

December 17, 2009  
Khartoum, Sudan

Dear Friends,

Greetings! There is now one week until Christmas Eve here in Khartoum. The weather in the last few days has been pleasant, it is quite like a very nice Seattle summer except that this is a Sudan winter in Northern Sudan. One of the ways that I can tell that it is winter is the play of the shadows on the walls of structures and the way that the light falls from the sky and strikes the earth. It is subtle, not direct. It is softer. This is something that I observe that cooler weather does to light, it softens it.

It is really more like a fall in the states than a winter. But it is a reminder of changing seasons and a reminder that Christmas is drawing near. Tomorrow (Friday) I will attend a Pentecostal worship service. On Christmas, the next Friday, I will also attend a Pentecostal worship service. So I know that I will have community around me on this, my first Christmas in Africa.

I have been learning my way around the bus system here in Khartoum. Tomorrow I will meet a family at the bus station (three rows of buses going to diverse destinations) and they will show me how to do the two-bus system so that I learn how to transfer from bus to bus. We will travel together to the church service. Thus far I have been taking a bus to where I am going and then usually having to find a mini van coming home because I am not doing so well at finding a returning bus which requires a bit more savvy than taking one out from a stationary line. A return bus requires making a hand signal; the correct one for my destination and hoping that the driver understands the signal and that there is a seat on the bus. So far I'm batting zero with this. Tomorrow after church I'll be going to lunch with friends and then getting a ride home in a car!

To explain a bit further about the two bus system: the family and I could, in the morning, take one bus and walk a few blocks to the church or we can take one bus, transfer to another one, and be dropped off in front of the church. It is not laziness on my part that is causing me to want to do the two-bus system but the fact that I really need to learn to do transfers because it will give me more flexibility as I explore the further reaches of Khartoum.

I have begun my Arabic language lessons. I am doing private tutoring because I realized after sitting in on a class for 15 minutes that I would never be able to keep up with a class. It is going slowly but not too badly. I cooked my first spaghetti this week.... I found bottled pizza sauce and added boxed tomatoes and there is imported pasta available locally. Thanks to fellow students at the language school in Khartoum I have discovered one restaurant that serves “ful”. This is a bean dish that is commonly eaten for breakfast here. It is vegetarian, cheap and nutritious. I had help ordering it last Monday and Wednesday managed to read the request off of a sheet of paper and get what I wanted successfully. It looks like I will not have to go hungry here in Sudan. Thank God for locally produced yogurt and pasteurized, homogenized milk!

As I prepare for my classes that I will begin teaching in about three weeks I am reading books and articles. I am learning so much about the subjects. I am enjoying the learning a great deal and also enjoying figuring out the best ways to present the subject matter to my students. I was asked to teach Oral English along with the other topics I have. The wonderful news with this is that I can use many ideas that I had in China and could not use because I am here in Sudan at a Christian college.

The Muslim Call to Prayer is sounding again as I type. The mysterious call in Arabic in a land of mystery, sand and conservative values. I am grateful to feel already connected to the Christian community here in Sudan for my first Christmas in

Africa. It is a global community AND a Christian community. It is a living lesson for me as I look forward to the classes I will teach soon on New Testament Background and the History of Mission. Christianity is not only a classroom subject but also a living, breathing community that is spread across the globe. Thanks be to God that I have the blessing of experiencing this community, OUR community, in yet another corner of that globe this year.

In Christ,  
Rev. Debbie Blane