

June 20, 2016

Dear Friends in Christ,

He said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. And when He had said these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. Acts 1: 7- 9

There are times when I look up into the clouds and wonder, 'when will Jesus come back?' We are in what should be rainy season here in Togo, and today the clouds are tumbling in the sky, but the rain just doesn't fall. I learned a new sentence last week: *Dunne, saak k baa bonnann*, which means 'this year, the rain is not falling well.' The people are waiting daily for the rain to fall from the clouds. Here in Dapaong, many people have not yet begun cultivating. In the villages, early rains were more abundant, animals were tied up, and crops planted. The millet and corn shot up nicely, but now lack of moisture is a problem. We must have hope that the Father knows the times and seasons needed for His people. It is not only for sowing corn and millet that God's knowledge of the seasons is important. The seeds of faith must also be sown and weeded and watered.

I enjoy so much attending church in Sankpong, with Pastor Remi and the congregation. I generally have at least two, and sometimes three or four young people with me, as the service is in Mual, the dialect the young people I work with best understand. However, time 'by the clock' in the village, especially during growing season, is very UNimportant. Though the hour set is 9:00 am, generally the service does not begin until 9:45 or 10:00. Pastor Remi has talked and talked to the members. I have encouraged, explained, sighed. When Remi suggested we 'start' at 9:30 or even 10:00, the suggestion was not accepted. Too late! Finally last week, I asked, what I could do to help them arrive on time? One of my thoughts was a 'sonnerie.' As there are no church bells here, a 'sonnerie' is a large metal wheel rim from a semi truck, hung from a tree branch or beam, and struck with another metal rod. I hear the CLET sonnerie from my house all during the school year - the sound travels. So, last week as I was walking into the market, I passed a welder's lean-to and saw a wheel rim laying along side the road. I asked, and yes it was for sale. Only about \$3.50. As I was on my way to the market, I asked the welder to keep it for me. Not a problem, and on my way back, I paid him the 2000 cfa; it was too heavy for me to carry home, so I asked the first taxi moto I saw to help me, and off we went. Yesterday I took the sonnerie and a piece of iron rod and nylon cord to Sankpong. Pastor Remi and his wife had just arrived when we drove up at 8:50. Standing on one of the benches from the church, with Teni holding the wheel rim, Remi hung our 'church bell' in the tree in front of the church, and started striking the call to worship. Well, yesterday we still didn't start the service until 9:45, but hopefully the ringing of the 'sonnerie' at 7:30 am and 8:30 am will call the people in from the fields to arrive at the church by the time the 9:00 am striking announces the beginning of the service, where seeds of faith will be planted, and fertilized and watered.

Most of my time, since my last letter, has been spent in language learning. Not only my lessons in Mual, but quite a bit of time with high school English once again. Today here in Togo, the students in Terminale, or seniors in high school, have begun their Baccaalaureat exam. The exam is administered in regional centers, and must be passed for a student to complete high school and continue on to most other types of education or training. The exam is very

difficult, and young people often attempt two or three or four years to pass. English is a required subject. Though during this school year, I hadn't worked much with Terminale students, their last month is generally free of scheduled classes, for individual study. Several of the young people I'd worked with in the years since my return, asked if I could help them again. Their request made me very happy, and we've had a number of intense English sessions on my veranda. We've also had times of friendship and talking about their futures. Two of the guys, twins, had always discussed Bible verses and their faith with me during our English classes. They are Catholics. However, since our last times together, they have grown frustrated with the Catholic church, and are very open to Lutheran doctrine and beliefs. Pierre has already attended service in Sankpong, and was very happy and thankful. Prosper has asked to attend also, as soon as the BAC is completed. The Father knows the times and the seasons!

As for my Mual language learning. Suo Suo. Little by little. I felt so encouraged yesterday when I was able to understand at least a part of the sermon. I always read the texts for each Sunday in English, French, and Mual before church, trying to get the basic ideas in my mind. Now that I have a little more mual vocabulary and understanding of how the language comes together, the task doesn't seem so overwhelming. Plus learning to distinguish the sounds. It's not easy, at my age, but I will not be discouraged. Everyone is so helpful, encouraged and encouraging when I attempt to speak in their own language. And learning the thought patterns in the way the language comes together, and the way ideas are communicated helps me understand the people, their actions and reactions. Some times when I try to explain something to a Moba person, (in French), the person's understanding of what I've said just seems so turned around or backwards. But when I see how the mual language puts ideas together, all mixed up or backwards to me. . .well, then I have a better acceptance of the situation. I have realized even more how important Bible translation and communication in heart language is to share true faith in God. Concepts that are difficult enough when speaking in one's own language must be shared in faith, with the help of the Holy Spirit speaking to their hearts.

My 'beloved' RAV 4 has been complaining and giving me concern since our visits to the literacy classes in villages earlier this year. I wish I knew even a little bit about auto mechanics, but I don't! *Yal kaa!* I'm very thankful for my mechanic, who helps me so much. On one of our village visits, one of the front springs broke with a clunk. I made it back to Dapaong safely, and the repair was made. I've replaced the front tires, as they were smooth. One of the rear springs also needs to be replaced, but waiting for the part. The gas gauge doesn't work, because something is rusted and there doesn't seem to be a replacement part for a 1998 car, so I just put the gas in periodically. But still, there is a rumble, grumble, and sometimes vibration when I'm off the paved highway. I thought it was the shocks- No. Finally, my mechanic explained that something underneath, where things come together, is rusted and needs to be replaced. He gave me the name in French but?? I left my car with him this morning; he took it to a garage that specializes in such work. A new piece will be made from materials available here. I am praying that all goes well, and when the work is finished in three days, I will be able to continue my trips to the villages, sharing God's Word, and learning from His people here until Jesus comes back in the clouds!

Amen! Yonmdaano Yiesu, baat na.

Amen! Come Lord Jesus.

Valerie Stonebreaker
LCMS OIM Missionary
Dapaong, Togo