

### REFLECTIONS FROM SOUTH SUDAN - WEEK 3

Goodness, doesn't time pass quickly when you are having fun, or at least when you are challenged. Herewith my second letter from sunny (very warm) Mundri. At least, tonight it is overcast and so a



little cooler and not, yet, raining. More letter on Saturday, probably 37 degrees and very humid! Sorry, if it is cold there..... and then final additions for the Lui ordinations of which more later. Actually finishing a day or two later, when it is again 'relatively' cool and we have been very wet. We walked home from the college in the rain as Paul's van (our usual transport in the evening) has finally given up the ghost with a split sump (though I suspect that it will be resurrected again somehow - all things are round here!)

This week has been a blur of teaching, teaching preparation and keeping body and soul together. Time is challenging us already. We have just one week of teaching left (now 2 days) into which to cram as much as we can. I was a little surprised last Thursday to hear, from the Principal (Paul), that he did consider that we were/are giving a whole semester's worth of teaching in three weeks! We thought we had a lot on our plates.



Our morning walks to the College often provide us with some form of entertainment. One day it is just the myriad of welcomes from passers-by (it is the culture here to shake hands with almost everyone you pass and to say a few words of greeting, which can extend your traveling time somewhat), to the appearance of two little girls and a small brother to one of them, all immaculately dressed in school uniform, who won't take no for an answer and faithfully hold our hands until our journeys take different directions (see the photo at the moment of meeting). Another day,

as we crossed the bridge on the way out of Mundri, we noticed the women doing the clothes washing in the local, somewhat grey, river.

It is fair to say that while Mundri is known as the major centre of the county, there is no mains electricity (everyone, who can afford it and not many can, uses generators), there is no mains drainage (either Pit Latrines or for our Guesthouse, a 'large pit' into which our flush loos and showers drain) and the only fresh water is via bore holes. Drinking water is brought in and bought in bottles. Notwithstanding this, the environment is clean, save the obvious plastic bags and bottles, and the people are fastidious. Hands are always washed before and after eating, as well as the face to make sure there is nothing available for the flies and mosquitos. Most people live in Tukuls, which are the ubiquitous little square mud buildings with thatched roofs. Most families live in, generally, unfenced compounds of several of these Tukuls surrounded by a space of 'bush' before the next compound. And this is in the centre of town. Not what you and I would know as town planning, but it seems to work.



Jane and I have been reading a book called Faith Under Fire in Sudan, written by Peter Hammond. This book gives a very powerful description of the history of conflict (especially between the Christians and the Muslims) throughout the Sudan. It is very sobering reading and lends us great

insight when we are discussing culture, economy and faith history with the students and others. It is also fascinating to read of the connections and references in the Old Testament with this part of the world. Sudan in the bible is the land of Cush.

Other events that have happened include our upright shower last Friday. Our usual transport was being used for other purposes so we said, as it was not raining, that we would walk. As we started there was a little fine rain; we wore our hats. As we turned the corner to cross the bridge into Mundri, we looked up and Mundri had disappeared in a wall of water. There were no trees close by, and no retreat! Within the blink of an eye we were soaked to the skin as we made our hurried way to the cover of the nearest shop. No need for a shower at the guesthouse then! Thankfully our Rucksacks are waterproof so the cameras and computers did not suffer, and we are waterproof on the inside. I have attached a photo of pouring rain at the college, but am aware that it is very difficult to give the real impression of rain, especially South Sudan rain! What is quite surprising is the rate at which the ground soaks up water. Underfoot it becomes not only very slippery but also spongy so that your foot sinks about half an inch into the surface before breaking it and finding the mud.



The last time I wrote I mentioned the Wild West frontier town look of Mundri. This time I add a photo. You can almost imagine the Tumbleweed.

I know I have mentioned before the almost inherent hope that we find among the people. However, we must remember that they have come through what is nearly 50 years of conflict. This is a nation that knows there is a vast amount to do, and not just for the infrastructure, but also for the people especially those suffering Post Traumatic Stress and many other afflictions we in the west like to think we understand. A nation held back not least by the scourge of Landmines that prevent development of agriculture, among many things (NGO's are working hard to clear, but there are many years of work ahead - see the photos below for their machinery and effects of clearance on the ground).

Before I came out here I was often heard to say that I thought I would learn so much more than I was going to be able to teach. Well, I think that is certainly the case, and, of course, not where I had expected. There is no doubt that the Lord leads us to many places to teach us things we did not expect, but I shall carry my reflections and experiences of this place and this country with me for a very long time.



On Sunday 7th October, we were invited to attend an ordination service in Lui Cathedral, and one of us was asked to preach. Through the tossing of a coin, the privilege fell to me. I spent a few days thinking hard about how to approach a sermon for an ordination in a strange church, to strange people of a strange culture in a strange country. The day duly arrived and Paul plus a few students arrived in Paul's old mini-bus to pick us up and carry us the 15 miles to Lui. Plenty of time, we had given ourselves 2 hours to get there! Of course, we left a bit late, but were soon trundling along the Lui road attempting to miss the worst of the holes when BANG, one of the tyres exploded.



It was immediately apparent that when you are driving along, there are many vehicles coming the other way and travelling with you. Of course, when you are stuck, there is no-one else on the road for miles! How strange.

Anyway, after much talk and effort, the spare (yes there was one) was appended to the offending side. The spare had

already seen a full life and a major hole had been repaired at some stage with a needle and heavy thread! (see picture). We also noticed that the fuel tank was leaking, so an empty water bottle was placed under the bus to catch the fuel, which was then tipped straight back in the tank as we moved off - so much for clean fuel. Anyway, we made it to Lui with 10 minutes to spare before the service, and I think the Dean had been greatly concerned in case he might have had to preach without preparation.



The service itself was a great African celebration. First the Bishop licenced 3 new LLMs, then ordained 4 new Deacons. After which we were all called forward (all the clergy in the Cathedral) to lay our hands on the heads of 9 new Priests (we had been told there would be 4, so where 9 came from I have no idea). It was a very rare privilege to be part of the ordination of new South Sudanese Pastors (as they call them here). Then we had the readings and I stood to preach, but not before we listened to the 'song for the preacher'; very blessed I felt.

The service was all in Moru, so Paul Issa translated for me, and I preached on the requested first reading from 1 Timothy 4, Paul's letter of encouragement to Timothy in Ephesus. I also made a strong point of talking about the wives/husbands and families of the ordinands, who have to put up with very much during the training, and will do during their ministry as well. There is no stipend here! Pastors live on the good wishes and giving of their congregations. The Bishop of Lui is still living in a Tukul because the village cannot afford the cost of his new house yet!



Overall, the service was a wonderful and joyous experience, though, with no interior ceiling and no fans to diffuse the heat from the 'tin' roof, the heat was fantastic and we all suffered, even the Bishop who was seen to mop his face regularly with a cloth. They even handed out bottles of water during the service. I did not really recover for 2 days!



After the service Jane was asked to provide the closing prayers for the clergy (and others) under a tree, then photos, and we were entertained by the Bishop for welcome refreshments,

lunch and then tea before he gave us a guided tour round Lui, a place famous for the Fraser family missionaries and the founding of the hospital. While we were with the Bishop, the senior Mother's Union representative joined us (the MU is very important here and very much part of the church and society). She is a lovely ancient little lady with a permanent smile of wrinkles. She said that I had preached a good sermon, and that I preach just like an African! Probably the best compliment I received all day. We were eventually returned, by the Bishop, at 7pm for a very welcome relax, cold shower and early bed, absolutely exhausted but with powerful memories of a great day.

Anyway, this is now a very long letter, and out of synch with Jane's letter, so I shall stop. We shall attempt to provide a last letter at the end of the week, though we have much planned and time will be short. God's blessings from South Sudan and your continued prayers for us and this remarkable Christian country will be welcome.

Yours in Christ  
Andrew Poppe