

Greetings to my sponsoring churches! When I last wrote to you, I was in Liberia and I stayed there until April 27th. I continued to travel between Phebe Hospital, Curran Hospital, and Monrovia. One of my stops was in Totota - on the road between Phebe and Monrovia - where I met Brian and Christine, the new ELCA missionaries there. Brian was a nuclear scientist before he decided to go into the seminary. He is a very handy man to know as he can fix just about anything. I managed to use some of his skills, but not to do anything nuclear!

I came across a book called "This Child Will Be Great" written by Liberia's president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. It is about her life and includes a lot of the history of Liberia. Liberia has a very interesting history and the President is a fascinating woman.

My jobs here are so many and varied - anything from making sure a mobile phone company pays the rent they owe Phebe for use of some of Phebe's land to getting x-ray machines repaired to talking to the Minister of Health about the future to helping make sure the Masters in Nursing Education program continues. Once in awhile, I even get to preach and serve Communion! We had a nice Maundy Thursday service with Communion but without any foot washing this year. The dirt floors in the church would have turned to mud. The Good Friday service covered Christ's last seven words from the cross. Others preached about the words and then my job was to summarize. Since some of the preaching was in Kpelle, I didn't really summarize what had been said but the words themselves - how they were both human and divine, as was Jesus.

The day after Good Friday, we went to Ganta for the day. The new dentist who recently arrived there went to dental school at CMC in Ludhiana. He told me he'd been warned about caterpillars in a certain tree. If their urine got on your skin and you didn't wash it off right away, maggots would appear under your skin in a week! I thought that might well be a "rural myth," so looked it up. It turns out that the larvae of certain caterpillars can secrete an acid that will cause skin to burn without actually causing a lesion. You have to be touching the larva to get the acid on you, and the burning is gone the next day, but I guess larvae and maggots might look alike, so the story may have been loosely based on fact. He's doing well and will be a great asset in training nurse practitioners to do dental care in the rural areas.

Easter was lovely because the day started with a slow rain which made the morning cooler. Three choirs sang and there was some very good dancing with the Kpelle choir. I left Phebe Easter evening after doing last minute sorting. I spent a couple of days in Monrovia tying up loose ends and then flew to Nairobi, Kenya.

I spent five days in Nairobi and stayed at Nazareth Hospital which is run by the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary from Tamil Nadu - the state Vellore is in. I have stayed there before and they treat me extremely well. The nights are high 50s to low 60s - a lovely contrast to Liberia and India. I spent a lot of time at mass - one for two young sisters taking their final vows, a special mass for Sister Clara's birthday where I was asked to read the Gospel, and another mass that was in Swahili. The sermon was in English, preached by an Irish priest.

Then I was on the plane back to India. My suitcase and I both arrived together and on time and it was good to be back even though May is the hottest month in Vellore. It was very good to see the folks at Sneha Deepam and Palliative Care again. It took the better part of a week to get used to the time change and I am not quite used to the heat yet. Did I mention that it is really hot?

Keep me in your prayers and I will keep you in mine. It's the nicest thing you can do for someone. Peace, John