

September 1, 2009

"Thou Shalt Not Inherit"- Ocan Emma

In the book of Judges chapter 11, God gives us the story of Jephthah, the son of an harlot. Judges 11:2 says, "...and they thrust out Jephthah, and said, Thou shalt not inherit in our Father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman." But God's Spirit came upon Jephthah and God used him to deliver Israel from the children of Ammon (Judges 11:29-33). Jephthah's story reminds me of Ocan Emmanuel, one of our smallest orphans. "Emma" is around 10 years old and very small in body, but he is a handsome and intelligent child. Anyone who visits us is attracted to Emma. He is little, but surprises visitors with very good English and many questions.

These past weeks have been the holiday break between terms 2 and 3 for school for our orphans. We usually take the children to spend some days with their relatives in their village, but because of a serious famine in our area, we have taken the children for a day visit, and given them food to give their relatives, and passed out Gospel tracts. Every time we have holiday visits, although we take all the other children to their villages, Emma is always taken by an "uncle" that lives close-by in town. We don't know where he takes Emma, and it is hard to get Emma back. Emma asked our head-mistress, Pamela Wieler, if she would take him to give his grandmother food in the village. Emma didn't know how to get to his village because he had not been there in years, but he said it was in Gweri county. It seemed odd that the uncle had never taken him there, but this past Friday, Pam, Milton (our national pasotor) and I took him along with other children to Gweri.

We stopped several places, and Milton would talk to people to see if they could give us information. Finally, we stopped on the path we were driving on, and as we got out to talk to people, a woman came running up and grabbed Emma up in her arms crying, "Ocan, Ocan!" We seemed to be in the right place! It turned out that this was a neighbor lady who directed us to an uncle's home. A girl from this place became our guide, and we finally arrived at the compound where the grandmother was staying.

As I drove up in my truck, we saw an old woman sitting in front of a mud hut, she was surprisingly quick as she jumped up to run away! When we got out, some other people came up as we tried to approach the old lady. Milton spoke to her in Ateso, and she said that she was afraid to see white people. I asked if she had ever seen white people, and she said that it had been a long time. She was now calm, but did not seem excited to see Emma. We tried to explain that this was her daughter's son. Little Emma carried the heavy bags of food into her hut along with some soap, sugar and salt, and we passed out tracts, but the grandmother showed no emotion for Emma. Soon more people were there and the "chairman" of the clan spoke to Milton in Ateso.

The chairman gave us Emma's sad story. This was indeed Emma's mother's village, but Emma's mother had been 'wife' to a man from Dakabela. She lived in Dakabela with him and had four children, then the man died of AIDS. When the man died, they "chased" her from Dakabela. She went to Serere close to Lake Kyoga to try to support herself with fishing. Emma was born in Serere. Emma's mother died, and they tried to send Emma to the man's village in Dakabela. The family refused to take Emma and said he was not their father's son.

Emma was taken to his mother's village. The grandmother we had just met also refused to take Emma. It was the wife of an older brother to Emma's mother that finally took pity for and started caring for Emma. Just as the chairman told us this, he pointed to an older woman standing behind us. It was this woman who had brought Emma to our orphanage in 2005.

Then the chairman gave us some good news. He said that since the people in Dakabela had chased Emma's mother and refused Emma, Emma's grandfather (father to his mother) had declared that Emma was a son of

their village and had given Emma land before he died. As we drove away from the grandmother's home, the girl who was our guide showed us the land that belonged to Emma. Emma was sitting with other boys in the back of my truck, and we showed him his land. As I looked in my rearview mirror, I could see a big smile on Emma's face. Emma had finally found his home.

Emma's smile warmed my heart as I thought about the blessing Emma would be to his village in the future. The next day, Saturday, I was visiting some people in Palisa. With Emma's smile still burning in my heart, I told them his story. As

I was finishing my story, one of the men asked, "What did you say his name was?" I responded, "Ocan." He seemed shocked and asked me again. "Ocan," I said again. "Do you know what that means?" he asked. "No," I said. Then this Ateso young man explained that Ocan means "trouble/bad times" in Ateso. Emma's mother had named him Ocan! When I told Pam this she said, "Oh, Phyllis, but think about 'Emmanuel,' God is with us in bad times. Phyllis, do you think his mother knew what Emmanuel means?"

I don't know if Emma's mother knew what Emmanuel means. Emmanuel is a very, very common boy's name here. But God knows!

Please pray for Emma's village. We passed out tracts, and I plan to go out and teach children the Christmas story during our next holiday.

Pray for Emma's grandmother to be saved.

Pray for all the villages of our children. Pray for their relatives to be saved. (If you would like to see a picture of Emma with his grandmother, go to www.tellafrica.org/pamela/photos)

God is with us in bad times,

Phyllis Hall