

RWANDA – DAY ONE

6:07 .am. -- They have mockingbirds in Rwanda, or at least what sounds like one... I discovered this at 5:30 a.m. (local Kigali time) when one decided to serenade me right outside my window. FYI, that would be 7:30 p.m. the night before, California time, or five hours after I was able to drift off to sleep (thank you, God, for Advil PM) in my hotel room in Kigali. Time isn't meaningless, but I'm working hard to discover its relevance right now. I spent a total of 21 hours on three different airplanes, basically losing a full day to travel and time change, while trying to get a little sleep back in "steorage" and breaking a commandment or two as I imagined what it would be like up in Business or First Class.

My new best friend, the mockingbird, continued to sing loud enough and long enough where staying in bed was no longer an option. And Harper Lee has forever put the jinx on any other ideas I might have had about trying to sleep a little longer. So I'm out of bed, looking every bit the accidental tourist in my cargo shorts and Mt. Cross t-shirt. I think I'll wander over to where breakfast will soon be served and see if they might have a pot of grace and mercy (coffee) ready to go a little earlier than the advertised 7 a.m. start time.

6:47 a.m. Praise the Lord! There is coffee and breads and fruit (bananas and pineapple and avocados – yes, avocados are a fruit...) and a smile and a beautiful 70 degree sunny morning. My travel partner for the last leg of the journey from Brussels to Kigali, Robin Strickler (who works with the Rwandan School Project and is married to John Rutsindintwarane, General Secretary of the Lutheran Church of Rwanda – "LCR") informed me that because Rwanda is very close to the equator, the sun rises and sets at virtually the same time year round, with only a few minutes variation between the solstices.

A little later this morning, I will be attending church with Robin and John (who also took me out for Pizza after we cleared customs at the airport) to attend the ordination of the son of Bishop Kaliisa. They have told me this service could last for five hours, which doesn't seem too long given my recent adventures in international travel. BTW -- I couldn't have asked for a more genial travel partner in Robin – she spotted me at the ticket gate in Brussels (mentioned something about "looking" like a bishop, even though I was wearing sweats at the time – I'll have to work on that...) and introduced herself, though I recognized her as soon as she spoke from pictures I'd seen of her ministry with the LCR. It was an amazing gift for a rookie traveler (I didn't have a passport before I was elected bishop) to find a friendly face and a person with experience in navigating the Brussels airport, customs, currency exchange and language barriers (my seat mate on the flight to Brussels – a man from Belgium -- spoke five languages, and was learning Spanish because he does business in the U.S. – food for thought).

Robin was returning from a brief furlough in the U.S. – and I was able to align my travel plans so that we could meet in Brussels and I could learn more from her about her ministry, the work of the LCR and LWF (Lutheran World Federation) in Rwanda, and about life in Rwanda in general on the eight hour flight we shared. Along the way, she was able to point out the Alps, Sicily, The Sahara Desert, and a few cities that could be seen from 39K feet. She had sent me a travel memo that has been prepared for visitors to Rwanda (VERY worthwhile reading) which somehow got lost in cyberspace. So I didn't know until it was too late that the hotels and

restaurants here don't take credit cards, and that new Ben Franklins will get you a better exchange rate than older Jacksons. Maybe if I turn over the tables of the money changers, they'll give me a better rate – oh wait, that didn't work out so well. For now, I'm confident that I have enough get by, which should be something I'm able to say more often in my life, even when I'm in row 37... More later.

RWANDA – DAY TWO

The five hour ordination service actually ended up being closer to six, which I was told was a *little* longer than expected... The church was as full as John and Robin had seen it in a while, and the voices of the children's and adult choirs were magical. I absolutely could not keep from smiling whenever they sang – there is such joy and exuberance and faith in their voices, their eyes, their smiles and their dance as they sing. Music is not something they are *performing* – it is *embodied*. That the ordination service was for the son of Bishop Kaliisa was only part of the reason for the joy of the day – the Lutheran Church of Rwanda (LCR) is a young church, formed within the last fifteen years, and any sign of the movement of the Spirit and growth in their ministry is an occasion for great joy. Many pastors from the Lutheran Church of Tanzania (from which the LCR had its founding during the time of the genocide and the eventual repatriation of Rwandan people who had sought refuge there) had ridden for hours on a bus to attend and were on hand to offer their support and blessing to the new pastor – The Rev. Prince Mukase Kaliisa (in case you wanted to add his name to your prayers).

I was brought into the service two hours after it started (not an unacceptable allowance given my 21 hour excursion to get here), and was ushered to a seat in the front row, where soon after I arrived, I was asked to come forward and bring greetings. I soon discovered there are two words that can be spoken to members of the LCR that instantly bring smiles and nods of greeting that transcend any other barriers – those words are the name of my predecessor in the office of Bishop – David Mullen. I had told Dave that I would bring greetings on his behalf when I had the opportunity, and have not been surprised, knowing how much his trips to Rwanda had affected his life and ministry, to see the way his ministry has affected the life and ministry of the people of this church. To say in that moment I perceived David had been an ambassador of God's grace and the good will of the people of the Sierra Pacific Synod (SPS) would be a gross understatement – he will always be “Bishop David” to the people of Rwanda – retired or not. I am grateful for the doors that are flying open before me because of his work, and the work of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the many congregations of the SPS who have companion parish relationships here and the work of the Global Missions Unit of the E.L.C.A. FYI – mentioning Mark Hanson's name (Presiding Bishop of the E.L.C.A.) also got some smiles and nods, but I think *they think* he works for David – I won't try to set them straight...

The day continued with Robin and John allowing me time for a nap following the service (I may actually have taken a few naps *during* the service – it's all kind of a blur and I was in good company, from what I could tell...). I learned a great deal more from them about the history of the work that is being done in Rwanda through the Ministry of Reconciliation. I will be meeting the Secretary of this Ministry at the offices of the government today, along with a number of

other officials in the ministries of health and education. There is great respect and appreciation here for how faith-based organizations, and the Lutheran Church in particular, have been a sign of “faith active in love” for the people of Rwanda. The E.L.C.A. has a statement that accompanies its name on its website, letterhead, etc. – “God’s work, our hands.” That statement is very much in evidence here.

Yet it is much more than a story of a rich and powerful and entitled church body helping a younger, poorer church body. I KNOW there are things the SPS and the E.L.C.A. can learn about life and ministry from the grace and dignity and joy with which the people of this church carry on in the face of many continuing challenges. What does it mean to have lived in a time of deep darkness – a genocide – only to emerge on the other side with the notion that reconciliation, and not revenge or retribution, would be the way out and forward? I wonder if lessons that are being learned here could make a difference in the Holy Land, even now, and in the U.S. – where “red state/blue state” divisions are alive and well, even as we inaugurate a new President who seeks to bring us together. I am embarrassed to think of the things we fight over in our churches when I see the manner in which the people of Rwanda and the LCR are living the radical notions of forgiveness, grace and peace which Jesus taught.

To be honest and not overly dramatic, I am a little fearful for what the meetings of the next few days will bring, because I believe it’s possible my life will be changed (or that it *should* be) – that somehow, my life and my faith will be entirely an entirely different journey from that point forward. I have seen it in the lives of the people who have been here before me. And if, after some time and some distance from these days have passed, and those with whom I am closest in life and ministry can see the memory of these days having less and less effect on the choices I make and the words I use – you have my permission to give me a good slap, or at least a gentle nudge, and offer one word – “remember.”

I hope to be at the airport at around noon today to greet a group that is coming here from Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Santa Rosa, led by Pr. Stephanie Lord and Karl Smith, former Treasurer of the SPS and a very active leader in trying to raise funds for the Rwandan School Project. We are all here to attend and participate in a dedication ceremony on Wednesday for the first wing of the new school having been completed. It will be good to see people from Bethlehem Lutheran whom I last saw in Advent, when I was blessed to be a part of a service of Evening Prayer and to read one of my favorite stories for Christmas (or any other time of year) – “The Littlest Angel.”

Yesterday ended in a kind of surreal way -- eating Chinese food at 10 p.m. with Robin and John in a beautiful outdoor restaurant, drinking Rwandan beer, while Glen Campbell’s “Rhinstone Cowboy” and other country music played in the background... I’m off to have breakfast at the buffet (no background music there) before Pr. John picks me up for this day of meetings. I think I’ll try some of the fruits on the platter I didn’t recognize...

PS -- So I found out there’s something worse than a mockingbird outside your window at 5:30 a.m. – I don’t know what it is, but it sounds for all the world like a cross between screeching brakes and a turkey being tortured. But at least it came a little closer to the 6 a.m. sunrise...

More tomorrow...

RWANDA – DAY THREE

I am discovering an amazing tolerance for the unexpected here in Rwanda; for the ebb and flow of schedules that are not of my own making, for appointments that need to be changed at the last minute, for time that is marked with wholly different sensibilities than those under which I normally operate. And it is OK – really. If Debbi is reading this, she is probably asking, “Who is this and what have they done with my husband???” (Could somebody please call her, and ask if she needs help picking herself up from the floor about now?) The reality is, time is marked differently here, and when one schedule is upended, another seamlessly takes its place, with grace and good will and anything but a sense of insult or injury being the reaction. It is one of the unintended learnings of this day – Day Three in Rwanda.

I was to have met today with the Program Coordinator for the Lutheran World Federation, Bishop Kaliisa of the LCR, the Minister of Reconciliation for the Government of Rwanda, and possibly the president of Rwanda himself. But as the day progressed, only one of these meetings materialized – two have been re-scheduled, and the President will have to wait until my next visit to have the honor of meeting me. I think he’s past the disappointed stage by now...

A schedule that was suddenly much freer than expected offered me an opportunity to join the pastors of the LCR in a weekly Morning Prayer meeting. During introductions, I had the chance to offer greetings on behalf of their sister parishes in the SPS, and they had the chance to tell me how much it means to have the support of so many sisters and brothers in Christ that truly makes a difference in their ministry. At one point, I asked them if they had any questions for me. After a few moments, the Dean of the meeting asked, “Your synod and your churches are doing so much for us here, is there anything we can do for you -- for your churches?” I told them, “You are already doing it. You have already given us the opportunity to see beyond the needs of our own churches and communities, even in the troubled financial times many of our people are facing, to extend the love and the blessings and the grace of God we have received in abundance to you as our partners in this important work; and we know that you are bringing a message of hope to the people of Rwanda. Thank you. You are teaching us the meaning of being reconciled with one another, of seeking to empower those who have been without power. Perhaps one day you will be sending missionaries to us – to teach us to look farther beyond the abundance of things we have in our lives to the true meaning of following Christ – to help us bring God’s love to people in the same powerful way you are sharing that love here.”

Pr. John Rutsindintwarane and I next went to the Rwanda office of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and met with the Program Director, Sophie Gebreyes. She outlined for me the four objectives of the work LWF is doing in Rwanda:

1. Improve rural livelihoods; including roads that are passable year round and opportunities for education for children.
2. Peace and Reconciliation; dealing with the lingering consequences of the genocide, including post-traumatic stress syndrome and other survivor issues.

3. Civic Empowerment; working to provide “good” government that is responsive to the needs of all the people of Rwanda.
4. “Cross-Cutting Issues” – issues that must be dealt with if improvements in other areas are to have any real effect – gender-equality, health and HIV/Aids, education, the environment – issues that affect ALL other advocacy issues.

The work of LWF is highly regarded by the government of Rwanda, and Sophie and Pr. John and many others are the reason for that respect. They are tireless workers seeking to better the lives of millions of people, and evidence of the success of their work can be seen in many areas of Rwandan life. Working collaboratively with other faith-based organizations, there are schools and roads being built, sanitary and water facilities that are decreasing the prevalence of water-borne illnesses, and improvements in health care. The work of empowering those who have been without voice or power – women and children – is continuing. But Sophie was also clear about one thing – there is still more work to be done. She and John and the LWF are looking to us to continue supporting this vital work.

In light of today’s events in Washington, D.C., I began to think about the many challenges Rwanda is facing and the many challenges facing (soon to be) President Barak Obama. LWF alone cannot fix the problems here, neither can people like John or Sophie. As Barak pointed out yesterday while working to clean up and paint a shelter for the homeless and for veterans – “I can’t make a difference working alone, and neither can Michelle, but together, we can make a difference.” Those words echoed in my mind as I heard Maya Angelou speak on the BBC this morning. At one point, speaking of how much we are expecting of this new President and all the problems we are looking to him to “fix,” she said, “He needs us, even more than we need him.” Those words will haunt me as I remember the work that is being done here by John and Robin and Sophie and so many others – and when I return home to see all that is needing to be done in our own country, and the rest of the world.

Because the other meetings were cancelled or postponed, I was able to go to the airport to greet 12 very weary travelers from Bethlehem Lutheran in Santa Rosa – I recognized their glazed-over eyes and the effects of many hours on a plane. We got them settled into the hotel and left them to recover, sleep and shower, not necessarily in that order. We will connect up again on Wednesday for the Dedication Ceremony at the Rwandan School Project. I then received an unofficial tour of Kigali, a city of 900,000 people that is growing -- fast. There are many construction projects underway, including “McMansions” – hastily built “track” mansions that are built within a few hundred yards of much more modest homes. Gasoline is selling for 7.65 Rwandan Francs (RF) per liter, or about \$5.25 per gallon. Bakeries and small grocery stores and butcher shops are dotted throughout the neighborhoods of the city; there are virtually no “supermarkets.” I converted my U.S. Currency into RF’s – 565 per dollar -- and I feel a little like John Jacob Astor (and don’t tell me younger people won’t know who that is – they all saw “Titanic” between 2 and 10 times...). Children approach on even the shortest of walks begging for money – and vendors seeking to sell everything from sunglasses to bags of rice are plentiful. Pedestrians and vehicles and motorcycle taxis share the road in an uneasy dance that is really organized chaos – I’m glad I’m not driving. Medians and roadsides are immaculately maintained – hundreds of workers can be seen throughout the day keeping the roadways

beautiful and green. And people walk EVERYWHERE. The sidewalks and the roadsides are jammed with people walking at all hours of the day and well into the night.

I'm off now to a meeting with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Rwanda. Then John and I and Jackie, a missionary who is working in the Congo (more about her work tomorrow), will drive three hours to Kibungo to visit the Mumeya, Kirehe and Rukira Lutheran parishes. We hope to be back in time to watch the Inauguration of President Barak Obama on the BBC – about 7 p.m. local time. At least that's what's on the schedule...

Hasta Manana...

RWANDA – DAY FOUR

Two Millennia of children...

I honestly don't know what I'm supposed to be feeling right now. I have spent the day having my kidneys punched by roads unlike any I have ever travelled before, at least not for the purpose for which I was traveling today. We drove three hours east of Kigali to the Kibungo district, very near the borders with Tanzania and Burundi, on roads that are barely passable, even in Pr. John's four-wheel drive Toyota Land Rover. We were "in the bush" – an unbelievably beautiful and unimaginably impoverished area of Rwanda. On the journey there and back, passing along mile after mile of hovels and shacks and outdoor markets and bus stops and banana palms and rice fields, the images that I cannot remove from my mind's eye are the children -- thousands of children. Two thousand children, by my reckoning, and that number might even be low.

As we drove along, whether at highway speeds or at the much slower snail's pace dictated by roads through the bush, the children would wave. When they could see who it was that was waving back, they would smile even more broadly, run closer to the road, wave with greater fervor, and shout out, "Mzungu! Mzungu!" – "White person! White person!" In a surreal way -- it reminded me of a game our children used to play while we drove in the family car – "slug buggy." The goal was to be the first to spot a Volkswagen Beetle, which gave you the right to punch your sibling in the arm and say the words "slug buggy!" The point was to be the first to see it/say it – and I was wondering if that was the goal for these children – to be the first to see that it was a white person, and have bragging rights for your eagle eyes. "Mzungu" is not meant as a racial slur, by the way, it's nothing more than the fact that for some children, especially in the bush, white people are still a very rare sight.

The faces of smiling, waving children have been a source of joy on this journey – but it's the faces of the children who are not smiling – children begging in the streets of Kigali -- seven and eight year olds carrying younger siblings on their backs while their mothers and fathers work in the fields – children with hollowed eyes and distended bellies – children with skin conditions whose arms and legs and scalps were covered with oozing sores – these are the images that will remain with me, and should remain with me. And even for the smiling children, I am left to

wonder how they spend their days and how will they be fed and educated and given clean water and what kind of future do they have – and what’s my role and responsibility in helping that future to be different for the thousands of children I encountered in just ONE DAY, and what’s my and our role for the BILLIONS of children the world over whose lives are no different or better? When I met with Sophie (the program director for the LWF here in Rwanda) the other day and she spoke of improving the lives of people in the rural areas, it was almost an academic exercise to discuss the needs of unseen millions of people. They are no longer unseen or seen from a comfortable distance. It is no longer an arm’s length, academic conversation. This is happening, now. It has been happening in the two millennia since Jesus gathered children in his arms, multiplied by millennia upon millennia of children who have lived in each every generation since that time.

The purpose of this day’s journey was to see the ministry being done by the LWF and the LCR, which is supported by the SPS and the many sister parish relationships that exist between congregations in our synod and parishes here. To meet the pastors and health care workers and community organizers of the region, and to see the facilities – churches, schools, clinics, water reservoirs – that are making a difference in people’s lives. But no one told me that along the way I would see the purpose for which these ministries exist -- people, thousands of people, thousands of children. Maybe they assumed I would have known that. Like so much of the rest of my life, I was so focused on the end of the journey that I wasn’t adequately prepared for what I might encounter along the way. How stupid/ignorant/clueless/arrogant/stupid (it’s worth mentioning twice...) could I have been? Am I? Will I continue to be?

What I also saw during the day was a clinic that is being built in Mumeya, in the middle of nowhere, which will save women who live in a number of small villages near the border with Burundi from walking 40 kilometers for pre-natal health care – a significant factor in preventing a high rate of birth complications, stillbirth, and infant death. The clinic will also address health issues for infants and toddlers; of 100 children born in this area, only 60 will make it to their fifth birthday. I saw a secondary school and a new dormitory that will house 160 middle and high school students, built with support from St. John’s Lutheran in Sacramento. I saw a sanctuary being built with support from Bethel Lutheran Church in Roseville. The members of a community organizing ministry held up the notebooks and pens they were using in their work, a gift from “Pastor Lucy” (Pr. Lucy Kolin and the congregation of Resurrection Lutheran in Oakland). There are so many vitalized connections between congregations of the SPS and the parishes here and at every place I visited; they were hopeful that I would pass along their heartfelt gratitude.

One of my traveling partners of the day was Jackie Griffin, who is a candidate for ordained ministry in the South Dakota Synod and who is doing mission work, supported in part by her internship congregation, St John Lutheran Church of Royal, Illinois, in the Rugari Parish of the DR Congo. It’s an ecumenical ministry near the border with Rwanda and Uganda focusing on development projects based on goals of the Millennium Project. I am including a link to her blog so that you can read more about the work she and many others are doing in the midst of a continuing humanitarian crisis brought on by ethnic violence. Her blog can be found at: www.gomanews.blogspot.com I shudder to think of what Jackie and so many others who are doing this work are seeing that makes my day pale by comparison. Please remember Jackie and

those who work in and near refugee camps in many places of the world, and those who live in these camps, in your prayers.

I am a little too dazed and my emotions are way too raw to write much more – I'll let the pictures tell more of the story of today. Please keep the people with whom I am now inexorably connected in your prayers. May the Spirit unbridle our hearts and our creative energies and quell our fear and challenge our indifference as we wonder where we might be fully present with those we may wish we could go on unnoticed.

RWANDA – DAY FIVE

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

I know the liturgical calendar says it's still Epiphany, but it's definitely Easter here.

I awoke this morning after a short, fitful night of sleep -- still numb from the events and sights of yesterday. The BBC was reporting that Rwandan troops are crossing the border into the DR Congo, three hours west of here, to deal with Hutu rebels that continue to commit acts of violence in that region. These are many of the same rebels (and now their sons) who were responsible for the Rwandan Genocide of 1994, and tensions are high in the area. Yet there is hope, because the Rwandan forces are moving into the region at the invitation of the DR Congo, as peacekeepers. Coincidentally, I will be meeting tomorrow with the Minister of State Unity and Reconciliation, Fatuma Ndagiza. She oversees the work of the government in bringing peace and justice to the people of Rwanda in a manner that does not sow seeds for further violence or retribution. I will spend about an hour with her before I go to the Genocide Memorial in Kigali. I am a little leery of having this on the schedule after yesterday, but it is an important part of the history of this place, and a key piece to understanding all that can be seen here in terms of the continuing re-development of Rwanda.

Yesterday's journey to the bush was something of a Good Friday experience for me; thankfully, today turned out to be Easter. The dedication service for the Rwandan School Project (RSP) was an event filled with hope and promise and evidence of the Spirit's movement in powerful ways, not only through the dedication of the school itself, but in the joyous spirit of those who were gathered for the service. The pictures tell it all, and I will only say that as the children sang, the light of the Risen Christ was visible in their eyes. As Karl Smith, a member of Bethlehem Lutheran in Santa Rosa and a leading voice in the development of the RSP said to the children when they were finished with their songs, "I couldn't understand the language you were singing in, but my heart got the message." This school is such a positive step forward in dealing with many of the problems I encountered yesterday, and it has given me the hope of knowing that in the face of such great need, there are dedicated and resourceful and Spirit-led people making a difference. The problems still exist, the numbers are staggering, but as with good Friday, this is not the end of the story. We CAN make a difference -- one village at a time, one country at a time, and eventually, one continent at a time. We CAN end the cycles of poverty and injustice and violence and hunger and disease that affect billions of people in this world, by not ignoring the responsibilities and opportunities borne of our many blessings that will empower us to do so.

See it for yourself in the pictures – the joy of those who came together to celebrate one school in one village that is changing lives and bringing hope, and imagine what would happen were we to multiply such a scene thousands, millions of times over with schools and clinics and clean water wells and.... Let your imagination and your heart take it from there.

I leave tonight for San Francisco by way of Entebbe, Brussels and Chicago. I don't know if I'll be able to post anything regarding Day Six in Rwanda during my layover in Brussels, but if I can, I will. In the meantime, your prayers for me and my fellow travelers will be appreciated. It has been GREAT having the people of Bethlehem Lutheran of Santa Rosa to share this experience with – they will be here for a few more days and then will make their way home on Monday.

Christ is risen!
bmh

RWANDA – DAY SIX

My last day in Rwanda was a day of meetings and packing, goodbyes and check-outs, which all started with an early morning post (Day Five) on my blog and a last breakfast at the Beausejour -- more generous servings of fruits and breads and Rwandan coffee. I then made my way with Pr. John to the Kigali parish, along with the group from Bethlehem Lutheran, for a meeting with Bp. Kaliisa. Apparently, there was a miscommunication, and Bp. Kaliisa never made it. The group from Bethlehem left to work for a day sorting books and other materials at the Rwandan School Project at Rwamagana. Later in the day, they left for a nature preserve in western Rwanda where they could see lowland gorillas. We said our goodbyes and wished each other well on the next parts of our journeys.

I had to leave the Kigali Parish by 9:00 a.m. for a meeting with the Anglican Archbishop of Rwanda, The Most Rev. Emmanuel Musaba Kolini, with whom I had a very enjoyable and informative meeting. He and Pr. John and other religious leaders are very involved with efforts at reconciliation and healing from the Genocide, including building and operating schools (60% of the primary schools in Rwanda are run by religious organizations, with the thanks and appreciation of the Rwandan government), health clinics, water catchment systems and wells, day care centers, opportunities for women's empowerment and improving the quality of life for all Rwandans. It is clear that Pr. John has been working hard, as a part of his community-organizing work, to network with many other religious leaders of ALL faiths to accomplish these goals. I don't believe I have ever met a more gracious, generous, and humble person in my life, who is incredibly effective at listening to others and acting on their concerns. He is what I would hope we could all aspire to be as servants to others.

My next meeting was with the Minister for National Unity and Reconciliation (I'm writing President Obama and suggesting we have a similar Cabinet Post) for the Republic of Rwanda, Fatuma Ndagiza, which was postponed from the other day. Fatuma, a Muslim, oversees the work of the Rwandan government to bring healing and hope in the wake of the Genocide. She gave generously of her time to talk about the history of colonialism and its role in the Genocide,

and the efforts of her ministry to ensure that the history and lessons which can be learned from this tragic time, when neighbors were responsible for the deaths and mutilations of neighbors, will not be forgotten. In 100 days, nearly a million people were killed, while the U.N., the U.S. and the rest of the world did virtually nothing to stop it. My visit with Fatuma, along with a visit to the Genocide Memorial in Kigali (there are memorials in many places around the country) are two parts of my time in Rwanda which will require much more time and learning to fully appreciate. From what little I understand about the Genocide, it is amazing to me to see how far the people of Rwanda have come in just fifteen years to bring about a society that functions as well as it does. The story of how reconciliation has worked to aid this process is something about which I want to know more.

I left Rwanda at 9:00 p.m., local time, and was blessed with on-time flights, easy connections, friendly customs agents and empty seats next to me on the four flights home. Since my return to San Francisco Friday evening, I've been to a Synod Council meeting, come home to spend time with Debbi and to hear about a difficult week at the high school, talked with each of our kids, preached at an Episcopal church in El Dorado Hills and attended a Service of Prayer for Christian Unity. To put it bluntly, I am "baked." I will end this now – but reserve the right to post some further reflections on the trip when my head is a little less foggy from jet lag. Thank you to all who have read these posts and offered your good wishes and prayerful support – it has been more of a blessing than I can adequately express. Thank you. Peace.

PS -- The night before I left Rwanda I discovered you can't see the North Star from there. I should have remembered that when one is below the equator, this compass point for navigation in the northern hemisphere disappears from view, but it was still a little disorienting when I realized that Polaris was nowhere to be seen. The sky was clear of clouds for the first time since my arrival, and we were far enough from the lights of Kigali to pull off the road and see what can be seen on an African starry night. It was amazing. The stars were as clear and bright as I remember seeing them from the Rocky Mountains a number of years ago. Orion was in an odd place in the sky, and it was facing the wrong way, and there were a large number of stars and constellations I didn't recognize and couldn't name. I guess I was experiencing "star lag," but it was worth it!