

Quest Mexico Reflection - Kristy Bootsma

I remember in January praying that God would break my heart. It is an odd thing to pray for, I know, but somehow I knew I needed to be changed. I was attempting to prepare myself for something I knew very little about - Quest Mexico. Pay close attention to this next part, I am going to try to explain what Quest Mexico is. This is a near impossible task, but I am always up for a challenge.



If you are unaware, Mexico is nothing like Canada (unless you are a fan of Coca-Cola, then it is pretty much the exact same). For 10 days over Reading Week, when most other students were doing homework or watching Netflix, we were sitting. We did a lot of sitting; Mexico is a culture where if one person sits, you all sit. But while we were sitting we were listening. We opened ourselves to a narrative that was unknown to us and sat across from those who had a story to share. These stories were about the past, present, and future of our global neighbors, specifically those in Mexico. We witnessed the paralyzing fear of political injustices, and then shook hands with young women and men living out what it means to be a politician for the people. We heard stories of those who had no choice but to cross the Mexico- US border and how they survived to tell the tale. We listened to brave men and women who are hoping for a better future, and how we in a developed country are able to impact what that future may

look like. We walked with the poor, we sat with the marginalized, we celebrated with the advocates, and we laughed with all of them.

We listened, and we listened to learn.

Some of you may be thinking, "so what did you actually DO?" I just told you: we listened. Listening is a form of doing. It may be hard to believe a Christian can go to Mexico

without building a school or volunteering in an orphanage and come back with a story to tell. We listened, and we listened to learn. But knowledge is only a gift that comes with humility. I am learning this lesson still. Since returning to my comfortable, middle-class, student life, I have been faced with the challenge that knowledge cannot be divorced from responsibility; if it is, did you learn anything at all? I know I have a responsibility here. I know that right now God is not calling me to drop everything and move to Mexico (no matter how many papers I wish I didn't have to write), but this doesn't mean I am not being called to action. I'll figure it out. Though more than anything, I do not want to forget. I gained an understanding I can never put into words, and I am actively letting it change me.



Reflections from the Program Director - Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning

'They treat us how they see us.'

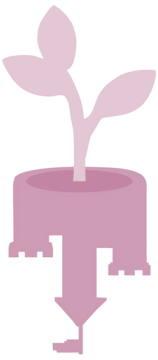
That phrase became a defining theme for the group of Micah Centre students, instructors, and friends who travelled to Quest Mexico for 10 days in February.

On our first day in Cuernavaca, our guide Gerardo led us to La Estacion, a squatter's settlement in the heart of the city. There we met Justino, a father and grandfather who was born in La Estacion and has lived there his entire life. His joyous hospitality could not mask his fear that he and his family would be forced to leave the renovated train car they called home by powerful political and corporate leaders in Cuernavaca. He shared with us his feelings of powerlessness, his fear for his children and grandchildren. At one point, a student asked Justino: 'why are they treating you this way?'

Justino answered: 'They treat us how they see us.' (Continued next page...)

Addressing Poverty, Injustice, Peacemaking, and Marginalization - King's Faculty Members

Randolph Haluza-DeLay, Associate Professor of Sociology, will be a participant in a short-term delegation with Christian Peacemaker Teams (www.cpt.org) to the Kurdish region of Iraq. CPT grew out of North American Mennonite churches to “wage peace” actively. It provides opportunities for observation in various troubled regions around the globe where local organizations can be partners in advocacy for human rights and peace-building. The Kurds live within the borders of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria and are the largest ethnic group in the world without their own self-determination. They have faced active opposition from the governments of all four countries. Haluza-DeLay will be in Iraq from April 21 - May 5 and will be available to speak with churches and other organizations about active peacemaking work like this.



Ryan Young, Dean of the Leder School of Business, sits on the board of the Edmonton Community Development Company (ECDC). This new and innovative organization uses surplus land to create and expand economic opportunities for individuals and families living in challenged communities and helps address the ongoing issue of homelessness in Edmonton.

“We must awaken to hope, resisting the temptation to despair that history cannot be any different, that another world is not in fact possible.” – Theologian and Activist Ched Myers

(Reflections cont'd)

We treat others how we see them. And all too often, either in Mexico or at home in Canada, the truth is that the poor are treated as disposable because they are seen as disposable, if they are seen at all.

What a contrast to the visions of Matthew 25 and Psalm 72, two texts that we spent time reflecting on as a group in Cuernavaca. The church over its history has seen Jesus' words in Matthew 25 as an invitation to encounter Jesus himself in the face of the poor, the stranger, the imprisoned. ‘Just as you did to them, the least of these, you did it to me.’

And Psalm 72 makes the audacious claim that a good and just king will ‘save the needy from death, and rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.’ What a claim – that God sees the blood of the poor and powerless as precious.

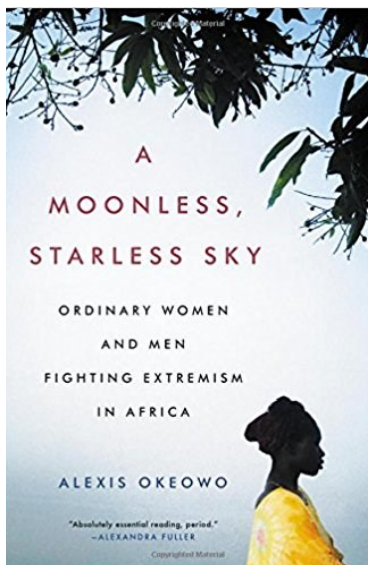
During our time at Quest, our students encountered instance after tragic instance of people being treated as if their blood was far from precious. But we also encountered many who see the world as the God of Psalm 72 and Matthew 25 sees, like the peace activists willing to put their lives on the line so that no more students or mothers or sons disappear.

At The Micah Centre, we have the privilege of creating space for the King's community to encounter worlds they may otherwise not see, to hear voices they may otherwise not hear, so that they may learn to see our world and all of the places and people in it as God sees them: as precious, and worth our best efforts to ensure justice and practice solidarity on their behalf.

Because Justino is right – “they treat us as they see us”.



The Quest group with Justino, a third generation resident of an urban squatter settlement in Cuernavaca, and his family. Residents are regularly threatened with jail time or expulsion from their homes, even after three generations of habitation, as a result of not having ownership of the land they are built on. Shortly after the King's group left Mexico, word was sent that Justino had been arrested and served jail time for this reason. He was released after a few days of incarceration.



What We're Reading

In our hyper connected, digitized world, empathizing with those who are suffering a world away feels increasingly important and increasingly difficult. That is why stories like those that Nigerian-American Alexis Okeowo tells in *A Moonless, Starless Sky: Ordinary Women and Men Fighting Extremism in Africa* are ‘urgently necessary’, as a recent NY Times review put it.

Okeowo chooses to tell stories that are, as she says, ‘not as easy to notice and so... show an ordinary and rare kind of bravery’. As the subtitle of the book suggests, the context of these ‘ordinary’ stories of love and struggle – extremist-influenced Somalia, Lord's Resistance Army-plagued Uganda, Nigerian communities terrorized by Boko Haram, and the world of human trafficking in Mauritania – makes them a compelling read. Our attempts to love our global neighbours and seek their good are better served by knowing stories like these, as we recognize the humanity we share with our fellow image-bearers a world away.