

Masanja Goes to Dar es Salaam (story in context)

By Rev. Joseph G. Healey, M.M.

One particular Friday in late March the Christians of Mtakuja Small Christian Community (SCC) in Western Tanzania met to pray together. After the *Bible Service* Peter the SCC leader said, "We are accustomed to have a "Teaching" after the

Bible

sharing. But Easter is drawing near. Therefore I will tell the story of Masanja, a Sukuma who lived in Maswa in Shinyanga Region. After getting married and building a new house Masanja got many difficulties. His wife ran away, his youngest child died suddenly, his house fell down and thieves stole all of Masanja's cows. Suddenly he was a beggar. He thought he had been bewitched.

Masanja started to despair. But finally he decided to leave Shinyanga Region, that is the interior of Tanzania, and go to the coast to the city of Dar es Salaam. He travelled as a beggar without clothes, without money, without anything.

After arriving in Dar es Salaam on the Indian Ocean Masanja started to get lucky. First he found work and a house. After a while he opened a store, then a small hotel. He began to make a lot of money. He built a permanent house that he rented. Then Masanja built a soft drink factory. Finally he became very rich with many possessions. But he didn't want to live in Dar es Salaam. So he returned to his home in Maswa in Shinyanga Region with great wealth -- a car, new clothes, many goods and a lot of money.

After telling this story Peter the SCC leader asked the community members, "What do you think? What does this story of Masanja remind us of?" Immediately a Sukuma woman answered, "This story is similar to a Sukuma riddle." She said, "I have a riddle," and Peter answered, "Let it come." The woman said, "*He went to the coast naked and returned fully clothed?*"

Groundnut

." Everyone laughed. Then other community members eagerly joined in the discussion. One woman said, "In my language Kinyamwezi we have a riddle that says:

You went far away; you returned with great wealth

? The answer is

millet

." A Ngoreme youth said, "I remember a riddle in my local language Kingoreme:

"I shot my arrow without feathers; it has returned with feathers?"

The answer is

runner bean

."

Another SCC member named William said, "I think the meaning of all these riddles resembles the example of the groundnut seed that is planted in the earth in order to later sprout. It grows inside of its shell. Afterwards the groundnut's flowers are showy and very beautiful. This example is also like a verse in Chapter 12 of *St. John's Gospel*: "Unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies it remains only a single grain, but if it dies it yields a rich harvest" (*John* 12: 24).

Then Peter said, "Good. We have heard a fine explanation. But there's still one more thing. Why have I told this story of Masanja near Easter Sunday?" For a while the SCC members were quiet. Then a widow named Modesta delighted the other Christians by saying, "The story of Masanja and the groundnut riddle and the example of the grain of wheat all resemble the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If a groundnut can be so changed surely the Son of God can rise from the grave in glory. The death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation of our Christian faith. In our everyday life we die and rise with him. Jesus Christ and we Christians too are like the seed that is buried in the ground before it can grow and bear fruit."

Immediately all the community members clapped for this widow. They recognized that she had touched the very heart of the Lenten season and the feast of Easter.

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