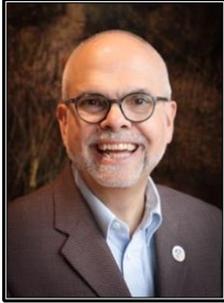




**HEARTLAND
CONFERENCE**
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
N. KY • OH • WV

"Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy." - Matthew 5:7

"Christ's Urgent Call to Extend Mercy"



Dear Beloved in Christ,

I have always been struck by how Jesus reframes life in ways that are often surprising and in contrast to the way the world often thinks about things. His Beatitudes illustrate this in each verse. Following the Common Ground pilgrimage, which I was honored to share with 21 others from the Heartland Conference a few weeks ago down at the southern border of Arizona, I have been especially pondering the beatitude, "Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy."

You may know that a pilgrimage is different than taking a tour. A pilgrimage places one in spaces to listen both with head and heart, anticipating that something of the room-building love of God will form the soul from the inside out. A pilgrimage stretches the soul in the direction of God's mercy by allowing one to see others more clearly as God sees them, as beloved.

So, what did we see and what did we hear? We saw and heard from families who had fled death squads and were awaiting asylum interviews which were supposed to have happened the week after we were with them but have since been summarily canceled. We raised crosses and named out loud just a few of the names of the over 4,500 people who have died in the desert southwest as they sought a life free from fear.

We saw the border wall from both sides and considered together the meaning of borders in our own lives. We prayed and sang and considered what the call of Christ is to be bearers of mercy that build the beloved community envisioned by God and modeled by Jesus. We were gifted to experience the beautiful variety of God's people.

We experienced glimmers of hope as we visited a grower-owned coffee collective in Mexico called Café Justo (Just Coffee). By cutting out the middleman this collective has raised the standard of living of its members. It started with 5 families and now supports over 100 families, giving them resources for health care and retirement and allowing them to continue to live in their beloved homeland with dignity. If you want to support this initiative of thriving, go to www.justcoffee.org.



The best place to live is where you do not fear...

We experienced how the arts can be a force for strength and good when desperation could so easily be the only alternative. Murals offered a vision of a new kind of reality. The music of a



HEARTLAND CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
N. KY • OH • WV

harpist stirred our souls, revealing the possibilities of beautiful harmonies. We learned a new a song, taught by one of our group members that consisted of one line, “What we need is here.” Its melody and sung harmonies remain deeply etched in my memory as reminder of the truth of God’s abundance.

The Gospels offer a compelling witness to the way in which the mercy of God as activated in Jesus offered healing, freedom from fear, and an opening toward flourishing joy. Often Jesus offered this mercy on the edges of society with those overlooked by the world at large or seen in some way as “unclean.” Twice in Matthew’s Gospel Jesus is quoted as saying, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” (Matt 9:13 & 12:7). On each occasion he is responding to criticism for the way he has extended mercy to others in ways that contradict conventional religious wisdom and way of the world. By this, Jesus stretches the moral imagination of what is possible. Our pilgrimage awakened me again to this of God’s deep merciful desire.

In this time in which we live it seems to me the call from Christ to extend mercy in every way possible with as many as possible may be one of our most important expressions of faith. By it, we open ourselves to the healing love of God whose very heart is merciful. May we commit to this high calling with our whole being both locally and globally so that love may answer the fear so prevalent in our day. Blessings on you, dearly beloved.

Pastor Dave