

JUST A POT OF GREEN STEW

BY TONY ALLMOSLECHER

A few years ago, I was in Chile. One particular day we went to a prison to preach, sing, perform dramas, and just share time with the inmates. As soon as we walked in, we could sense the oppressive atmosphere. Unlike an American prison, it didn't have cells, heat, television, recreation facilities, or running water (except for one pipe sticking out of the wall). It was very dark and depressing. There wasn't a cafeteria and the inmates only received what their families brought in.

Our program began, but the inmates didn't acknowledge our presence. No eye contact, no gestures - nothing. When we finished, we stood there wondering why nothing happened. Suddenly, one of the inmates stood right in front of me. Intently, he asked me if I would eat with him. At that moment, great fear swept through me as I realized I was being asked to eat something that was probably going to be just awful. We walked over to a small table and sat down. From under the table he pulled up a pot of green stew. As he opened the lid, the smell nearly sent me over the edge. I began to cry out to the Lord to protect my stomach and to dull my taste buds! Then the inmate took a spoon from his back pocket and handed it to me. I'm sure the spoon had not been washed in days. As I held the spoon, God held me and opened my eyes to a much bigger picture. It wasn't about me or my stomach, it was about being an example of acceptance, a picture of Jesus. It was about making the claims we had preached about real. It was about building bridges to this inmate for Jesus. It was coming to a better understanding of John chapter four, where Jesus challenges His disciples to eat the food that kept Him full, by finishing the Father's work and doing His will.

I took the spoon and dug in. I put the spoonful in my mouth and began to chew. The inmate was still looking at me earnestly. When I finally swallowed, he stood up and proclaimed to those within earshot, "Hey everyone, he's for real!" Then he turned to me and said the following words, "Now you can tell us about your Jesus." Later that day, we watched as seven inmates surrendered to Jesus. Incredible.

The world is watching. Never underestimate the impact our acceptance and eating food in another culture can have. Most of all, remember that you and I are making REAL the claims of Jesus.