's all hands on deck early Sunday as we made over 150 sardine or corn beef sandwiches plus boiling 180 eggs. It's a joy though to work together for a common good. For the past weeks the boys and I also have to go and rent a tent and chairs to add on to our overcrowded space. So even though I am not preaching each Sunday, the day is still long and tiring.

We have also started having two children's classes, one older and one younger. Maybe soon we can further divide the groups into smaller and age appropriate groups. Nkiru really enjoys seeing the littlest ones learn about Jesus.

Brother Edem came at the first of the month to begin his work, while his wife and children stayed in Lagos to wrap up the school year. This gave us the chance to prepare their apartment, including painting, electrical, etc. Chidebem, our son in law, with a little help from myself and others, managed to build beds for all, a dining table and chairs, kitchen shelves, and a desk/bookcase for the preacher. I am glad to be teaching and mentoring Chidebem to be able to gain various skills to be able to work with his own hands to help himself and others. We were blessed to have caught in time an electrical fault that could have proved fatal, as electricity was merging with the children's shower. This did prove to be fatal to one long term missionary in Ghana, so we are glad this was not repeated.

We had a series of break ins in Br. Edems new apartment, one of many temptations I know the devil will throw at him to discourage him in the new work. We were perplexed as to how anyone could get in after we had put in new locks, etc. Finally the thief tipped her hand, a young girl living next door, who had found a small crack in the iron bars on the window to slip through. Hopefully these ugly events will not repeat, though one has to always be on alert.

Our kids were able to successfully finish another school year. Our high school seniors finished their last exams this week, and those entering junior high finish theirs today. We will have a little over one month break before those early morning school runs have to start again. We are thankful for each achievement, each mile stone that becomes a part of our family history. Gold took first place in her grade level in both math and science. Others did equally as well, while some less so.

One thing our older kids faced, as have many here, was a severe case of malaria and typhoid. Nkiru's aunt and uncle came for a visit, and he became so ill he had to be hospitalized. It was like covid in that our younger ones were not much affected, but in the older ones it was pretty severe. Please continue to pray for our health.

Please also pray for our safety, as the country continues to face security challenges. Even in areas that were considered safe before, things are happening that threaten the solidarity of the country. Our own area has been quieter than most, for which we are thankful.

Please also join us to thank God for delivering grandson Marvelous from death. On his way to Sunday worship, the five year old left his uncle's hand to cross by himself and stepped right in front of a car. Fortunately, the car was being driven by a police officer and he was not speeding. Marvelous escaped with severe scrapes and bruises, but after a night in the hospital for observation, he rejoined the family hopefully a bit wiser. This was not the case for the person brought by police while we were in ER. Beaten by unknown persons, he died just a few feet from us. One family wept, one rejoiced in deliverance.

I have been invited to speak at the 68th annual lectureship at the Nigerian Christian Bible College. This is a series of Bible lessons and sermons for all ages, attended by the thousands. Please pray for us as we speak on the 11th of August on the subject of the Truths of Christ's Victory over Death. Such an important topic as a part of the themed lectureship on Timeless Truths for Troubled Times. Please pray for our safety over a dangerous stretch of road, and that we may be faithful stewards of God's Word.

Again, we thank you so much for your participation in this work. Every day you sow seeds in the lives of others. I know times are more difficult for all of us now, and likely to get worse before it gets better. Common food items are often triple the cost, fuel costs as well. This makes things more challenging as we try to make do with whatever we are blessed with. One of our American friends left recently after 27 years here, lamenting that things are not the same here. Well, we all know this is not our home and that we are trying to be faithful in whatever circumstance we face.

May the Lord strengthen us all as we seek to do His will together. May He grant you peace and strength. We love you and appreciate you more than we can say.

Love,

Cliff, Nkiru and Family