

March 12, 2017

*He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?*

*To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8*

Dear Friends in Christ,

It has been several months since I last wrote. I apologize. I often think of you all and even began one letter, but the words would not come. Many things to say, but still, they would not come. It is difficult to write about situations in ways that communicate all that I am feeling. I get too long winded, and still feel that I haven't genuinely expressed myself.

This evening, as I was washing my rice pot, the words (above) from Micah just came into my head. I'd been thinking about Lent, and repentance and the day that is now coming to a close. Wondering about . . . my life, my work, my actions and thoughts. I pray that these words will remain with me.

Since my last letter, many 'events' have occurred. I celebrated Christmas in Sankpong with Pastor Remi and my friends there. Kokou, the junior high school student living in my compound here in Dapaong, had been attending church with me since he arrived in July. He attended the Lutheran Church in Lokpano, but had never been baptized. On Christmas Day, he was welcomed into the Lord's family, washed clean of his sins with quite a few other children and adults in a joyous service. We celebrated Christ's birth and Kokou's baptism here at home after.

Two days later, YEMBORE Azouma arrived from Lomé to attend a funeral in Lokpano as well as to work with me on planning our CCCS school activities. Azouma went on to Lokpano, only to learn that the mother of two of the students we are working with had just passed away. The two boys were living in Lomé with Azouma, and attending school there. It was necessary to arrange transportation for them as quickly as possible. The boys arrived in Dapaong the following morning. I met them at the taxi station and immediately took them on to Nano in my car, half way to Lokpano. There, we were met by Azouma and another villager, both on motorcycles, to take the boys the remaining distance. The boys had not seen their mother since perhaps September, though they had heard she was ill. They did not arrive before the burial, as there was no possibility of delaying it. Polygamy and levirate marriage laws resulted in a very complicated family situation with much jealousy. On New Year's Day morning, I again transported Azouma and one of the boys nearly to Lokpano. Azouma was ill, the student grieving. I am not certain that the mother was a believer in Christ. It was difficult to give comfort. I was unable to attend church. . The year was not beginning well, but I prayed for the Lord's guidance.

On New Year's Eve Day, I was cleaning up trash around my courtyard wall when I stepped on a bougainvillea thorn. The thorn stuck in the sole of my sandal, and didn't seem to prick deeply, so I paid little attention to it. With my concern for the students and Azouma, this was not important. However by Monday, my foot was hurting and swollen. I tried treating it myself, and continued on with my Mual lessons and other activities. However by Thursday, my foot was so swollen and painful I could not walk on it. I took a taxi moto to the hospital where the first medical assistant I saw told me I would need to stay- be admitted!! - however he sent me to the surgical area, where I was seen and several medications prescribed. I was told to return, if this did not work. I managed to hobble to a pharmacy to purchase the meds, then returned home. Another Sunday, unable to attend church. Prayers for healing at home. By Monday morning, things had not improved at all, so I called Kougbaengbene, one of my former students who is now a medical assistant, to ask for his help. He could not come to my house, but told me whom to ask for at the hospital. . .so I returned. At last, I was seen by a competent health worker who took an x-ray, did blood tests, and changed medication. One of the treatments was to wrap my foot in cotton, then an elastic bandage and then douse it all with alcohol. Of course, I had to keep my foot elevated. After three days of this, the swelling had gone down quite a bit, and the x-ray and blood work revealed nothing abnormal. I used about three liters of alcohol and spent many hours studying mual with my foot up, but am so

thankful that nothing serious developed. I was imagining having my foot amputated. . .God is faithful!

The Sunday following, I was preparing to go to church when I received a phone call from Pastor Remi, letting me know that he'd been in an accident. He assured me it was not serious, but he was at the clinic in Nano, and would not be at church. He seemed a bit confused, and I was concerned, but I headed off to church, hoping to encourage the young people that would be leading the service. As I was driving, I received a phone call from Pastor Djatoite, pastor of the Nano Lutheran Church. He asked me to come on to the Nano clinic and transport Remi back to the Dapaong hospital. I was very willing to be able to help. Remi had been hit while on his motorcycle on Saturday evening; he had no open wounds, but one of his knees was very painful. The Nano road is. . .well, not the best, and was being worked on. Dust, gravel, deep holes, and an injured man, his wife and brother. . .God sent his angels to guide us. Back at the CHR Dapaong (regional hospital), Remi was carried to the third floor surgical area on a cot by his brother and a hospital worker. The examination determined a severe sprain, and an x-ray verified no broken bones. A cast was necessary to stabilize the knee, so Remi's brother was sent out to the market to purchase supplies at a pharmacy. The patient is responsible for finding all necessary medications and treatment! Remi's knee was swollen, so it was necessary for him to remain at the hospital. His wife and brother also stayed the night, sleeping on benches or empty beds and buying food from street vendors for the three of them. I was sent home. . .but kept in contact. Finally, Monday around noon, the cast was applied and I transported Remi, with a full leg cast, his wife and brother, back to their home in Doré, on beyond Nano. The cast was to remain in place for three weeks! Remi is not a person who sits still, and it was very difficult for him to remain stable at home. Several times I know he was transported to meetings on a motorcycle, with his cast propped up on the knee of the person driving! Three weeks later, I returned to Doré to bring Remi, his wife and brother back to the Dapaong CHR. I don't think I have ever seen such a relieved look on a grown man's face! The leg was weak and stiff, but functioning. Back to Doré once again. God is faithful!

Once again in Togo, public school teachers and the government are at odds concerning teacher salaries and benefits. Teachers began striking soon after the school year began last October, causing delays in semester exam schedules. Since soon after the Christmas break, the students have spent more time at home than in the classroom. Though there are periodic demonstrations by upset students, there have been no casualties. If the difficulties and strikes continue, it is possible that the year will be declared "une année blanche" or a white year, meaning an unsuccessful, uncompleted school year. The students will be compelled to repeat the entire year. Difficult to accept, with the conditions of poverty, need, advanced age of many students. Please pray for the Togolese students, teachers. . .and government!

Along with difficulties, the Lord has provided blessings. In February, a group of visitors from LCMS in Saint Louis spent several days with us here in Dapaong. I was able to meet Christian Boehlke, Director of Missionary Support and several members of the Publications team. I enjoyed sharing parts of my life and work in Togo with them. This past week I have been working with Stephanie Schulte, a new 'old' missionary. I first came to Togo in 1998 to teach her children. She and her husband returned to the USA where they continued their studies (along with their children!) Gary is now our Regional Director and Steph is directing Health Care programs in West Africa. We are working on bringing a short term medical team to Togo this fall!

Once again, I have too many words and too little space. Thank you always for your prayers and encouragement. The Lord hears the voices of his people. . .and answers in He knows best.

*Yennu i be nan'i.* The Lord be with you!

*Nan'a mun.* And also with you.

Valerie Stonebreaker  
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