

Bonjour!

The lilt of the women's accents is as gentle as the pastel blooms of bougainvillea. These voices as well as these flowers belie the rugged, harsh conditions along the trails which link villages in the central plateau of Haiti. As I reflect upon my experience as a member of our medical mission team this past week, one of the most profound memories is that sweet greeting—*bonjour*!

Literally, this French greeting translates as 'good day.' It is offered by virtually all of the women and men traversing those mountain trails as a sweet gift of hospitality to the foreigners—like me—whom they pass along the way.



I had the finest hiking shoes and socks. I was protected under the shade of a wide brimmed hat, ventilated along the sides to maximize air flow. I had the best mosquito repellent money can buy. All I had to carry was drinking water, trail mix, some crackers, and pre-packaged tuna with herbs and sundried tomatoes for lunch.

All the people who said 'good day' to me had none of those helpful tools or protections or snacks; and most carried much heavier loads—under their arms and on their heads! Yet, they were the ones recognizing and declaring that it was a good day. What did they see that I could not see? What did they know that I didn't know?

"Bonjour!" I responded to each person, winded and weary as I was from ascending those slopes under the hot sun. Under the almost comically ironic circumstances, it was the least I could do.

I thought about some of the rejoicing psalms, written by someone who walked on similarly rugged, harsh pathways under the hot sun. "This is the day that the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it!" (Psalm 118:24) "Be joyful in the Lord all you peoples. Serve the Lord with gladness and come before his presence with a song!" (Psalm 100:1) What did the psalmist see that we don't always see? What did the psalmist know that we don't always notice?

I promised myself in Haiti that I would not write about how their hardships make me thankful for my blessings. I should be able to be thankful without using someone else as a contrasting foil. Instead, I vowed to write about how their hardships make me thankful for their courage, hope, perseverance, and joy.

I was humbled by how clearly the people I met are able to see and know the gentle joys of a *bon jour*— good day—in spite of difficulties and burdens. Moreover, I was impressed by how sweetly they expressed this truth to the foreigner in their midst.



The people I met on the trails did not ask me for anything. Instead, they taught me about the meaning of the rejoice Psalms. The goodness of the day has nothing to do with my personal estimation of blessings or hardships. Neither does the goodness of the day have anything to do with my resources or my poverty. The day is good because it is a gift from God, that is all...and that is enough.

I am thankful for all the people who greeted me so sweetly and gently on the rugged pathways of the central plateau, and who helped me see the goodness of God more clearly. I hope I can use this gift to greet each day and each person with that much courage, hope, perseverance, and joy.

Bonjour,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. W. W. W.', with a small cross-like mark above the final 'e'.