

## One night in Juba

Dear all,

We've left Mundri and are now in Juba and indeed South Sudan, for one more night before returning home to the UK.

I hope that Tim and I achieved our aim of leaving well. All I can say is that leaving was a difficult and emotional experience. We held a leaving service in the college chapel where Tim preached and I presided, representing a swap in the focus of our teaching roles. This was a very special time for me. To share in this meal with them after sharing in their lives to the extent we have was a fitting conclusion. We, like the disciples on the Emmaus Road, recognised Jesus in our midst as we broke bread together, realising afresh that it was Him who had made the whole trip and our deep connection with one another possible.

Their singing at this service was exquisite - oh for a service back home with that kind of harmony, expression and rhythm!

I've been struck by the joy held on the faces of these people as they worship. These are people with stories of war, death and struggle but you wouldn't know it as you looked upon them in worship. They know the meaning of joy in The Lord. There's a freedom in them at worship that I think is missed in the context of British reserve, traditionalism and formality. The Church in Sudan has formality by the bucketful, it also has its well established and expected traditions but it also has a freedom - a freedom in sound, voice, movement and expression that is moving and liberating.

We then had a round of speeches from the gathered assembly and I think I can safely say that Tim and I were deeply touched by the depth of their appreciation for the work we've done these past weeks. The Bishop is quite a storyteller, so these speeches were not a short affair and we were able to leave them with a few token gifts - along with news of their impending examinations based on what we taught! I'm not so sure they were thrilled at the prospect.

This was followed by an incredible feast that was provided by the college and produced by the three ladies who have worked so hard to provide for us during our stay. Rose, Rasul and Ceryla have been incredible to us and we owe them a huge vote of thanks, along with Limou, Victoria and Mary at the guest house where we stayed. I know we've moaned about the food, but the sheer effort involved in producing one meal is immense and they did it day in and day out. They also did it with smiles that melt your heart.

But, we are now in Juba with farewells completed. The best of which came at the airstrip in Mundri with a crowd of friends gathered to enthusiastically wave us off. Tomorrow we take to the air again and head for Nairobi and then Heathrow.

We are both tired and keen to be at home with our families but we go with some incredible memories that will remain with us for the rest of our lives. There is a lot to process in terms of what we've seen and what we've heard. But, for me, one of the most encouraging things I've encountered is the determination of the people to build a nation that knows a lasting peace and to build it on the foundation of Christ, a huge and wonderful aspiration. Please commit to pray for them in this!

It only remains for me, at this point, to say a huge thank you for your prayers over the last month and to ask you to do so again one last time.

Please pray for:

Our journey home on Wednesday, asking if it could be a journey with no mishaps and protection over us both.

Those we leave behind, that they too will know The Lords protection, provision and love. Pray especially for the students as they 'return to normal studies'.

Pray for the future of Bishop Ngalamu Theological College and their vision to redevelop the 'Village of God', as it once was known.

With thanksgiving for an excellent month and the Lord's hand on us and the whole venture!

With love in Christ,

Jim