

## Trauma and Grace

This is our first prayer letter after our three month sabbatical in Nicaragua, where we had lived from 1996 to 2013 as your missionaries.

This could simply be a report on what we did. I could tell you about the joy of being next door neighbors to our long term friends, Manuel and Luz. I might highlight the many other dear friends with whom we were able to spend time, and maybe recount part of the rich history we share with each of them.

Or, we could take another tack. I might share photos of sunsets from the ten wonderful days we experienced at a condo on the Pacific Ocean. I might entice you with the verdant mountain scenery we enjoyed at an eco-lodge on a coffee farm in the highlands of Nicaragua. I might describe the small rural villages where we stopped on our road trips with Manuel and Luz and give you a verbal portrait of the fascinating people we encountered. I might even boast of the nine chapters that I wrote of what might someday be a book.

But the story I want to tell instead is one of trauma and grace. A story of grace that enters our deepest wounds and births testimonies of joy.

### *No Stranger to Trauma*

The story is that of Pastor Ricardo. Some of you may know him personally. Ricardo was our pastor during the seventeen years we lived in Nicaragua. Those of you who came to visit us probably heard him preach when you went to church with us. Some of you may even have been part of a short-term mission team that stayed as guests in his home.

Pastor Ricardo was no stranger to trauma. He was born into a very difficult family situation in El Salvador. As a teenager he resolved to escape and seek a different life on his own. His long and solitary journey eventually landed him in Puerto Cabezas, a city on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. It was there that the grace of God in Jesus found Ricardo. A fellowship of young adults that was to become the Verbo (in English, "the Word") church of Puerto Cabezas became the family he was seeking.

Sometime later Ricardo moved to Managua, the capitol city of Nicaragua. As he would tell the story, his initial assignment with the Verbo church in Managua was to



*This photo says it all!*

clean the bathrooms! The grace of God that he first encountered in Puerto Cabezas continued to pursue him. His considerable gifts were recognized and nurtured.

When we first attended Verbo in 1998, Ricardo was the pastor. Ricardo had a way of expounding Scripture that was without equal. He drew the congregation into the story of Scripture in such a way that they could imagine themselves as part of it. His sermons were more an art form than a lecture as he skillfully wove the threads of the story together until he reached the crisis of the plot. Always, the crisis of the plot embodied a challenge to practical discipleship in the concrete reality of everyday life.

### *A New Grace*

I remember a bus trip with Ricardo in 2012. We were going to El Salvador for a consultation of missionaries and partners of Resonate in Central America. We sat by each other and talked most of the way. I know it was emotional for Ricardo to return to El Salvador. I think he was also at one of those crisis points in his life where the Spirit was placing a new challenge of discipleship in front of him. Ricardo very much wanted his wife and children involved with him in ministry, something that was difficult in a large church like Verbo. He also had a weariness that often comes with leading a large institution as Verbo had become.

It was not long thereafter that Ricardo resigned as pastor of Verbo. With time the Spirit led him to become chaplain of a community ministry called Villa Esperanza (Hope Village). Maybe in part because of his own early history of trauma, Ricardo was always drawn in particular to those who

had suffered trauma in their own lives: the children, the single parents, the disabled, those who lived in contexts of grinding poverty and often violence. The grace that had found Ricardo he passed on to others, often through simple acts of service. The photo that accompanies this prayer letter comes from Villa Esperanza says it all.

### Trauma and Grace Once Again

We had plans to visit Ricardo and his wife Leyda in the last week of my sabbatical. But we received a call that both were feeling ill with Covid- like symptoms. From there things progressed rapidly. Ricardo entered the hospital and was to spend the next three weeks intubated in the ICU. While in ICU his oldest son passed away after suffering the same Covid-like symptoms. Two weeks ago

Saturday Ricardo also passed away.

At first glance this final trauma seems to be one without grace. It is not unlike many other stories in this pandemic. Each story leaves its own burden of pain and disruption in the bodies and souls of those of us who are the survivors.

Yet, if we believe the witness of Scripture, and we do, this final trauma was also the moment when Ricardo was graced with an eternal victory over death.

This is how Scripture puts it in I Corinthians 4:17, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." (NIV) Trauma, for sure, but trauma eclipsed by grace.

Joel and Jeannie

### PRAISE:

- Joel also had a relatively mild breakthrough case of Covid at the end of our sabbatical. We are thankful that Joel has recovered completely and that Jeannie did not become ill.

### PRAYER:

- As we were writing the prayer letter we received word that the founding missionary of Verbo, Bob Trolese, passed away after a weeks-long battle with Covid-like symptoms. Please pray for comfort and strength for his wife and family as well as for the wife and family of Ricardo. Bob had been Joel's friend and mentor from the day we entered Nicaragua.
- Pray for the Verbo church as it deals with these significant losses even as it celebrates the life and testimony of Ricardo and Bob. Pray in particular for Hultner and his wife Tania. Hultner is now the pastor of Verbo in addition to continuing to serve as the director of the Nehemiah Center.

## Support for our Ministry

We are so thankful for your prayers and financial support for our ministry for the past 26 years! For the present year (our ministry support year runs from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022) we have the challenge of raising significantly more than we have raised in the past. **About a third of the cost to Resonate of sending and keeping missionaries on the field continues to be funded out of ministry shares and general giving.** But the rest of the costs need to be raised by all of us working together. **This year Jeannie and I have committed to raising about \$25,000 - \$30,000 above what we have raised historically.** It is a challenge but also an opportunity to do our part in keeping, not just ourselves, but all of Resonate's missionaries at their posts! What a privilege to be witnesses to the gospel of grace in contexts of trauma!

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