

First Threshings

First Mennonite Church

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Earth's crammed with Heaven
And every common bush alive
with God.

Only he who sees takes off his
shoes;

The rest sit around and pluck
blackberries.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning
(1806-1861)

**The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous.
By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.**

Psalm 19 vs 9b, 11

(The following is another story from the *Hesston College 2015 Anabaptist Vision
and Discipleship Series* conference, *Overcoming Evil*,
led by Father John Dear, February 2015)

A woman present at a breakout session remembered an experience from 1984, an experience she hadn't recalled or spoken about for a long time.

This woman was a teenager at the time and had traveled with her Mennonite Church youth group to the Bethlehem, Pennsylvania conference in 1983. In the course of the week, she and a friend from the youth group were walking back to their dorm room when an unidentified man came running in front of them and exposed himself. The girls were startled by this unexpected event. As they walked on they saw a policeman, approached him and told him about the event, describing the young man as best they could: about college age, white, medium height.

The policemen listened carefully, then asked them to get into the back seat of his patrol car. He started the engine and drove the car away from the convention site, eventually arriving at a home in an African American neighborhood. The policeman got out of the car, walked up to the home, and rang the doorbell. When a young man came to the door, an African American young man, the policeman began to speak roughly to him. The policeman told the young man that these two women were accusing him of inappropriate behavior, and that he had better watch his step.

The two women could not believe their ears and eyes. They had clearly told the officer that the young man they had encountered was white.

The policemen ended his strong words to this young man, came back to the patrol car, got in, and took the girls back to the conference center. This woman expressed her confusion and disbelief at what she had witnessed over thirty years ago – unfair intimidation toward a young African-American man by an officer of American law. And she had become part of it.

One message from the *Overcoming Evil* event was: know about the real presence of wrong in our midst. It is not enough, speakers said, to “be good.” We must give time and active effort to offer life in the presence of the ways of death. Jesus “faced evil” and is for us the source of strength to know and “face evil” ourselves, as we stand in Jesus’ death-defying, God-given power of love.

Pastor Susan

April 2015

**Ministries Council did not meet in March.
The next scheduled meeting is Thursday,
April 9, 2015 at 7:00 p.m.**

April Events

- 1 No meal or activities
- 2 **Maundy Thursday**
7:30 p.m. service
8:00 Stewardship Committee meeting
- 3 **Good Friday**
12:00-7:00 p.m. Reflection stations,
Fellowship Hall
BC/TC closed
- 5 **Easter Sunday**
6:30 a.m. Sunrise Service: Kleibers (943 150th)
9:00 a.m. Brunch in Fellowship Hall
10:00 a.m. Easter Celebration Worship Service
- 8 6:15 p.m. Supper
7:00 p.m. Christian Education activities
- 9 7:00 p.m. Ministries Council meeting
- 12 TC Concert Choir Spring Tour: Home Concert
- 15 Last regular supper/C.E. activities (6:15/7:00)
until fall
- 17-18 MCC Relief Sale, Hutchinson
- 22 7:00 p.m. Variety Show
- 23-25 BC: Spring Drama
- 26 7:00-8:30 p.m. KMMC w/BC Men's Ensemble

Bethel College

Wednesdays 9:30-noon: Life Enrichment
in Krehbiel Auditorium

Tabor College

Fridays 9:45-11:15 Lifelong Learning
in Wohlgemuth Music Education Center

A Persistent Peacemaker

Father John Dear is an avid advocator for spreading Jesus' gospel of peace and non-violence. That message has taken him around the world, resulted in him being arrested over 75 times for civil disobedience and given him opportunities to address issues of peace at many levels of government in various countries.

Dear was the resource person for the *Hesston College 2015 Anabaptist Vision and Discipleship Series* and several from our congregation had opportunity to hear him.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in his nomination of Dear for the Nobel Peace Prize, describes him as the embodiment of a peacemaker. "He has led by example through his actions and in his writings and in numerous sermons, speeches and demonstrations. He believes that peace is not something static, but rather to make peace is to be engaged, mind, body

and spirit. His teaching is to love yourself, to love your neighbor, your enemy, and to love the world, and to understand the profound responsibility in doing all of these. He is a man who has the courage of his convictions and who speaks out and acts against war, the manufacture of weapons and any situation where a human being might be at risk through violence. For evil to prevail requires only that good people sit on the sidelines and do nothing. John Dear is compelling all of us to stand up and take responsibility for the suffering of humanity so often caused through selfishness and greed."

"John Dear's extraordinary autobiography, *A Persistent Peace*, reaches its climactic scene when a National Guard unit, prior to going to Iraq, stands in the early morning outside the door of his parish in New Mexico, where he has been preaching against the war, chanting "One bullet, one kill!" His life might well be summed up by that scene: a Jesuit priest whose commitment to nonviolence and peace carries him to El Salvador, the Middle East and all over the United States, and whose protests land him in jail again and again. His deep faith and steadfast devotion to the principles of Jesus, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton and Daniel Berrigan, lead him to defy the authority of hierarchies, whether in his church or in the nation, and hold fast to his beliefs even when soldiers, chanting threats, show up at his door. John Dear's life story is inspiring and heartwarming." ---The late Howard Zinn, author of *A People's History of the United States*.

In his Sunday morning message at Hesston (February 15, 2015), he shared 10 points on living a life consistent with Jesus' message of peace:

1. Peacemakers are the beloved sons and daughters of the God of Peace.
2. Peacemakers are personally nonviolent.
3. Peacemakers are meticulous people of nonviolence to every part of creation.
4. Peacemakers are people who are involved as activists in the global nonviolence movement.
5. Peacemakers are teachers and students of nonviolence.
6. Peacemakers are prophets of peace – must speak out!
7. Peacemakers need to be visionaries and follow those who went before us: Jesus, Gandhi, Dr. King.
8. As we approach Lent, carry the cross!
9. Peacemakers are people of hope – costly hope.
10. Peacemakers are people of the resurrection.

This world will never improve through the use of violence. The only hope we have for peace is for those of us who believe in nonviolence to step up.

*Deanne Duerksen
Nadine Friesen*

8,000 Miles to a Whole New World

A colleague from DaySpring and I left on Valentine's Day, around 3:00 p.m. I flew from Wichita to Dallas, then to Heathrow, and on to Delhi. Each of the international flights was about nine hours, so we landed around 1:00 a.m. on Monday. We spent the first day adjusting to the 11½ hour time change, walking around Delhi and visiting shops.

The following day, Tuesday, February 17th was a Hindu holiday for the Destroyer god Shiva. That day we were driving to Moradabad, a city about 167 km (104 miles) east of Delhi. The drive took us across the Ganges River where we saw people collecting water, then carrying it home in brightly decorated buckets. The water from the river is believed to be holy and should be placed in the temples. People would travel miles on foot to carry this home.

Each day as we rode to villages we saw beautiful green fields with women working wearing brightly colored saris: small pops of red, orange, and pink. Although the homes were small, in clusters of two or three, people were always put together in their best clothes.

As a designer, the primary reason for my trip to India was to help me understand the production process and to build relationships with our partners there, so the following days were full of factory visits. We reviewed designs and sample products that we are working on – talked about improvements to make, and worked on agreements for how much we could purchase pieces for. Most of the factories we went to visit were run/established by Indian families. They were clean and the employees were working in good conditions. It was so interesting to see how exactly our pieces are created – the tools and techniques that are used to carve the wood or mold the ceramics. Not being able to work directly with the artisans as I create designs for pieces can be a challenge, but visiting them and watching the employees work was so great.

People were warm and kind, easy to work with. Working with the factory employees felt like true partnerships as we were able to speak honestly about what each side needed to make the process successful. Every noon we shared lunch which was delicious. They fed us amazing food, full of flavor and fresh vegetables. Most Indians are vegetarians, but with so much flavor I didn't miss having meat.

This was my first trip to India – it's a beautiful country full of bright colors and vibrant life. From women's saris to large trucks, everything is painted with all the colors you can imagine. The architecture was stunning, with beautiful carved details. The weather was just changing from winter to spring and

was the first time I had enjoyed the sun and warmth this year.

I would love to visit India again. Because this trip was with DaySpring our time was very limited – we were only there eight days – so I didn't get to see as many landmarks as I would have liked. I look forward to the next time I have the opportunity to visit.

Katherine Goering

Tasting Suffering

The Lord did not complete His suffering. It has been given to the church to complete the sufferings of Christ. Suffering not yet filled up waits out there for you. You see, the body is also Christ. The body, which is the church, is part of that Christ. There is suffering out there yet to be endured, yet to be known, yet to be embraced by that part of Christ which is called the body. We all thank God that no one member of that body will ever have to know and endure all the suffering that Jesus Christ experienced while living on earth. But each one of us – because we are in some mysterious way one with Him – will taste some part of His experience of suffering.

One within your fellowship may know *ridicule*. Another will partake of *physical* pain, another will know *rejection*, perhaps someone else may taste what it means to be *vilified* and verbally, socially crucified. And perhaps, just perhaps, there will be one within your fellowship who will touch that awful thing which Christ touched in that last moment on the cross: the dark night of the spirit.

There is one aspect of the cross that none of us will ever know – praise God! We will never know what it means to be the sin-bearer. That is one thing which I will never experience, nor will you. He and He alone has experienced that. He experienced the one thing that none of us should have escaped, and the one thing which He need never have known. He became the sin-bearer and thereby took suffering that was truly mine.

Now you must step into your place in the body of Christ, and you must receive and you must bear some segment of the suffering which is Christ's – that is, that part of Christ which is the church.

*Celtic Daily Prayer from the
Northumbria Community*

April 28

(Based on Psalm 22:1-8, Isaiah 53:6-7,
Matthew 5:11-12)

“Striding” Around Washington, D.C.!

World Strides is a travel organization whose goal is to enrich K-12 students’ lives by providing them ‘unique and experiential educational programs’. During spring break, Darrel and Joe Knoll and Sharon and Sarah Diener (from our church) spent four days in Washington, D.C. with them. I asked Sarah how she heard about it.

“Mr. Knoll presented it to the whole class and my mom said I needed to sign up so I did but, when I found out I was the only girl going, I wanted my mom to come with me,” she said. She then went on to tell me that this was her first time flying. And Sharon said that, initially, Sarah was reluctant to go anywhere near the windows – but it wasn’t long before she was enjoying looking down on the land and taking photos.

“Did you visit lots of places?” I asked Joe. He smiled and then rattled off a list that came to mind immediately: Library of Congress, the nation’s Capitol, Washington, Iwo Jima, World War II Memorial, Korean Memorial, Vietnam Memorial, Mount Vernon. His favorites were the Washington Monument and Mount Vernon. “And,” he added, “the Korean War Memorial was cool. Our bus left at 7:15 sharp so we were on the go from 6:00 a.m. ‘til 9:30 p.m. every day!”

With such a tight schedule, any delay was unwelcome to the driver and, two or three times, they were held up by motorcades: they thought one at least was for President Obama, although Prince Charles and his wife were visiting D.C. then so one may have been for them.

Mount Vernon was one of Sarah’s favorite stops, too. “I also really liked the World War II Memorial and the Washington Monument,” she said. From the website, the former certainly is impressive: it’s built of white granite; the oval pool with its attractive pattern of fountains lies in the center and, on the perimeter, there are two ‘triumphal’ arches (one looking east to Europe and the other west to the Pacific) which are flanked by sets of columns set in semi-circles on either side.

After almost three years repairing the damage caused by an earthquake in 2011, the Washington Monument has reopened for visitors; elevators whisk them up 555 feet 5 inches in 70 seconds (which beats climbing 897 stairs!) so they can marvel at the nation’s capital city so elegantly laid out along the Potomac River. The weather was clear and everyone in the group enjoyed that experience. “I hadn’t realized that it sits in the middle of a direct line between the U.S. Capitol and the Lincoln Memorial,” Darrel commented. “And, coming down in the elevator, they stopped it to show us various stones

that were donated by the various states and organizations that were unique.”

Darrel’s favorite building, however, was the Library of Congress. “The reading room is incredible,” he said. “We didn’t get to go in but could view it from an observatory. We also saw the Mainz Bible and the one of the best-preserved Gutenberg Bibles. The workmanship for both Bibles is incredible – very impressive to see firsthand. Wikipedia says this about the Mainz Bible: ‘It is notable for its beauty, for being one of the last manuscript Bibles written before the invention of printing in the West, and for its possible connections with the Gutenberg Bible.’”

Sarah went on to describe their time at Arlington Cemetery. “We saw the changing of the guard. Everything was very precise; it was really cool,” she enthused. Changing the guard is quite an elaborate ceremony and is executed hourly: the guards have to be within a certain height range and in top physical shape, and they go through rigorous training in order to qualify for the job. “They also changed the wreath,” she said. (This decorates the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier – a less frequently observed event.) There’s only one inscription on the Tomb and that’s on the back of it; it reads, *Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God*. Sharon pointed out the interesting fact that, with DNA, it’s less and less likely that future war dead will remain unidentified.

“I know a lot more (about American history) now,” Sarah continued, “and I understand it better because, even if we have learned about (President) Washington, it’s easier to remember now I’ve seen his house.”

After touring the Mount Vernon estate, they watched a 14-minute, 4-D movie of some battles in the Revolutionary War. “That was exciting!” Sarah smiled. “There are two screens, and the room lit up when they fired the cannons and there were sparks flying everywhere, and the seats shook; we felt like we were really in the fighting. They even had fake snow (that fell all around them) – kind of like bubbles, but I’m not sure what it really was. It was really cool.”

At the Holocaust Museum, Sharon said she and Sarah took their time, reading all the informational placards. They were very moved by what they learned.

Eleven of the Smithsonian’s nineteen museums and galleries are located on the National Mall, and the group visited several of them. Sarah talked about the Air and Space Museum. “We went there before lunch: that was interesting but it was cut short a little bit. But,” this time she smiled broadly, “my favorite thing at the Smithsonian: I really liked seeing the First

Ladies' dresses!" "These were the inaugural ball gowns," Sharon explained, and she was very impressed with the work that went into making them, especially those older ones that were hand-stitched.

All four of our travelers found the Korean Memorial very poignant, and Darrel was interested in its configuration: it is a triangle intersecting a circle; the walls are 164 feet long and 8 inches thick and are made from more than 100 tons of highly polished 'Academy Black' granite from California. On them are sandblasted more than 2,500 photographic, archival images representing the land, sea and air troops who supported those who fought in the war, and Darrel remembered that *Freedom Is Not Free* is inscribed on one of the walls.

Inside the memorial is a group of nineteen 7-7½ foot tall stainless steel statues of soldiers, each weighing nearly 1,000 pounds. The figures depict a squad on patrol, drawn from each branch of the armed forces, and represent an ethnic cross-section of America. Darrel commented that they are reflected on the granite wall that lines the memorial, giving the effect of 38 soldiers: Korea is on the 38th parallel. The soldiers are wearing ponchos (which cover their weapons, and seem to be blowing in the 'cold winds of Korea'), and are walking among patches of juniper bushes to represent rough terrain; alongside, lying on the ground, are polished granite strips that represent Korean rice paddies. Sharon said they have water trickling continually through the 'paddies' that makes the scene feel even more authentic.

Joe said the Iwo Jima statue is good, too. The six men are faithfully represented from a photo that was taken at the event on the island in 1945. The figures are 32 feet high and the flagpole they are raising is 36 feet long. By presidential proclamation, the U.S. flag at the top of the 78-foot tall statue flies at full mast all the time.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is two walls of polished black granite etched with 58,274 names of the 'missing or deceased', and Nurse Sharon was alert to the fact that eight nurses were killed serving in Vietnam, and that a specific tree has been planted in memory of each of them. The wall is certainly a powerful depiction of all those U.S. lives lost.

How many walls would it take to etch the names of all the Vietnamese who died? Estimates of their dead are: 1.1 million North Vietnamese and Viet Cong fighters, up to 250,000 South Vietnamese soldiers and as many as two million civilians.

The following is a song written by Pete Seeger and added to by Joe Hickerson. This song has been recorded by many singers from c. 1960 to the present. It was particularly popular during the Vietnam war years.

Where have all the flowers gone, long time passing?
Where have all the flowers gone, long time ago?
Where have all the flowers gone?
Young girls have picked them, every one.
Oh, when will they ever learn? Oh, when will they
ever learn?
Where have all the young girls gone, long time
passing?
Where have all the young girls gone, long time ago?
Where have all the young girls gone?
Gone for husbands every one.
Oh, when will they ever learn? Oh, when will they
ever learn?
Where have all the husbands gone, long time
passing?
Where have all the husbands gone, long time ago?
Where have all the husbands gone?
Gone for soldiers, every one.
Oh, when will they ever learn? Oh, when will they
ever learn?
Where have all the soldiers gone long time passing?
Where have all the soldiers gone, long time ago?
Where have all the soldiers gone?
Gone to graveyards, every one.
Oh, when will they ever learn? Oh, when will they
ever learn?
Where have all the graveyards gone, long time
passing?
Where have all the graveyards gone, long time ago?
Where have all the graveyards gone?
Gone to flowers, every one.
Oh, when will they ever learn? Oh, when will they
ever learn?
Where have all the flowers gone, long time passing?
Where have all the flowers gone, long time ago?
Where have all the flowers gone?
Young girls have picked them every one.
Oh, when will they ever learn? Oh, when will they
ever learn?

No one had mentioned the Martin Luther King statue so I asked Sharon if they saw it. "Yes; it's very realistic. I've seen the photo of him in that pose; and the statue looks just like it."

I asked Sharon to sum up her thoughts on the trip. "For a school group," she said, "this really is the best way to get an exposure to D.C. If I were organizing a trip like that independently, it would be very hard for me to pick out where to go; I would want to see it all. I know there's no way I could arrange all that in four days - it'd probably take two weeks - so I would have to be creative in what to see and how to schedule it, and I would need to leave myself open to being flexible. Things like, I was so thankful for our tour guide: our first day, before we got dropped off at the hotel, he had checked the

weather forecast for the next day: they were saying it was going to be cold and wet and snowy, so they were able to change our itinerary. That was really important because we'd been scheduled to go to Arlington Cemetery, and that wouldn't have been any fun in the cold and wet.

"One of my biggest disappointments was some of the memorials we had to see after dark" (because the evenings don't stay light long enough yet). "Some of them are lit up very beautifully so they look great after dark but there are several that aren't well lit. Ideally, I would have liked to see some of them in daylight, too. And, I enjoy American history so I could have used more time at the American History Museum – but you can't do everything. Apart from that, it was great."

Even if the trip seemed like a bit of a blur to the students, no doubt when they've talked about it some more – and maybe checked out the various websites – more of those sights and facts will gel for them. They all agreed it was a great overview of some of the major sights in D.C. – and, if they ever go back, they'll have a better idea where to go to again.

Darrel was very pleased with WorldStrides as an organization: not only did they have everything set up for them but he, too, appreciated their flexibility when it came to the weather. He also appreciated that they had staff on duty all night at the hotel. He noted Sharon's comments about not being able to see all the outside venues in daylight: he's thinking it might be better to go right after school's out when the weather's warmer and the days are longer. "I have a parents' meeting on April 20," he volunteered. "Another trip is tentatively scheduled for the week of May 23, 2016. And, by the way, if any adults are interested in going, they can let me know."

Many of the details for this piece were gleaned from pertinent websites and Wikipedia.

**An Invocation Of The Holy Spirit
Most powerful Holy Spirit,
come down
upon us
and subdue us.
From heaven,
where the ordinary is made glorious,
and glory seems
but ordinary,
bathe us
with the brilliance
of your light
like dew.**

(Celtic Daily Prayer, Northumbria Community p. 284.)

"These things just don't happen to us...until they do."

A condensation of several blogs that Amelia Brandt posted during March.)

"I started off my time in Sierra Leone being surprised how little this felt like an emergency situation to me. Yes, things were chaotic and the expectations on me were overwhelming at times, but it felt kind of like any other job. However, the experiences of the past few weeks have really had an impact on me."

On February 15, one of Amelia's housemates had to be tested for Ebola-like symptoms: their apartment was doused with a chlorine solution and he was taken by medics wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) suits (which take 15 minutes to put on and another 15 minutes to take off). Everyone in the house was placed in quarantine and they spent a few worrying days before it was diagnosed as E.coli. "Things went pretty much back to normal: we were out of quarantine, back to work and all of us thought that the worst was over," Amelia wrote. "I boarded a helicopter on Thursday morning and headed out to Kenema to visit our OICC (Observational Interim Care Center) there without a care in the world, beside the normal crushing workload I was managing."

Later that day, Amelia found out that a colleague was Ebola positive. "The most extensive contact I had had with this colleague was very minimal: I let him use my phone to call some staff. However, I was told that I would need to be quarantined, this time for the full 21 days, so, within the hour, I was in a car on my way back to Freetown, a 7-hour drive. But I wasn't to tell anyone: Ebola, unlike many other diseases, is only contagious when a person is showing symptoms and I had no fever and no symptoms, so I was not a danger to anyone. However, we knew that if the details of why I was returning to Freetown were revealed, the drivers would probably refuse to take me."

Amelia was allowed to stay in her house, but was relegated to 'solitary confinement' in a ground floor apartment: she would be expected to monitor her temperature three times a day and promptly report any symptoms. Everyone was trying to trace all this colleague's contacts, and she was relieved to find out that her contact with him was low enough to *not* warrant quarantine, so she went back to work. It seems that everyone, whether they've had minimal or close contact with an Ebola patient, is quarantined to the same degree which is causing some frustration. "As a result," Amelia reported, "there have been instances of people fleeing quarantine and actually causing the virus to spread more quickly than it would have otherwise." She was required to be re-quarantined on day six.

"As I arrived home, I found myself somewhat in shock over everything that had happened over the past week or two. Life in Sierra Leone is nothing like life in Boston, but up until all of this started, it had still been a

normal life, albeit with its own quirks. Now, somehow, within the space of two weeks, I had watched my friend be carted off in an ambulance by people in space suits, learned that a colleague had Ebola, and had been threatened with forcible quarantine. The level of normalcy that I had started to feel here had been completely shattered. I knew that my level of risk was very low and wasn't worried about actually having Ebola, but I could hardly believe how quickly the life I had built since January could be dismantled. I had been displaced from my home, my freedom had been taken away, and I felt like I was losing control of my own life.

"For a little over two weeks, I could only go as far as my front porch. I was still in the building where most of the staff lives, so I would see normal life going on around me; I just couldn't really be a part of it. People came to visit me pretty often, but it still felt like life was passing me by. The most striking thing was the endless monotony of it all. People who know me well, know that I like to keep my schedule full. I love planning everything, to the detail, in advance. If my calendar isn't full, I feel like I don't have anything to look forward to and I start to get bored. Well, for two full weeks I didn't look at my planner at all, because every day was the same. Some days I dealt with that alright and some days I didn't." She developed a general routine of working in the morning and until late afternoon and, for recreation, she enjoyed Netflix. She managed to stay pretty positive throughout and surprised herself by being able to find joy in very small things – an attractive coffee mug, 'rock out showers' when she would sing along, a beautiful hibiscus plant, sitting outside to watch the sunsets – "but," she acknowledged, "I would be lying if I didn't admit that it was a very long two weeks."

"I think perhaps the most surprising part of the experience was the last night," she confessed. "Even though I was going back to the same job and desk and office I'd spent 'way too many hours in over the past two months, I found myself with the same jitters I'd had before my first day. It felt like it had been so long since I'd left the apartment that I was anxious about going into work. I knew logically that my anxiety was unfounded but, viscerally, I just couldn't shake it.

"The 21 days between the day I found out my colleague was positive for Ebola and the day I was released from quarantine are ones that I don't think I'll ever forget...although a lot of them do blur together. My colleague passed away less than a week after being diagnosed. A week after that, his wife passed away. Although I didn't get to work with him for very long, it still affected me. In this kind of work, it's easy to think of yourself as isolated from the world around you. These things just don't happen to us...until they do."

"After about a month of everything going wrong that could go wrong, I'm back in my room, in my own flat, and with my roommates. I've returned to the office and

now, instead of alternately working and napping to get through the day, I'm running back and forth between meetings and starting to figure out my new position. In short, I'm trying to get my normal Sierra Leonean life back.

"On Friday, I found myself at a district health planning meeting where I was the only person who wasn't from Sierra Leone. The meeting was extremely chaotic and took place almost entirely in Krio, the native language here. Krio is similar to English, but it's different enough that it was hard to catch everything. The meeting was supposed to start at 9:00, but didn't start until 10:30. I'm not sure when it ended, because I had to leave at 3:30. It was a truly bizarre experience.

"That night, we threw a party to celebrate my release. I then spent Saturday doing all of the things I had been thinking about doing while I was trapped in quarantine: getting a pedicure, going to a restaurant and ordering lobster thermidor, lying around all day by a pool. It was glorious. And then Sunday, as per usual, was a beach day with my roommates. So, back to life as usual, I think.

"I left this Friday for Accra, Ghana. One of the perks of working during an emergency is that we can use the U.N. flight system, so I can get free flights to Ghana, Senegal, Liberia, and Guinea. The downside is that you have to get a medical check every time you want to fly, which is a bit of a pain. I have to say though, walking on the tarmac to the World Food Programme plane made me feel pretty cool. At this point, there are so few flights coming in and out of Sierra Leone that there are no commercial flights on Fridays. The only people in the airport were those of us going on the U.N. flight and a group of Chinese military people with their own plane. The arrival and departure boards were blank and the airport was nearly deserted.

"I spent yesterday in Accra and I'm heading to the Cape Coast later today. I haven't travelled on my own for a long time, so I'm a little out of practice at figuring things out myself without any drivers or other resources. But, hey, I'm a resourceful girl and I'm sure I can figure it out.

I've had many homes that I've loved in my life, and now I can add Sierra Leone to that list. You never really realize that a place has become home until you leave it and come back. I returned from Ghana on Wednesday and found myself breathing a sigh of relief as I stepped out of the airport into the cool air. I enjoyed being away and having some time to myself, but I was happy to see the ocean stretching out before me on the ride home and was excited to see my friends in Freetown.

"As I started to unpack, I had another great surprise. My room doesn't have a dresser or any shelves in the closet so, for the past three months, I've been keeping things that don't need to be put on hangers in my suitcase. But when I came home, I finally had shelves!

So after three months of living out of a suitcase, I was finally able to unpack properly.

“My time in Ghana was really refreshing: I spent one day in Accra and then went to the coast to spend a few days. The town I stayed in was small and the coastline was dominated by Cape Coast Castle. This is one of the several castles that were built on the Gold Coast of Ghana for the slave trade. It's hard to describe how I felt as I was touring it. The disconnect between the beautiful building and the stunning views of the coast and the ugly things that had happened there was hard to stomach. The most striking contrast was the entrance to the church in the castle: just outside the door of the church was a spy hole for the men's dungeons where over 200 men at a time were trapped with only a tiny window at the top for light and ventilation. It's hard to imagine how the people working at the castle were able to walk into their church service past the cries from below.

“My time in the Cape Coast was completely heavy, though. I made new friends and learned how to play a ngony and managed to commission one to be made and sent to my Mom. I spent a lot of time sitting on the beach, sipping beer, and just relaxing. Here in Sierra Leone we generally work 10-12 hour days and are expected to work at least one day of the weekend. Since it's the norm, you get used to it and start to forget what it's like to have a proper work-life balance. While I was away, I didn't check my email at all and I was able to just focus on myself for the first time in a long time. It was definitely a needed break.

“This weekend in Sierra Leone we're having a 'stay-at-home' period, also known as a lockdown. The cases had been reducing, but getting to zero is proving to be much more of a challenge. We've had case surges in certain areas and it seems that our progress is starting to stall. So the government declared this lockdown for three days. No one is allowed to leave the house for three days to try to reduce cases. It's quite boring, but at least I have my roommates. The house we live in has three floors of people, so we've been taking turns cooking dinner for each other and hanging out. In addition to that, I've been making great use of my Netflix account. I think if they ever need a spokeswoman, I could absolutely do it.”

The Sign of Jonah

In 1960, a pastor in East Germany wrote a play called *The Sign of Jonah*. The last scene dealt with the Final Judgment. All the peoples of the earth are assembled on the plain of Jehosaphat awaiting God's verdict. They are not, however, waiting submissively; on the contrary, they are gathered in small groups, talking indignantly. One group is a band of Jews, a sect that has known little but religious, social, and

political persecution throughout their history. Included in their number are victims of Nazi extermination camps. Huddled together, the group demands to know what right God has to pass judgment on them, especially a God who dwells eternally in the security of heaven.

Another group consists of American blacks. They too question the authority of God who has never experienced the misfortunes of men, never known the squalor and depths of human degradation to which they were subjected in the suffocating holds of slave ships. A third group is composed of persons born illegitimately, the butt all their lives of jokes and sneers.

Hundreds of such groups are scattered across the plain: the poor, the afflicted, the maltreated. Each group appoints a representative to stand before the throne of God and challenge his divine right to pass sentence on their immortal destinies. The representatives include a horribly twisted arthritic, a victim of Hiroshima, a blind mute. They meet in council and decide that this remote and distant God who has never experienced human agony is unqualified to sit in judgment unless he is willing to enter into the suffering, humiliated state of man and endure what they have undergone.

Their conclusion reads: You must be born a Jew; the circumstances of your birth must be questioned; you must be misunderstood by everyone, insulted and mocked by your enemies, betrayed by your friends; you must be persecuted, beaten, and finally murdered in a most public and humiliating fashion.

Such is the judgment passed on God by the assembly. The clamor rises to fever pitch as they await his response. Then a brilliant, dazzling light illuminates the entire plain. One by one those who have passed judgment on God fall silent. For, emblazoned high in the heavens for the whole world to see is the signature of Jesus Christ with this inscription above it: *I have served my sentence.*

Retold by Brennan Manning

All submissions of interest to the FMC family are welcome and will be included, depending on timeliness and space availability. (If preferred, they may be submitted anonymously.) *First Threshings* is distributed the first Sunday of each month so materials should be submitted at least one week previously. Comments pro/con regarding any aspect of the newsletter are also welcome. Please address these to Pat Bartel, compiler/ editor: mailslot 107 or meadowlark.bartel@gmail.com