

Hope's Promise Kenya Short Term Mission
March 28-April 10

Part 4

Sacred Wrestling:

Mother Teresa's Home for Abandoned Children of Huruma, Kenya

She gave birth to a baby boy. Then she tucked him into a black plastic bag, placed the bundle on a trash heap, and walked away.

Why?! Why would a mother do this? It is the cry that sears a heart, a watershed line carved into a child's first breaths. Answers are as elusive as the woman who was swallowed back that day into the murky maze of a developing world slum.

A "Good Samaritan" somehow discovered the discarded package while there was still life within. He took the baby to a police station. Later that day an officer rapped on the giant blue metal gate of Mother Teresa's. A tiny nun named Sr. Stansalata received the newborn, washed him in the waters of baptism, and gave him the dignity of a name. For 15 months, he was one of many passed through the assembly line of institutional care: sleeping, feeding, and bathing. Then, he was adopted.

His adoptive mother vowed from the beginning to tell him the truth. She had no idea how she would survive that bitter day when it came, how to wound the heart of one so loved. He asked the pointed questions on a long car ride when he was only ten. The answers could only be lies, or the truth. Her heart accelerated as she realized the day she always dreaded had suddenly crashed upon her, the day for which she could never be prepared. As gently as possible, she told him the naked truth. He didn't cry; he didn't even seem horrified. Calmly, he asked question after clarifying question as if it was a news report about some distant event. But the following week, all hell broke loose. He began to wage a mighty war to somehow integrate the inconceivable. It is a long hard road, but healing pushes through like fragile yellow-green sprigs nourished by dark black soil.

Two years later, she asked him how much of his story she could share as she prepared for a presentation in which she would try to make a far-away place real to people sitting safely in church pews. He was quiet and thoughtful, and then he said, "You can tell about everything. God used the awful things that happened to make us into a family. Other people need to know what happened to me so that they will care about other kids in my situation."

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There is a little baby boy at Mother Teresa's. When an STM member finds him, he is wet. Unfortunately, he isn't in the part of the assembly-line-day that deals with bathing. She cradles him in her arms and realizes he won't be clean unless she herself takes action. The workers bring supplies to her. In her family, for

generations, children have been received as precious gifts. She treasures memories of reverently bathing her own three children. Slowly and carefully, she washes and dries the tiny body. And she worships.

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A journal entry from Tuesday, April 3, 2012, by STM member Wynne Lee about serving at Mother Teresa's:

Because we were stuck in traffic for over an hour, we missed the opportunity to be with the babies and toddlers. Instead, we spent our time with the disabled children. It was lunch time, organized chaos. My group was told to wait; but after a few minutes, we couldn't help ourselves. We split up and started to help. The workers welcomed it, so we were given porridge-filled cups to feed the children, one at a time.

My gaze fell on a boy who was sitting in a chair, covered in thick blankets. He was tiny with a loud, tearless cry. He was ignored by the workers, who pushed his chair to the side when they needed to get by. I went over and stroked his tiny face. His head was turned at a severe angle to the right, his eyes fluttered and rolled back. His cry worsened with each violent facial tick. Was he seizing?

Unsure of what I was allowed to do, I talked to a worker, and she handed me a cup of porridge and told me to feed him. I hesitated, and her response was to hand me a spoon, as if that would help me feel comfortable feeding a child who would have benefited from a feeding tube. After one failed attempt of what was at best a force-fed spoonful of porridge that ended up on his blankets, I hid the cup under his chair and began to pull back his blankets to clean his chin. And then I saw it. He was tied to the chair.

I spread his blankets on my lap, untied him, loosely swaddled him, and cradled him in my arms. He was so light. His body relaxed as I rocked him, and he twitched less. His head lolled back over my left arm, his eyes staring blankly. Brother Titus, another volunteer from a monastery in Nairobi, invited me to sit with him in the sun. He was more patient and kinder than the other workers. He told me the child I was holding is named "Sacramento", and I thought it was weird that a child would be named after a city, but then realized his name means "blessed or sacred".

Sacramento was skinny all around and no more than 3 feet long. His wrist was the thickness of two of my fingers. His hands were closed in

tight fists, a sign of severe mental retardation. When I opened them slightly, there were sores on his palms. He was sensitive to touch and flinched violently when I accidentally bumped his tiny foot on the chair. He had all his baby teeth and nails. His neck and back were turned at a grotesque angle. Sacramento is only 7 years old. It was really hard to let him go when I had to leave.

Every day we were challenged to go out and seek out the face of Jesus in the people we met, and to be the hands and feet of Jesus. I saw Jesus in Sacramento's face. It was only by God's strength that I got through the morning without crying in front of Sacramento. It was only by God's love that I touched his face without fear of contracting an exotic disease. It was only by God's compassion that I witnessed another person's deep suffering and prayed for him and the mother who had to leave him. How much she must have suffered when she had to make such a difficult choice. It was only by God's mercy that I stopped judging the workers with my Western eyes, to see how hard they work to get food into each child's belly and to understand that Sacramento was tied so that he wouldn't aspirate while eating in a prostrate position. And it's only by God's urging that I continue to remember this passage of hope: "Not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. ~Joshua 23:14"