

UPDATE FROM DEBBIE BLANE

Lusaka, Zambia

February 2, 2014

I arrived yesterday, February 1, 2014, in Lusaka Zambia. Between December 13th and February 1st I was in Addis Ababa.

I had planned to leave Addis Ababa on January 6th and fly back to Juba, then fly from Juba to Malakal on January 7th. I would then have had until February 10th for working on my UNISA degree program, sorting through my things and packing for my move to another house on the church compound in Malakal and doing final preparations for the Theology II class which I was to teach for the Concentrated Course at the Nile Theological College.

Instead violence broke out in Juba on December 15th and by December 16th my own world began to change. The worlds of many other thousands of people in South Sudan were changing at the same time as my own. Thousands of people lost their lives, their earthly worlds abruptly came to an end. Thousands of people became internally displaced within South Sudan itself, fleeing to and taking shelter at United Nations Compounds in places such as Juba and Malakal. Thousands of people became refugees in other countries such as Uganda, Sudan, Kenya and Ethiopia.

On a personal basis this has been a difficult time for myself. I have had little news on the fate of many colleagues and students. I know that a handful of each are safe and alive. The compound where I live in Malakal has been sheltering 2,000 people and the compound at the BAM Center where the Nile Theological College has been located has been sheltering 4,000 people.

Since I left Malakal for only four weeks (one week in Juba working on and obtaining a six month visa with the help of a local pastor there and then three weeks in Addis Ababa) I left with limited supplies, including clothing and medicine. I had also packed very few summer clothing items as I was in Juba for only a week and then was going to a cool climate in Addis Ababa where I had stored clothes made for me by a local group of disabled women who have wonderful tailoring abilities. Now I am in Lusaka and it is warm here. I will have to sacrifice myself and find a way to get clothes made for yet another climate:)

This also means that the lion's share of my belongings are in Malakal and I do not know whether they have been safe from looting or if I will find them stolen or destroyed upon my return. This includes my two bookcases of books. It also includes a wonderful collection of colorful African dresses made for me by tailors in Sudan and South Sudan as well as in Ghana.

Just in a few hours in Lusaka I have realized more things about Africa and why it is a continent that is hard for Americans to truly comprehend. There are well over 50 languages spoken here in Zambia. It occurred to me yesterday that if all of the original languages of all the people groups in the United States were spoken today that we too would have many, many languages spoken. This would, I assume, begin with the Native American languages. It would expand to include all of the Asian, African, European and Latin American languages of all of our people groups who make up America. Instead somehow at least I always seem to think of America as a homogenous group of people with only one language, English. Upon deeper thought, this simply is not so.

I am also acutely aware that Ethiopia is the only African nation that was never colonized. This is said about Liberia as well but the truth, in my eyes, is that Liberia was colonized by former African slaves from the United States. Those former slaves became the oppressors of Liberia and turned the native Liberians into slaves, as happens in so many places in the world. Israel was created because of the oppression of the Jews and now the Jews oppress the Palestinians, etc.

So far Ethiopia is the African country in which I am least comfortable. Having examined myself in this I believe it is because it is not the least bit European in character and I find my comfort zone in the countries that bear the marks of, say, the United Kingdom. I have heard it said that Ethiopia believes it not like the rest of Africa. It is true. It was not colonized by other nations and therefore does not bear the marks of that intrusion. And for myself it is the marks of that intrusion that makes other countries perhaps more international and more familiar to me. I am not saying that this is a good thing on my part. I am just acknowledging that reality of what I recognize in myself.

It is rainy season here in Lusaka. I am enjoying the sound of the rain on the roof and the windows of the house. I suspect that when I walk outside I will not be threatened by the kind of mud that clay ground creates when it is wet. In Malakal the ground is apparently clay and clay does not absorb water, instead it becomes a mud that a person sinks into. The time I fell in the mud in Malakal my boots had stayed in one place and I had continued to move forward and so my body was not able to stay upright. Boom! I don't think that this is going to happen in Lusaka. And for that I am grateful.

Blessings,
Debbie

