

I went on my first overseas mission trip in 2008. Along with my wife, Moira, and 18 other individuals from the church I was pastoring at that time, we flew out of Newport News, Virginia to Atlanta, where we caught a connecting flight to San Pedro Sula, Honduras. I remember well what it was like standing around at the gate waiting to board our plane in Virginia. We were 20 people who, based on the look of us, could have been going anywhere that day, and not necessarily all together. When we stepped off the plane in Atlanta, we could have just as easily been going to play golf. We didn't look like a group of people on our way to build homes on a remote hillside in one of the most forgotten parts of the world. When we got to the gate to board for San Pedro Sula, however, I suddenly noticed that we were starting to stand out, not because we looked like everyone else, but because we didn't. Getting off the plane in Honduras and standing in line to go through customs, we were the only ones who didn't seem to be wearing a tee-shirt that was a color of the rainbow. 15 reds over here, 22 yellows over there, 10 greens standing right in front of me. Every shirt had written on it the name of some church, and on the back, some catchy one-liner, most inspired by a Bible verse, about what they were up to. “Go into all the world, and make disciples of all nations. Honduras 2008.” “First Baptist Church. For the love of Jesus. For the love of Honduras.”

For the record, I have no problem with matching colored shirts. I've been on my fair share of sports teams. I was in the high school marching band. I've been part of groups before that all dressed the same. There can be a collective sense of pride that comes from getting to look the part. It's being able to say, look, I belong. At the same time, those who

don't have the matching tee-shirt can be made to feel just the opposite. Look, I guess I don't belong. Exclusivism. Elitism. If we're not careful, it can rear its ugly head without notice.

Of course, no one ever puts on the matching tee-shirts intending to exclude. Those who go to places like Honduras on mission trips would probably tell you that they go because they have something to offer, something to give that the people living there can't come up with on their own. We are doctors, construction workers, pastors, citizens of the first-world come to lift up the citizens of the third-world. It all sounds good and innocent. The problem is: it comes up short of what Jesus had in mind for us.

Based on our gospel reading for today, I think it's safe to say that for Jesus, the point of mission is not service but relationship. "See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." This is no relationship that I would ever want to be in—lambs among wolves. What's Jesus doing? He's picking up on an old prophecy of Isaiah's. Isaiah who looked into the future and saw a peaceful kingdom coming, and in that kingdom the lion and the lamb will lay down together.

In sending his disciples out into the world, and calling them lambs among wolves, Jesus isn't saying, go, and I hope you don't get killed. No. He's saying, go, and show the world what is possible. Show the world what can happen when enemies dare to love one another. Show us something greater than fear and hatred. Show us grace and mercy. Prove to the world that Isaiah's prophecy wasn't just a dream, that lions and lambs really can get along. "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals. Just go into a house and say, "Peace to you." Don't complicate what is simple. The mission is simple. It starts by introducing ourselves to one another. Ask someone their name. Sit down at the table in the seat that is offered to you. Gratefully take the food and hospitality that is given to you. Don't carry a

purse or wallet. Carry a purse or wallet and you'll be tempted to pull it out to show people what you're made of, and the point isn't to show off how much you've got or what you can do with it. The point is to be in relationship, to get close another to one another that anyone walking by will have to ask, "Is that a lion or a lamb?"

Today marks the first Sunday in stewardship season for us here at Four Corners Community Chapel. Most people assume this means that for the next 3 weeks all we'll be talking about is money. And if you think that, you would be at least half-right. Because by definition, a steward is a caretaker, and stewardship means to ask the question: "How are we doing in using what we've got to take care of what we've got?" In our lives, as in our church, we've got some things, and we've got some things to take care of. Most obviously, we have a house, a piece of property the house sits on, and the people who live in that house with us. In just a moment, Anne Bouchard is going to come forward to tell us also about our neighbors who live around us. Anyone who moves into a house hoping to live there for a long time knows that you can't stop at being interested only in the house and the people in the house, you also need to get to know your neighbors, and to understand what their needs are and what's important to them. Here at Four Corners, part of that effort involves our work with the local soup kitchen and the food pantry and other organizations who share our commitment to being good neighbors and to making sure everyone has access to the things they need to live whole and healthy lives. But here's the rub, and truly the only thing I want to say before handing over the pulpit to Anne and then to Elaine, who is going to share a beautiful story with us. If you think the reason we're going to tell you about local missions today—the food pantry, Mobile Loaves and Fishes, Tag Tree, and so much more—if you think the only reason we're going to tell you about these things is so

you'll open your purse or wallet and give the church money, think again. "Carry no purse, no bag, not even any sandals with you," says Jesus. For the mission is not the food pantry or the soup kitchen. Nor is it the upkeep of our building and sanctuary. Nor is it to provide Sunday School programming for our children. The mission is not to give our money or our canned goods. All of these things are only means to the mission, which is the making and sharing of peace. The mission is peace.

What is peace? Peace is relationship. It is taking the time be with another person, to understand their hopes, their dreams, their burdens. To listen to their story and to let our own story be heard by them. What is peace? Peace is compassion. As one member of our Honduras mission team said that day, standing around in the airport, and someone asked, "Why don't we all have matching tee-shirts?" and Nancy, one of the oldest members of the team, answered, "Compassion is our clothing." She was quoting Saint Paul who told the church at Colossae: "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion."

It's a hard thing to do, though. We live in a culture that tends to divide itself between the haves and the have-nots. We have the service providers and the service recipients. The people who can give and the people who must take if they are going to survive. And we tend to think that one is better than the other. And this make is easy for us. There is an "us" and a "them," and no confusing the two. Then along comes the church, trying with all our might to bridge the divide. Yes, by giving some money to the outreach of the church, by volunteering to work the soup kitchen line, and by donating a couple grocery bags to the food pantry. But first and last, we bridge the divide by insisting that for all the stories we could tell about ourselves and who we are, the story that matters most is this

one: once upon a time, out of great love for all creation, God sent a savior. The savior arrived, looking an awful lot like the last thing you'd expect a savior to look like. He walked the countryside and the city streets with not a penny to his name, and one day, seeing a crowd of hungry souls, he took a loaf of bread, blessed it, broke it, and giving it to us—ah! *us*—he said, “This is not just bread. It’s my very body given for you.” Amen.