

thewhitesinspain

March 2016

Dear St James,

It seems like a year since I last wrote to you as so much has happened! I was in India for most of January whilst Liz went back to Spain with her mum and the boys. Since getting back from India we have been busy planning the move to Granada, tying up loose ends with the ministry here, Liz had a 5 day trip to the Liverpool for a women's conference and we have all had the obligatory Spanish spring flu.

Freedom Encounter

For 3 ½ weeks in January I was based in India taking part in a course called 'Freedom Encounter'. We were based in Kolkata (formally Calcutta) and also travelled to remote rural areas in West Bengal State right on the Ganges river border between India and Bangladesh. I joined 14 other delegates from around the world all whom had the same interest in human trafficking prevention and using business as a vehicle for development amongst some of the poorest people on the planet. We were based with an incredible organisation called Freeset www.freesetglobal.com which was started about 20 years ago by a couple from New Zealand called Kerry & Annie Hilton. They had moved as missionaries to Kolkata with a young family and found themselves living in Sonagatchi, one of the largest red light districts in Asia where over 20,000 trafficked girls work in an area of 1 square km. Some as young as 12 have to sell themselves 30-40 times a day for as little as 20 pence alongside being subjected to the most horrific abuse and violence. Kerry realised that the problem is an economic one, where families are forced to sell their own daughters into this world just so their other children won't starve. An economic problem needs an economic, sustainable, solution so they started a business making jute bags, which are a local speciality. This grew and now they have businesses making tee-shirts, a whole range of bags, hand woven scarves and fabrics, as well as helping others set up a leather business, bags from recycled sari's and business making handmade paper books. They currently employ close to 1000 ladies across all these businesses but their goal is to give work to all 10,000!! The goal is freedom not rescue. If they just went in and removed the girls more would be trafficked to take their place. These ladies stay living in the brothels, the only world and family they know. The difference is they now work in a job that pays well, is safe, gives them a pension and health care as well as dignity. There are now brothels where most of the women living there work for Freeset. Alongside this they educate the women (most whom are illiterate in their mother tongue and therefore are easily exploited), provide group counselling and restoration sessions held in the factories in their work rooms amongst their new family. There is no distinction between life and church – which I love. There is no Sunday church as every day they live church and community and the majority of these amazing women have encountered Jesus.

Stopping the Flow

When they researched where most of the girls were trafficked from a huge percentage came from a region in North West Bengal. So Freeset have gone there and are opening businesses to stop the flow at source. They are bringing hope, future, good employment and education to a part of the world totally forgotten. For me it was incredible to meet so many people, a large number from New Zealand, who had given up security, jobs, friends, comforts to give their lives to serve the poor. For me it is the purest form of Christianity I have ever seen in my life and confirmed to me so much I have believed and wanted to see lived out for most of my life. Jeremiah 22:16 says, *'He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?'* declares the LORD.' For me it was life-changing and I will never forget the things I saw and heard nor the people I met. The issue of human trafficking and slavery is such an offence to God and our generation will be held to account for what we do about it. I am praying about what this means for us personally moving forward. I have a greater commitment than ever to work with the poor both in India but also here in Spain where I saw so many parallels with the work in Naquera and countless other forgotten places in this country.



Above: Some of the amazing people I met on Freedom Encounter



Right: Reminding the Indians who invented the game!

Moving Mountains

Over Christmas the situation with the house purchase got very exciting! Whilst we were praying around the house back in June with my friend Dave he got the word 'God says Happy Christmas', we felt something would happen to change the situation over Christmas. A few days before Christmas we received news that we had been given almost half the money we need to buy the house and the offer for a bridging loan for the rest while our house sale in the UK goes through! So God has taken us from 0 to the 200,000 we need since when we saw the house in June!! Whilst I was in India I made an offer to the vendor and we negotiated a price of 200,000 (15,000 under the asking price). We have been in dialogue with the owner during this year and he knows our desire and commitment to buy. 3 weeks ago I instructed a lawyer to start formalising the purchase as our moving date is now very close. Then 2 things happened 1) The Euro which had been at a 10 year low against the pound shot up 10% due to the Britex referendum and Boris Johnson's backing of the yes campaign – effectively increasing the price by 20,000 2) The owner phoned me and said the Spanish capital gains tax law had just changed and that he now needs to increase the sale price by 40-50,000! So suddenly, just as the impossible became possible and we are about to realise our dream, it vanishes in 24 hours as we would need to find another 60-70,000!!

What is the vision?

It was a time for re-evaluation and reflection. We don't listen to mans report, to the politicians or what the markets say because we have a higher word and if Our God says 'yes' then that's where we put our trust. It was especially hard for me coming from one of the poorest places on the planet working with people whose dream is not to have to sell their bodies to feed their children. Here am I upset because our dream house my no-longer be ours. God knows I would happily live in a slum for the rest of my life and actually that's where I feel most at home. But this house was never about us wanting to improve our standard of living. This house is holy and a place where God wants us to host people in His presence and to be a centre for hope, healing and transformation for many people. It is to be a light on a hill, a house of prayer and worship and a home that is open to anyone. This is what we are contending for. So we prayed that the man would change his mind. The next day he came back and said he would be happy with 212,000!! Amazing turn around, so we start to move forward until he says, obviously he would want us to declare a sale price of 190,000 and pay 20,000 extra in cash!! Although illegal, this is standard practice in Spain and even our lawyer had no problem but it was a definite 'no' for us. We were offered our dream again but only if we compromise our integrity. It was a painful test but one we had to get right, we can't start something new with our first act being compromise. We are called out of the culture and way of this world to represent something higher. John 16:33 says, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take*

heart! I have overcome the world." It was very painful with a lot of tears shed especially as the boys were sick with flu and obviously being very demanding and needy, unaware of what was going on.

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies!

So the sale is off unless we comply with this request. The weekend was coming and I asked the lawyer to see if the vendor would reconsider his position. The lawyer phoned me on the Tuesday morning, after the weekend, to say that after having his house on the market for years with no interest suddenly someone in the same town with a flat for sale (which is what he is wanting) saw his house on Friday, likes it and they will do a house swap plus the exchange of some 'black money' which is the perfect scenario for the owner. The sale is off but this time someone else has the house!! Wow! What do you do when God makes the impossible possible only for it to become impossible once more? We were confused but knew it has never been in our control and God hasn't brought us this far for no reason. God spoke to me about 3 days that the house dream needs to die and go to the grave for 3 days before he will resurrect it. So we waited for 3 days, praying for God to intervene but also resting knowing that only He can change this situation. Friday morning we prayed with Dave & Kelly (the couple moving with us) and prayed against corruption, and that this deal would fall through. 30mins later, exactly 3 days after the deal was off the owner contacted me to say this house exchange plan had fallen through!!! Amazing!! But we are not there yet! As I write this the owner has said he doesn't want to sell to anyone as it won't work for him financially. We felt we should look around at other options just to push doors and see if God had something hidden He wanted to now reveal. However there is nothing that comes close, nothing that wouldn't be a huge compromise to everything God has said to us.

What now?

We have had several prophetic words about Noah, who planed and worked towards an event that seemed impossible without knowing when it would happen. We feel we have to be prepared so we are currently packing up the house and planning to leave Puzol shortly. It feels like we have jumped from the plane and the ground is approaching quickly and as yet the parachute has not opened. We just want to find God's will in this, we aren't against renting first for a short period, if we can find somewhere, but even this is difficult and very complex logistically, especially regarding schools. We would value your prayers for this. There are many things working against us; a spirit of confusion, greed, corruption and an enemy who doesn't want us the move there. I don't see demons behind every rock but have seen enough to know we are at war! Our close friends who moved to the area last year have had health problems, a very serious car crash with their 3 kids, and other struggles and battles. Spain is a sleeping giant and we can't expect to start waking it without a fight! Alongside all of this we have a God who is committed to preparing us to move into our calling and destiny. I felt Him say to me, 'these are the pains before the birth!' How we walk this in faith is laying a foundation for what He wants to do when we arrive there. I have always been convinced by this, you can't lead someone somewhere you haven't been yourself and you have to live what you confess or its just empty words.

Please pray!

All we want is to see God move in this broken country, to make ourselves available for Him and to say 'Yes' to Him whatever He calls us too. To give some context to how dark the current atmosphere is in Spain; in Valencia our city and also state, 100% of the People's Party politicians, the previous ruling party, are being investigated for fraud and corruption. That's 100%!! The party has now had to hire an administrator as there is no one left to run the organisation. These are not people who built duck ponds with expenses, we are talking millions or billions of Euros stolen from the taxpayers. It's into this world that Jesus wants to come and why He has us, and many others, here at this time. It's an honour and a privileged and we expect great things from Him!!

God bless you and thank you for being a part of this,

Love Chris, Liz, Leo & Samuel