

Settling into Sia'toutai Theological College

Greetings to All from STC,

We have certainly been under a flurry of activity, since I last wrote to you of our arrival. We have moved from the girl's dormitory into our own bungalow; in the college's village section, known as Filitelfia (Philadelphia). Each of the village areas are named after one of the seven cities of Revelation. Once again, the generosity of the Tongan people is quite humbling. They have provided beautiful furnishings for our home; as well as appliances to ensure our comfort and needs.

Our next major change involved transportation. Renate and I had been adventuring out into the island by hitchhiking and using our reliable friend, the Hihifo bus. We decided that we would like a bit more independence, so we have rented a vehicle on a monthly basis. Now, we can more easily decide to do something on the spur of the moment and not be so tied to bus schedules. Yet, we will not forget, that our trusted Hihifo bus, is always available as a good back-up.

Renate has found the ability to utilize her teaching skills in town. She has a variety of locations; that are in a state of formation. She loves teaching the exercise classes and, depending on the viability of the different classes, Renate will continue to offer her skills and expertise.

I, on the other hand, have been busy aiding the students at STC. I am currently in the midst of proof-reading several theological dissertations. It is such an amazing gift to be given the privilege of reading the student's work. The young men and women's dissertations are filled with unique Tongan cultural revelations, fascinating moments of Tongan History and compelling personal life stories. I am deeply grateful just to share the reading of their work and then the added gift, in being part of a discussion with each student; in relation to their work.

As an additional honour, I was asked to lead the main Sunday morning service for the 3rd of November. I was assisted by eight of the young women from the girl's dormitory: Miss 'Eukaliti, Miss Fatai and Miss Mafi led the hymns (How Great Thou Art, Amazing Grace and And Can It Be); Miss Fangalahi, Miss Ha'unga, Miss Finau and Miss Veamatahau read the lectionary readings; Miss Tu'iano delivered the Children's story (based on the Gospel reading regarding the encounter between Jesus and Zaccheus).

Different liturgical moments of the service were interspersed with a variety of musical components offered by STC's Choir and Choir Director. Prior to the service, Renate and I were presented with our breakfast and a variety of gifts. I, also, had the privilege to participate in a special 'kava' ceremony before the start of the service. In our Tongan encounter, we have received a welcome that is woven with kindness, generosity, honour, respect and a deep love of land and kingdom; Malo Aupito (Thank you very much).

In closing, I wanted to share a poem that I wrote one morning; as I was headed to the school's library to Skype call my mother in the USA.

"Morning's Walk in Sia'atoutai"

As I walk these paths of Earth and Stone

My thoughts are drawn to this place

We call Home

Patches of vibrant Green and loamy Brown

Riots of Floral colour

Surround me

With an early morning

Embrace

Joyful greetings

Surprise me as I walk these paths

Recognition and Celebration

For simply Being

A shadowed passageway beckons

Briefly passing by where

Minds and Voices

Grapple with understandings of

God and Meaning

Within their Kingdom

As the beginning meets its ending

Voices waft and rise

From a blessed structure

Which houses this

Angelic Choir

Walking now
Enveloped in
Heavenly melody
I approach and enter
Stillness

Magical connections
Ringing tones and
I speak to my
Mother
In another place called
Home.

Best Wishes,

Revd Bill Tardy & Renate Laloo

