

July, 2015

Hello Fellow Travelers,

You and I are working in the company of men and women in the trenches of the fight for justice.



Thousands of boys – some as young as four – have been trafficked to serve as slave labor aboard crude wooden fishing boats on a vast lake. Their work begins before the sun is up and lasts for ten hours; with one small meal a day, they haul heavy nets and are forced to dive into the murky, parasite-infested water to untangle snagged netting. Injuries, illness and drowning are common.

My colleagues at IJM Ghana are here to stop it.

Because of them, a little boy who was trafficked into a life of hard labor while he was still in kindergarten is safe today, playing soccer and learning to read.

But what does this battle look like up close?

I've often told you that, for security reasons, there is much I can't share. **But today is different.**

Today I'm going to throw open the doors to our office and invite you inside. Today you will see what the hard work of justice looks like on a day-to-day basis.

It looks like tears sliding down the face of an American law student.

She has spent hours in the office poring through the case files of the rescued children, reading every detail of their stories, learning their faces and their names. Now she's actually here with them, standing at the back of the classroom in their aftercare home. The teacher asks a question, and a little boy – one of our little boys who was so recently a slave – raises his hand and gives the correct answer. Looking over his shoulder he beams at my colleague.



The fight for justice looks like an angry scar on the arm of another colleague. That's where a large chunk of flesh had to be cut out to remove a staph infection acquired after days out on the lake gathering evidence. But he's still here.



The battle against darkness looks like piles of receipts and reports carefully filed by an accountant who is often the first to arrive and usually the last to leave. She approaches her work with the precision of a quartermaster, because she knows that fuel for the rescue boats, the salaries of our social workers and lights in the office are all provided by gifts from countless individuals (including many of my fellow travellers). IJM takes that stewardship very seriously. And so does she.



Sometimes justice looks like an empty plate.

Faced with a seemingly impossible roadblock in our work, one of our directors felt it was time to fast and pray. And justice sounds like the ringtone on his cell phone when the call came in that same evening telling him the individual he had been praying about had undergone a sudden and miraculous change of heart.

Justice looks like hands folded in prayer around a conference room table every morning. It looks like tattered bibles opened. It sounds like voices raised in songs of praise.

Some nights, the battle for freedom looks like headlights reflected on the eyes of a weary but alert driver navigating craterous potholes on a rural road after nightfall. His day started at dawn, and he still has three hours of driving before he delivers us safely back to the office. Perhaps he has ferried colleagues to a meeting with officials in a distant town, or on an investigation, or maybe searching for families.



The man was once a taxi driver on the streets of Accra. One night he drove a foreign couple to a restaurant near their hotel. A friend of theirs had recommended him, and he had been taking them around town. They told him not to wait at the restaurant; they would walk back. Later that night the driver phoned them... just to be sure they had gotten back safely. The couple turned out to be the Director of IJM's newest office, and his wife. He recognized in that driver a selfless concern for others indispensable to this work. Now that driver sits at a desk next to mine.

Sometimes the work of justice tastes like birthday cake made by my roommate.

Wait, what? Seriously. And here's why.

These people have been tested. During the first operation they encountered an onslaught of darkness both physical and spiritual that could have torn our team apart for good – yet they came through. So it is vital that we celebrate and joke, share in laughter, struggles, birthday cake and prayer. The bonds must be strengthened. Because we will be tested again. And again.

Now, fellow travellers, look at the screen on which you are reading this. Refocus your eyes.

Do you see it... your face reflected in the screen? That's what justice looks like. You are taking the time to travel with me, amidst the thousand other things demanding your attention today. Allowing your heart to care about a little boy on a lake 6000 miles away.

“Akwaaba!” as they say here. “Welcome.”

Welcome to *your* office.

In joyful awe,

Bonnie