

Update from David Montgomery -Jan 2009

Hey everybody!

Hope this note finds you well, life here in Spain is moving along the way life does - picture the point of view of a caterpillar trundling along the window sill of a bullet train...something like that (that's something somebody else said one time that I really liked). The sun has been out a lot the last few days and today we all went out to the center of town for Festival San Valero (one of the many saints who have been deemed saintly enough to deserve special holidays to commemorate their lives). This particular occasion is important because it is on this day that families eat Roscón. Roscón is a fantastic kind of cake. The outside is a lot like shortcake or devil's food cake and in the middle there's a layer of cold whip cream-like frosting goodness. Not only do the families here order them from local bakeries and serve them for dessert at lunch, folks who deserve to be sainted themselves give the stuff out to the kids for free at the city center by the massive Basilica where we were! You should have seen the lines, it was like waiting to see Santa at Christmas...except without the crying kids and the crusty old man in a faded red suit and fraying beard that smells vaguely of cat pee. I should give you a second to get that image out of your head.

I spent the rest of the day playing Risk with Olivia, Jonathan, and David Tabiendo (ages 17, 12 and 8). Somehow Jonathan managed to hold Asia the entire game and, as empires tend to do, slowly enclosed the rest of us within the vice grip of world domination. I've been able to spend quite a bit of time with Sam's kids these past few weeks and this has been one of the many unexpected blessings of my time so far. So even as I am at once comfortable and concerned about the idea of living with an English speaking family (I don't get to practice Spanish as much as I would if my living situation was otherwise), I am certain that where I am fits into the story that God is telling here. A note about the language, I've signed up to take a three week Spanish course at the university here in Zaragoza. Three hours a day, five days a week...my brain is going to be mush and that's a good thing.

The church here is small (nine people last week), diverse (both racially and generationally), and inquisitive. Picture a big meal served around 2:30PM followed by some singing (Sam and the kids make up the worship band now though we hope Luis will step up to lead soon) and a bible study. Sam facilitates the discussion, guiding the group through a certain section of scripture with the hope that we might learn together how to see, speak, and live like the church God calls us to be. As I sat and watched, understanding and participating as I could in feeble Spanish, I felt the distinct sense there, right there in the living room, that a people emerged that was capable of enacting the story of Jesus Christ. What I mean is, a group of particular human creatures are learning how to hope together, to trust each other, to realize that there is nothing to fear. For the God in whose direction we blindly point tells us a story, calls us into the life of the crucified one whose broken body opens to the whole world the reign of God where, "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the

yearling together; and a little child will lead them."

All this might sound wonderful, inspiring, extraordinary and such. It would be easy to read something like that and wonder what is so special about this group. What is the method, the strategy, what is the leader like, who are these pious souls who have received God's story with such abandon? What makes them so special? Let me assure you, there is nothing special about this group. There is squabbling here, there is suffering, there is deception. One of the church members recently approached Sam because he was concerned that another younger member was being groomed to take over and felt resentful over the perceived favoritism. One of the Ecuadorian church members made a derogatory joke about Spanish culture in the presence of the only Spanish couple at the gathering. These are not extraordinary people. This is not an extraordinary church. Sam is not an extraordinary pastor (though he is one of the most gracious and humble pastors I have ever been around). But in no way are these affirmations of reality meant to diminish or clarify the fact that this body that meets in a living room has come to resemble a crucified God. For the life of Jesus was by no means exceptional (at least, not according to the generally accepted standards of successful exception). Rather it was and is a life lived resolutely towards the cross, the to-be-expected result of such a life. In his torturous death by crucifixion, Jesus declares that the reign of God has come to pass in this world. And the footprints leading away from that empty borrowed tomb declare that we need not fear each other, unexceptional though we may be.

Paz y amor,  
David