

Critical Mass  
Matthew 18:19-20  
NUCC Traditional  
07 October 2018

\*PRAY

When I was in Guatemala this past May one of the goals of our gracious hosts, Ken & Lois Werner, was for us to get to know and interact with local villagers with whom People For Guatemala works. Our first day at the clinic we met with some amazing women who wanted us to see first-hand the journey they take when people from their village must access the clinic. It involves walking through a coffee bean plantation (with permission), over a ridge and under a barbed-wire fence. I found myself sweating and a little breathless at times. They were perfectly at-ease with the walk and of course they were doing it while carrying a sick child. Once we arrived at **that** village, we met with people from two **other** villages about their need for a road. It was such a moving experience for me, that, even though it was in a different language, at one point I was moved to tears. And I would love to tell you more about it, but it's such a rich story that I have already slotted it for my sermon on Pentecost Sunday next year. So, you'll have to wait.

The next day, we went to an outlying village. This church had an early impact on this particular village. You see, Mike & Ann Armstrong, and Mike's brother, Jack, also a member of our congregation, had helped them bring clean, running water to their village. They were so excited to show us how this unique system operated. But we also drove up to a construction project. While they have a school built, just below the hill, they are building a new school, a secondary school. It will serve the upper grades.

A group of college students had been there the week before, working to build the school. The men who were helping to build the new school stopped working when we pulled up. Suddenly I realized that the people working were also the Concorde, the town council. This group is elected for two years and cannot serve consecutive terms. The president of the Concorde welcomed us and as his greeting was being translated, another man came running down the hill and interrupted the president. The man was older, so I could tell that they wanted to give him deference. Then he explained that he had been president of the Concorde many years before, when they had built the original school; now his son was the president and he wanted us to know how proud he was of his son and of this group of young men. And that was what stood out to me, how young this group of leaders was.

Deb, Duncan, Judy and I introduced ourselves and they introduced themselves to us. Then they told us how they wanted me to tell you of their deep appreciation for you. They wanted me to tell you, Naples United Church of Christ, about how your generosity for people that you have never met and likely never will, has changed their lives. More importantly, your generosity has changed the lives of their children. As tears ran down the face of the President, I looked over and saw the tears of his father, and I wondered about how many sleepless nights you have taken away. I wondered how many times this father and grandfather have been able to hold clean drinking water in their hands and cook on stoves and not worry about debilitating lung conditions because of you. And then I felt the sting of the tears as they ran down my face. Tears of gratitude for you and for who we are as a mission-driven, intergenerational, and growing

congregation. A church that changes lives in Guatemala and provides food to families at Grace Place.

As I mentioned, these leaders were young. So Deb asked a fascinating question: “When this new school is built, will any of your children attend?” They all shook their heads no. Then one of the Council members said: “We want to make our village better. We know that education is the way to do that.”

This was the most “Field of Dreams” moment I had ever experienced. You know that moment, when Ray, the Iowa farmer, played by Kevin Costner hears a voice while walking through his cornfield that says: “Build it and he will come.” That’s how these young leaders saw this new school. Even though their children would not immediately benefit from it, they knew they had to build it. They knew they would have to step out in faith and work for a better day even if they wouldn’t be the Town Council any longer, even if their children did not directly benefit immediately. I stood in awe of their courage and their vision.

It’s just as Jesus said to the disciples in the gospel lesson for this morning:

**“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”**

And that is my prayer for us: that we will live into that kind of faith. That we will look into a future that, even though we cannot fully see where it is taking us, we will know that God is calling us to respond. That we will see the foundation that has been laid by those who have gone before us and rest in the assurance that we have the critical mass to make a difference in Guatemala, at Grace Place, at the Neighborhood Health Clinic, and in places that God has yet to reveal.