

Wealth is an Inheritance

The road of the refugee may rise and fall but it levels the lives of those who walk it. In former days Nduka and Ikobi would be unusual companions. Now there was little to distinguish one from the other. Ikobi's tattered coat and shorts still suggested a more affluent way of life had once been his. As a secondary school teacher he had been able to attain comparatively high standards for himself, his wife and four children. He tried not to think of them. The pain was great – it hurt far, far more than the loss of all he once possessed. He had no idea where they were or even if they were still alive. Reports of rebel atrocities were heart-rending – almost unbelievable. Nduka, his companion on the road, still believed that his family had escaped ahead of him and he would find them in the camp. He had watched his small subsistence farm plundered by soldiers and only got away by running into the bush on all fours among the goats.

Ikobi and Nduka had walked together, mostly by night, keeping a distance from larger groups and finding shelter by day. There was rainwater to drink, but their meagre supply of bread and rice had not lasted. Hunger slowed them. They talk of many things on their slow journey, and of the Christian faith they shared.

'How can we love our enemies?' asked Nduka. 'There is so much hate in my heart.'
'And in mine,' replied Ikobi. 'But while it's there the wars will never stop. We have to try to love. Jesus was right. It's not easy. It took him to the Cross. But it didn't end there did it?'

Arriving at the camp there were still days of formalities to endure. Relief supplies had been ambushed and replacements had not arrived. Always, the word was 'wait'. The two men sat, in safety, just outside the wire, as emaciated as the crowds around them, staring into the treeless waste, ears closed to the constant sound of children crying, burial groups chanting, occasional gunfire, women shouting in the queue for the stand-pipe. Dust-laden air filled their mouths and noses.

Nduka went to join the queue for water. Hours later he returned. He offered the plastic bottle to Ikobi and watched him drink sparingly. Then, secretly he took some stale bread and a small parcel of cooked rice from under his shirt.

'Where did you get that?'

'A poor man has his ways.' replied Nduka, breaking the bread and offering half to Ikobi

'No. It's not even enough for you. You found it – you eat it.

Nduka squatted by his friend. He still held out the bread. 'Ikobi,' he said. 'Have we walked together and not learned? When I eat it all, you go hungry. When we share my food we are both blessed. When we have nothing we can still share it, and we will be rich. We will inherit the earth. Ikobi took the bread. The two men joined hands and wept for sadness, for joy, for hope. They had an inheritance that no war, hatred or revenge could take from them.