

*"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."* **Jesus, John 16**

"Despite everything that I have done wrong, and that has been done wrong to me, Jesus has been faithful. On *that* I depend - not my faithfulness to him." This was the summation of our late night visit with our Egyptian brother who was spending the night with us in order to make his morning appointment at the German Embassy in Athens the next day. A tragic divorce and custody struggle over two children were creating a complicated path for Majid to be close to his boys, as his ex-wife prepared to move back to Germany. Disappointment and hurt and loss and guilt were creased on his face - but also was the resolute hold on the One who stands by him during every moment of the dissolution of his marriage. And the divorce of what he thought his life would be. ***How can such a broken person be so strong - so determined - so clear minded?***

This month we have spent time with our ministry and refugee partners in Manchester and Birmingham, United Kingdom. We praised Jesus on how Daoud's seemingly unattainable asylum has made slow progress with the new immigration lawyer he has been able to engage (*with the financial help of a brother in the US - and that is a Holy Spirit story in and of itself*). But even more praise for how he discusses with Muslims in his housing project about the True Vine, in whom we have life. And how he continues to pray and imagine how he can proclaim the name of Jesus in his Iraqi hometown. We cried and praised Jesus how he is lifting our Iranian brother, Hassan, in Birmingham from indeterminate waiting for his asylum, to a new apartment with privacy and a job and close community of Iranians with whom he shares his faith in Jesus. And Jesus is revealing to Fazad how he can use him to work with immigration lawyers in Birmingham to translate for other Iranian asylum seekers and to assure them that they are truly seen and heard. Each of these have had relatively weak "grips" on The Vine over the last several years, but now admit that Jesus' hold on them has been unrelenting. Hasan shared with us over lunch, "I look now over my journey walking all the way from Iran, through Turkey into the Balkans, across Europe and then a boat across the English Channel...there is no question in my mind that Jesus has been with me every step. I know that now." ***How can such a journey be viewed as a privilege with the King of Heaven and Earth?***

One evening, we were presented before a Persian prayer group in Birmingham in order to be blessed and prayed over. Prayers of those that left everything in their home country. On our shoulders were the hands of those that had not held their Iranian families in years. Blessings for us to continue to serve the King who they

now know is their only hope. How can this be? ***How can so much suffering result in so much beauty?***

These experiences are revealing to us more and more that our teaching, our ministry and our projects are not the vine onto which people must hold in order to have life. But rather it is certainly Jesus of Nazareth and Heaven. Our mentoring and discipleship of these that we love must source from the bond that Jesus unrelentingly has with us. Therefore, please pray for our clarity of purpose with these that also need friends that do not let go of them as they move through each day in a new place.

May you rest in The Vine's mighty grip. And may you be available to encourage others in your world that are tired and discouraged and unsure if they can hold on. They may need to be reminded that their story is still being written....

Blessings, phil&rebecca

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Philip & Rebecca Jackson

"Blessed is the one whose trust is in the LORD, whose confidence is in him."  
Jeremiah 17:7