

NEWSLETTER FROM SOUTH SUDAN 2

Mundri, 19 October 2013

Dear friends



Greetings from Mundri, where Andrew Poppe and I have now completed our first full week of teaching at Bishop Ngalamu Theological College – and we are glad of a rest day today! On Monday and Tuesday we each taught for six hours, 8.30 till 4.00 with one tea break and one lunch break. On Wednesday we taught only four hours, in the morning – “fellowship” happened in the afternoon - and on Thursday just two hours in the morning, as students had “manual labour” after lunch. On Friday, we taught for four hours but had a free double period before lunch (but I was marking student work). Neither of us has taught theology before, and some subjects are at the limit

of our range: Andrew is finding “OT Theology” hard going, and I have to work hard to prepare “OT Poetic Books” – I’ve hardly studied Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.

Here is the First Year class, considering the Book of Job. But we do have to go quite slowly, especially with the first year students, some of whom have extremely weak English – when they read the Bible (English NIV) aloud we find we have to explain several words in each verse. So there has to be lots of time for discussion and feedback from them. They are so keen to learn, it is really heart-warming: yesterday was a particularly hot and humid afternoon, with a Worship and Liturgy class, and I really felt after an exercise on writing their own Collect that they might have had enough (with half an hour to go) – so I suggested that might be enough for today...but the cry went up “Tell us more!”, so I took a deep breath and we embarked on the format for a Service of the Word.



My “extra” teaching slot on Friday was “Writing practice” for Year 2, deputising for Bishop Bismark who is in Juba; so I suggested the students write a project proposal for a new venture by their own church. They first wrote it out, under prescribed headings (objective, benefits, cost etc.), and then read it aloud, and I then marked their writing. It was fascinating - the quality of writing varied, and so indeed did the projects: we had two boreholes (for clean water), a church office building, a training programme for lay leaders, a poultry farm, a nursery school, a vegetable garden (this from a Mothers Union co-ordinator!), three church buildings and a shop for rental. Funding sources were usually either “contributions from congregation” or “application to local NGO” – meaning Mundri Relief and Development Association (MRDA), a very active community organisation with external funding for a number of different projects. Here is the Second Year class, with Andrew about to teach.



In plunging into the week’s teaching, I have forgotten to mention Sunday, and worship in the Cathedral. We were bidden to attend both the English Service (Communion) at 8.30 and the Main Service (non-Eucharist) in Moru at 10.30. At both we were formally introduced and applauded, and

Paul Issa joked about Andrew's surname, calling him "Reverend Pope"... this had unforeseen consequences later in the day, when a young man called at the guest house asking for "The Bishop of the Americas" – his mother had heard us welcomed in church, and slightly misunderstood...

The English service was basically ASB, with a good sermon by a lay preacher on Zacchaeus (appropriate, since the preacher was a short man), and enriched by some enthusiastic singing of songs and choruses ("Sing Hosanna" was one) to a keyboard and some drums, led by a mixed choir in the front rows. Communion elements were broken sweet biscuit, and rich grape juice in small "Baptist-style" glasses, drunk kneeling at the Communion rail and glass then tossed into the plastic bowl that followed the glass tray. The Cathedral was half-full, so perhaps 220 people, with separate Sunday school outside under a tree.

The Moru Main Service was larger – the Cathedral (capacity 465) was full by the end, with people standing, and it lasted nearly 3 hours. It was led by the Dean, assisted by another priest, with sermon preached by a lady priest; Bishop Bismark was in his place, we were on a sofa in the sanctuary, and after a while Bishop sent a message to Paul Issa to join us and interpret – a great help, especially during the sermon. The singing was very rich and lively – the choir entered during the first song in procession from the west end, swaying to the music as they sang; the accompaniment, including keyboard, included a stunning range of percussion instruments – maracas, drums, tambourines, shaker canisters and of course clapping. Later in the service the Sunday School processed in similarly and performed a song and dance routine – well over 60 of them, all in immaculate uniform, and singing their hearts out.

We were introduced during the Announcements, a long episode halfway through the service. Andrew gave all the "Greetings from Salisbury" which always have to be said; when it was my turn, I managed to read unobtrusively from a page of "useful phrases in Moru", written by Paul for Jim last year.....apparently this was so convincing everyone assumed I spoke fluent Moru, and clapped vigorously.....the downside was that, in the line-up afterwards when *everyone* shakes the hands of *all* the clergy (we must have shaken 500 hands), many addressed me enthusiastically but unintelligibly. At least I could say "Mikado" (how are you) and "Makado" (fine)...it's a start.



During the offertory (bag-holders stood at the front, everyone came up in turn and put their notes through the slit into the bag), we noticed a live duck being brought, tied up in a carrier bag, just head and neck showing – see left. More of this duck later...

Sadly, on the way to church the sole of my sandal came right off. It was too late to turn back, so for the rest of the morning I was hobbling along on the upper, and trying to stand straight in church. On Monday, after class, Paul's "cousin brother" drove us home in the aged minibus

(very dicey on the college road, which was in a terrible state), and we asked to stop at a roadside stall where we had seen a shoe-mender. But, seeing us negotiating, our driver started honking and shouting, and finally made it clear HE was a shoe-mender too. So of course he got the job, and the following day my sandal reappeared, beautifully stitched and secured, much better than glue. And of course he got the ten SS pounds (about £1.50) quoted by the original man. Joy all round.

We have actually found you can buy a lot in the local market (see picture) – fruit, of course (banana, papaya, guava, orange, apple) but also steel wool (to scrub out our loos), flip-flops, a good knife (to carve the papaya), and also our daily supply of bottled water, bought cold and kept in our insulated bottles. The male shopkeepers seem to be Somali or Kenyan, the ladies (mostly on fruit and veg) must be local, and are much more friendly and chatty.



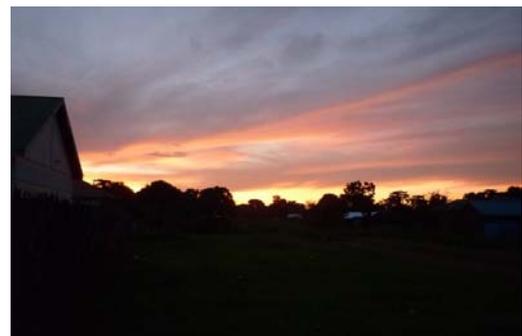
The weather has mostly been kind to us – when the sun shines it is hot during the day, around 35 deg; but often there are showers, which cool the air, so many nights have been quite pleasant, perhaps as low as 21. We have only encountered two real storms: the first was while I was teaching the Book of Job to Year 1, and we had just reached the climax of the story, and were reading “Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm”, when...CRASH! a mighty crack of thunder and continuing rumbles, and heavy rain so I could hardly be heard by the class. Divine affirmation? Entry on cue? The second was yesterday, when we waited for some drizzle to stop before leaving College to walk home. As we came to the river bridge, we could see that Mundri town ahead was blotted out by a curtain of water...and then the monsoon downpour fell on us, and in a minute we were completely wet through. After a few minutes we reached the shelter of a local shop and sheltered there for perhaps 15-20 minutes, until it stopped completely...I was moved to sing the theme of “thanksgiving after rain” from Beethoven’s Pastoral Symphony. It was a squelchy walk home, and I don’t know if my trainers will fully recover – but they are out in the hot sun today.

One consequence of the rain has been that the road to the College, bad before, has become virtually impassable. On Wednesday Paul invited the Director of MRDA, Light, to lunch – a very impressive guy, local, extremely well educated, who has not only revived and developed MRDA and started many projects funded by e.g. Oxfam and Tearfund, but also raised a lot of money in cooperation with the Cathedral, for the recent renovation. Lunch for him was a special treat: the duck we met on Sunday. It seems that in discussion after the service, the Cathedral authorities concluded that the duck should be a gift to the College...so we benefited. But I couldn’t help remembering the old question “Is it polite to eat someone you have been introduced to?” Light has a functioning 4x4, so



Paul asked him to take us home...and *his* vehicle got stuck in the mud on the College Road! Eventually he got out, but Andrew saw that the mud was over the rear wheels and the vehicle was actually grounded on the high central bit. But good comes out of bad – the following day was the students’ weekly “manual labour” afternoon, and sure enough, the Committee (student run) had decided it was road repair time, so they collected rocks and bricks and starting filling-in. It will be several weeks’ work, but already it’s a lot better. Here they are at work.

MRDA has been a real blessing to us, not only the guest house we stay in: we also have open access to the office, up till dark (7.00 p.m.) which has Wi-Fi for which we have the key. So, any time we wish, we can go and sit in the office marked “Visitor” and Skype (Andrew can Skype his wife Sarah), email, use Facebook, and even buy Kindle books. I’m keeping my head down and not replying to *every* email, but it is good to be able to communicate. Here’s the sky one evening as I walked home.



And we've been able, via email and phone, to fix up a visit to Maridi Diocese, my own Deanery's link Diocese, on 1-2 November; so that will take two days out of the final weekend but leave us free to preach here on the Sunday.

So now you have all our news. All is well, and we are enjoying the teaching, the learning and the relationships. It's a surprise to realise that we are already a third of the way through the teaching – the time suddenly seems too short! Please keep us in prayer, for continuing good health, and safety, and that we will really be able to make a difference to the students' understanding.

With love and prayers

Jane