
Linnea's India Blog VI: Vellore

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Juliana addresses the assembly



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We awaken on our second morning to a light brown haze on the campus. It is Pongal - the Harvest festival - and a holiday has been declared. A cultural festival, it is observed in a somewhat more religious way by Hindus than by others. Everyone is decorating the front walk of their homes with a kollam - a design made in coloured rice. The festival lasts a number of days and today's observance is the burning of old waste to cleanse for the new year. We heard there was so much smoke in Chennai (the major city) that planes could not land and, in one case, a truck plunged into a train.

Our students are earnest and dedicated, and some are tired after a day of medical studies or work, but they are keen. We begin each day with a short worship, for which I am trying to choose songs that we all know. Some of that is old protestant hymns, some is American choruses from the '70's, sometimes I throw in a Linnea song or a world chorus, sometimes a Hillsong devotional. There is a ripple of laughter as I begin to lead "God is so Good" in Tamil. "What is so funny?" I ask, in a between-verse moment. I have had it sung and written for me, and I hope I am not turning it into some ridiculous ode to laundry or something. "Am I singing it wrong?"

No, they are just delighted that I am singing in their language. Laughter means happiness in this moment. I vow to get these lyrics in the vernacular (as they say here) of every state that we visit.

Juliana is our wise elder team member. She has a background in theatre arts and missions and she is the one who regularly says, in her rich Sierra Leone accent, "Don't get caught up in distractions: it's all about the Mission. Don't lose track of the Mission." For this reason, it was critical to me that she be on our team.

Asking participants to speak aloud in a group is impossible. It is not the Indian way - and many here are new to English and to public speaking. For some, the practice of speaking scripture aloud from memory is 100% new - and being publicly on the spot deeply stressful. We talk about this in our team meeting at night. Our style is very western: expecting interaction and extraversion and individual thinking and speaking. It is how we know that we are succeeding. It called to my mind a study I had just read before leaving Canada: for many language learners, there is a "silent period", when their parents and teachers may worry that the student is simply opting out but, in fact, they are taking it all in until they are ready to speak. We shift to asking them to work in pairs and it seems to work.

Next morning, Juliana returns from our session, beaming. "I was annoyed at you for suggesting that students should not be expected to speak out in our circle," she says to me, "but when I left it as an open invitation, they began to tell!"

At the end of our Mission 4 days, students are invited to sign up to tell one of the four scripture stories they have been working on. All four stories are told in the closing worship - with each person taking their own very unique style. A

young woman comes forward to tell the story of the Syro-Phoenecian Woman (who changes Jesus' mind) in her own Tamil - which means that she has stayed up late to re-learn it from the English worked on during the day. Her language rolls like a washboard, her hands dancing around her head like birds.

Ron has discovered his inner "evangelist" and is speaking with great vigour on stage about the power of sharing the Word by heart. David has become servant of all, assisting with set-up, whispering chords to Larry, photographing the students receiving their certificates of accomplishment - and of course drumming up a storm. Bonnie blesses us at the last with the story of a people called by God to the very edge of a precipice, and when logic and fear prevent them from daring to go any further - God pushes them.

They fly.

Linnea Good

"Enlivening Faith through Story and Song"

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Linnea Good

"Enlivening Faith through Story and Song"



Team Telling: Fay Lundin leads Lily & Margaret



CMC Allied Health Sciences



Linnea leading children singing at St. John's Church of South India (Sunday School)



The Mountains Above Vellore



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