

February 19, 2017

Dear Friends,

Greetings from Rwanda! As many of you know, I arrived in Rwanda on February 9<sup>th</sup> after a long but smooth journey. It wouldn't be a real visit to Africa without some unexpected challenges in the first hours or days of my arrival. This visit was no different. After accomplishing many necessary but tiring tasks in Kigali, Godfrey and I set out for Nyanza, which is about two and a half hours south of Kigali towards the Burundi border. Almost immediately, the underside of the car began making a strange noise. And so, at 10:00pm, we left it behind in Gitarama and caught a taxi for the last half of the journey to Nyanza.

When we arrived, I was sweaty, dirty, and tired, and it was very dark. While carrying my pillow, purse, bags and groceries, I walked gingerly down the rocky, sandy path towards the entrance, which is in the back of the house. Suddenly, the rocks and sand started sliding, my feet lost all traction, the belongings flew out of my arms, and I made a fast and furious crash landing! I now have bruises and scrapes on the left side of my body, but thankfully I am okay. Isn't that just like me to make a grand entrance? And if you notice bruises in any pictures, you will now know why!

Despite the rough start, my time here has been incredibly meaningful. Just before I departed, the rector of my church, Jeff Miller, prayed a beautiful prayer, asking God to bless my time, in "spite of myself"! And that's exactly what God has been doing! He has ordered my steps, anointed my conversations and bestowed a sense of deep intimacy with everyone I meet.

Many missions are about "productivity" --- whether running a Vacation Bible School, hosting a dental or medical clinic, building churches or leading seminars. For me, this visit has instead been about RELATIONSHIPS --- relationships with God, others and even myself. It's really been like one continuous family reunion, visiting dear friends, co-workers, students, teachers and even former street children.

This past week, I traveled to my old home, Musanze (formerly called Ruhengeri) for a few days. It was amazing how the Lord orchestrated so many special meetings. Even if I was not able to plan a specific time to see someone, he allowed me to fortuitously bump into those very people in the most unexpected places.

For example, after some of us drove out to see the graveside of Pastor Frank, Joel's father who died two years ago, we passed hundreds of people streaming down the road like a river at the end of the day. Unexpectedly, my friend Mbonigaba shouted, "There's Jackline!" I yelled, "Stop the car!" Then I swung open the door and started running down the road to meet her. I was waving my hands and shouting her name. Of course, everyone was looking at me ("Who is THAT muzungu?!"), but Jackline finally turned around and we met, hugging and laughing. Jackline was my Kinyarwanda teacher. Her sister, Jane, was my helper and prayer partner and even lived next to me in the compound. Jane has sadly since gone to be with Jesus. But Jackline and I cherish many significant memories of those years working, studying, praying and breaking bread together.

Just yesterday, eleven of my former students from "Sonrise School for Orphans," rode to Nyanza on public transport to visit me in Nyanza and enjoy a delicious lunch at home. One by one, my "kids" -- who are now all grown up -- shared how they have matured since they were little spouts in primary school. We reminisced, told funny stories and poignant ones too. We laughed, sang old songs and danced around the room singing "Our God is an Awesome God". It was just like old times! I shared some experiences from my life and

exhorted them to keep seeking Jesus, even as they face difficult challenges in the future. It was a foretaste of heaven.

These are just small examples of the ways God is reconnecting me here and opening up opportunities for me simply to “love on people” with the love of Christ. I’ve also had an opportunity to teach Bible and serve porridge to children and adults at the cooperative. I’ll continue that this week and will also speak during a graduation ceremony for the graduates of our three-week conference on “preparing to go out into the working world.” I’ll walk and pray over the land, especially near the cooperative, thanking God for his provision of rain, strong leadership, humble vigorous workers and vibrant plants and farm animals.

Speaking of, you might be thrilled to hear that our banana plantation has doubled in size, from one thousand to two thousand trees!! Well, actually, the banana trees are planted all over the place, even in people’s yards. It reminds me of how the first settlers in Jamestown planted tobacco, known as “green gold,” in their front yards. . . Jeff, that historical statement is for you!

THANK YOU for your prayers, support and encouragement. I am deeply grateful to you. I THANK GOD for redeeming the years that the locusts have eaten.

Those who sow in tears truly do reap with songs of joy.

With love and appreciation,

Martha