

SPRING 2020

THE MICAH CENTRE



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Seeking Justice from Home: Hope in Strange Times

by Jonathan Nicolai deKoning

Micah Centre Program Director

As I write this, the snow on the south side of my house is quickly melting, and tulips and crocuses are (finally!) sprouting through the soil and stretching toward the sun. But while the return of spring points to the constancy of creation and our Creator, uncertainty seems to abound everywhere else.

The changes brought on by COVID-19 have disrupted all of our lives. None of us need reminding of those changes: relatively small things like working from home, forced distance from loved ones, cancelled travel plans, or postponed wedding celebrations, to massive changes like economic shut-downs, struggling small businesses, and public health systems stretched to capacity. King's has not been immune to these changes, as our community moved our courses online, postponed convocation, cancelled international trips, and made the moves necessary to keep our campus community safe. We at the Micah Centre were forced to cancel our annual Honduras Water Project, plans for student internships changed, and we were not able to complete learning experiences like Quest Mexico and the Justice Fellowship the way we had hoped.

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Many of us who are justice-minded may be tempted to tell ourselves 'It's not such a big deal. Others have it far worse than I do - I shouldn't feel bad for myself!' I wonder if it may be more appropriate to allow ourselves to fully feel our responses to the current situation - our anger, our disappointment, our frustrations - and to let those feelings nudge us toward empathy for others who do, in fact, have it far worse than we do. Instead of negating our emotional reactions, we can feel our frustration, our anger, our disappointment - I mean really feel it: shout it out, cry it out, even shake our fists little. Then, maybe, we can let these feelings lead us toward anger and frustration and disappointment on behalf of the many others who are suffering deeply in this strange and heavy coronavirus season.

For those of us committed to a more just world, many of the stories we hear do lead to anger: much-needed testing kits in the global south being rerouted to wealthier countries, rising numbers of people suffering domestic abuse as they are forced to stay at home, the glaring inequality of wealth and power exposed at home and abroad. The importance of faith-full communities of justice-seekers is as apparent as ever, and the need for education like that offered at the Micah Centre is as vital as ever.

And yet there are also signs of hope. For one, the important act of social distancing is a profound act of social solidarity. We are doing what we're doing for the common good, with special attention towards the vulnerable among us. Who would have thought we'd be willing to grind the economy to a halt in a global act of solidarity? And our social media and over-the-fence conversations (2 metres apart, of course) abound with stories of creative acts of neighbour love and global citizenship as people reach out to one another in care.

In this strange season, the Micah Centre invites you to make space for learning and for stories that you may not have had as much time to pursue before this pandemic. Our 'What We're Reading' list included in this newsletter and our Micah Centre Facebook page have some suggestions on how to get started. While you shelter in place and keep your distance for the sake of your neighbours, we invite you to stay safe, to practice physical distancing and social solidarity, and to immerse yourself in stories- like those in this newsletter from our Micah Centre students- that do not create fear but cultivate hope that another world is possible.

Honduras Water Project 2020 Update

Restrictions on travel and social interaction made it impossible for the Micah Centre to send a group of students to Honduras this May for our annual water project. We had planned to send 12 students to El Espino in southern Honduras to work alongside community members to complete the second stage of the water project that we began last year, bringing water from the main village lines into backyard compounds. Although we are disappointed that our students cannot participate in the project and build relationships with their global neighbours, we are grateful that the project goes on. Our Honduran partners - WorldRenew-Honduras and Diaconia Nacional - will be using funds raised by students and the Flaman Foundation to allow residents of El Espino to complete the second stage of the project this fall. Muchas gracias to WorldRenew-Honduras, Diaconia Nacional, the Flaman Foundation, and this year's students for continuing the work of transformational development and clean water in difficult circumstances!



Washing hands at a cement pila - a home water storage unit

Quest Mexico

I Did Not Leave Mexico in Peace or Comfort Rachel Bootsma (4th Year Environmental Studies)

What do I do now? That is the question that has been on my mind since coming back from Mexico. The hardest part while in Mexico was fighting the deep desire to help and try to fix in some way. I learned about corruption in the country. I felt the hopelessness. But now I want to make sure I don't just come back and live my life as if I did not even go on Quest. What is hard about that is trying to explain to others how Quest changes you. It is difficult to discuss it when you haven't experienced it for yourself.

While I was in Mexico I was challenged emotionally and physically. I went into those ten days with the expectation to have an impactful experience that I would grow from. My goal for myself was to be as vulnerable as possible and be receptive as I experienced what I was learning and feeling; I spent a lot of time in self-reflection which I do not normally get the chance to do with such a busy school year. I pushed myself out of my comfort zone and that is one of the reasons Quest has left such an impact on me. Everyone on the trip was reacting and responding to what we learned in different ways, but all of us had common ground as we built a safe environment together. This encouraged people to develop and share their thoughts in a safe, respected, and healthy space.

One thing that was really hard for me is that I found it difficult not to emotionally distance myself after learning about the indescribable corruption. I needed a way to cope. Local activist Juan Francisco put it profoundly simply when he said regarding the Mexican people, "if you knew them, you'd fight for them." This was a turning point. For me, changing the world, or fixing México's seemingly unfixable seems impossible. The injustice and corruption are evident within the government, police and society. I cannot directly change or fix what is going on, but learning and reflecting is an important step forward. So, I have to ask myself, what am I willing to struggle for? Nacho Tomez challenged me when he said one evening that it is "better to die standing up than to live on your knees." How am I supposed to decide what this looks like in my life? What does this mean for my personal choices? What does God call me to do? These are all questions that I do not have answers to yet, but I am challenging myself to find them.

What is going on in México seems unfair for many, and the sad reality is that most people do not understand or know the extent of how bad and unfair life is for those who live in México. But I have to acknowledge my own reality: that after learning more about what is going on in México there is not much I can do to fix it. I did not leave Mexico in peace or comfort, but with a desire and trust in God to use me and what I learned at Quest for God's glory. Now I am called to be more conscious of how the decisions I make affect other people. I will continue to challenge myself. I immensely cherish my learning experience and how Quest has forced me to think about my part in the world in different ways.



Taxco, Mexico- a yearly site visit during Quest Mexico

Quest Mexico Deconstructing Wilful Ignorance Rachel Lucier (4th Year Psychology)

1 John 3:17-18 "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

In February of 2020, I set out with an incredible team to participate in a program called Quest Mexico. Being a part of the Quest Mexico team has impacted my life in numerous ways and has continued to alter my worldview. It was transformative to sit and learn from the wisdom and stories of those in Mexico. Through the lens of my camera I experienced the life, colour and beauty of Mexico. I heard the cry of the poor and the marginalized. This forced me outside of my comfort zone and pushed me to reflect on my privilege. It has led me to believe that to destabilize our own privilege and deconstruct our beliefs is a painful process. But isn't that our calling? We live in a world where we are surrounded by systemic injustice on a social, economic, environmental and political level. It is dangerous to continue to live in a place of wilful ignorance - we must wake up to injustice!

Moreover, I have been reminded of the power of listening. Whether sitting on the forest floor or in the homes of Mexican families, we listened and we learned from advocates, scholars and the marginalized. This was a humbling experience. We had many gracious hosts who blessed us with the richness of their stories. On one occasion I was sitting in the home of a woman in a rural village as she was telling me her story. I have always been of the belief that hands have a narrative of their own. Her hands were rough, callused and bleeding because she and her children had to weave baskets all day just to have "tortilla money" to survive. She was considered the lucky one in her village because she would be able to eat. At one point during her story, she asked if we were thirsty and we nodded. She came back beaming - with a bottle of Coke and some small plastic cups. As she poured us each a glass, I took it with tears in my eyes. I was humbled and awed at her gift. She and her family did not partake but she took joy in blessing us - her guests.

Truth be told, today I have more questions than when I first arrived in Mexico. As I go forward from here I pray that my life becomes a lived attempt to pursue answers to these questions. I have set down a path of reconciliation. Instead of thanking God for what I have, I am forced to ask for forgiveness for taking more than I need. Our work with the poor is not giving - it is giving back. When the body of Christ is attacked, we should all feel attacked. This experience has pushed me to explore what it means to embody love and to create a world in which we value life. If merely a few of us could learn to live with less, many of us could have so much more. I am left to ponder a question posed by Gustavo Gutiérrez; "How do we say 'God loves you' to the poor, when so much of their lives seem like the negation of love?" We must remember that the "Kingdom of God is for the poor and those who hunger and thirst for justice" (Matthew 5:6).



The 2020 Quest Mexico group

The Justice Fellowship 2019-20: The First Cohort Looks Back

This year, the Micah Centre started a new initiative called the Justice Fellowship. The Justice Fellowship is a year-long experience of experiential learning and community building in which a cohort of students takes a collection of 5 courses that all emphasize biblical justice and out-of-classroom learning.

The courses were diverse, but they were all tied together by the a commitment to justice, reconciliation, and the hope of a better world. They included a history class on Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, a theology class on the biblical and contemporary foundations for justice, two social science classes – one on marginalization and social justice in a local context, and another on globalization and injustice in Mexico, and an independent study on a topic of the student's choosing.

In addition to their classes, the cohort met regularly with Jonathan, the MC Program Director, to share questions, talk about what they'd learned, and deepen their friendship with each other. Nine students took part this year. Four students were willing to share their reflections: Connie Kane, Allie Deweerdt, Kaleigh Greidanus, and Michelle Roseboom.

What experiential learning opportunity (community visit, guest speaker, off-campus course) was most impactful for you? Why?

I think the Mustard Seed (an inner-city organization in Edmonton) was the most powerful, just because it was something that we could see right here in the Edmonton community. I think it's super important that we "introduce poverty" that is in our own communities, because oftentimes people will first think of the starving children that are in a different country far away before thinking of the impoverished people within our own communities. (Connie, 2nd Year Biology)

Did the Justice Fellowship provoke some big questions for you – about yourself, the world, your faith, etc? Can you share some examples?

I have definitely thought deeper about what my future will look like as a result of The Justice Fellowship and what I've had the opportunity to learn and experience from this program. I've questioned what my purpose is, and what God's calling for me is. I feel the Justice Fellowship, and all it includes, has really deepened my passion for justice – in all forms. It's solidified for me that I want to pursue this passion, and let that be the driving force behind where I end up going later in life. (Kaleigh, 4th Year Biology)

The Justice fellowship challenged me to learn more about injustices that I normally wouldn't consider, or which I am not necessarily interested in pursuing but are equally important. I found the class presentations in THEO 374 (Micah's Challenge) to be very helpful because the class presented on topics that they were passionate about that I would not normally have learned about or spent my time considering. (Michelle, 3rd Year Environmental Studies)

How has your mind changed since September?

Although important, I now think of how the system must change rather than try to work within the system. (Connie)

The biggest thing is changing from teacher to social worker. I am still in the process of doing this and I am hopeful I will get into a social work program. I believe this is where God wants me to be and that through Him I can pursue this dream. (Allie, 2nd Year Social Science)

What course were you most engaged with, and why?

I honestly don't think I can decide, I really enjoyed them all for different reasons. I think Micah's challenge provided us with a good background understanding of what justice is and why we need to pursue justice, and it set us up well for the rest of the year. The social science course provided us with the learning experience at the Mustard Seed which was very impactful and really introduced us to the vulnerable, marginalized members of society that we need to advocate for. The history course gave me a better understanding of the land I live on, and the people that came before me. I learned a lot about Canada and Edmonton that I did not know and that was really challenging and impactful for me too. Quest Mexico provided us with a more global perspective on issues of justice, and showed me how that the way I live my life in Canada plays a huge role in the lives of Mexicans, whether I know it or not. My directed studies was also really engaging for me because it was an issue I am really passionate about, and I think it's really important that we were all given the opportunity to further explore an area of particular interest to us. (Kaleigh)



Allie Deweerdt and Michelle Roseboom in Tepotzlan, Mexico



Small chapel in Cuernavaca, Mexico

What experience, reading, or speaker was the most challenging or thought-provoking? Why?

The Mustard Seed weekend was the most challenging for me. I did not really know what we were doing before we got there but I learned so much. The stories we heard were powerful and heavy. There was a lot of trauma and hurt in these people's lives, they spilled everything on to us and it was a lot to handle. The debriefs we did were much needed while there. The overall experience was really eye-opening about the homeless population in Edmonton and how they are treated and what they go through. (Allie)

How do you think you might bring your Justice Fellowship learning forward from here? To put the question another way: What will you carry forward, and what might you leave behind? What changes might you consider making in your life as a result of the Justice Fellowship year?

Something I will carry forward is continuing to ask who is contributing to injustice, whether it be holding myself, others, or the government accountable and saying their name. Something I will leave behind is this idea of perfect actions. Actions are still steps forward regardless of intention, while inaction will always amount to nothing. (Connie)

I will for sure take a lot from my Justice Fellowship independent study on voluntary simplicity and seek ways to live more simply so I can reduce my impact on others and the environment but also to allow myself to have more time to pursue my passions and interests and live more intentionally. One of the things I want to work on is always continuing to learn about social justice issues and to not become ignorant to the things around me. I want to continue reading books about different issues and theories and to push myself to learn about things not just in my wheelhouse of interests but outside of my interests as well. (Michelle)

I think I've already told people in my life a lot about what I've been learning, and I don't think that's going to stop anytime soon. The relationships I've built with the Fellowship cohort is something I hope comes with me, that has been one of the factors that has made this experience all the more memorable and impactful for me. I also hope to take with me this deepened passion for justice and explore it even further as I leave King's. I hope I am able to leave behind some of the pessimism I've experienced lately as a result of all this difficult learning. It's been really hard at times, and I have been more pessimistic about the world than I would like. I hope that I can leave that pessimism behind, and transform it into hope and passion going forward. (Kaleigh)

If someone asked you why they should participate in the Justice Fellowship 2021-22, what would you tell them?

Do it to challenge yourself, but do it not if you want to be educated but if you want to learn. (Connie)

I would tell them they will learn so much, they will have their hearts broken by the injustices in our world. But the experiences are worth it. It is well worth their time and it is a really good experience I believe every King's student should have. (Allie)

No matter what degree you are in, what career you want to pursue, or what experiences you've had prior to this point, The Justice Fellowship will be challenging, eye-opening, and beneficial to your life going forward. There's something for everyone in this program, no matter what your interests and passions are. And to someone who is already passionate about social justice: this is what solidarity feels like. It's been so amazing having a group of like-minded people to share this experience with, and to learn and grow alongside each other. This program has allowed me to grow in so many ways I would've never expected, and I think anyone who participates in the Justice Fellowship will be amazed by the growth they will experience in a matter of 8 months. (Kaleigh)

I would tell them that if they want their worldview to be challenged and changed in a good way that they should consider doing this. I would tell them that if they are ready for a different way of learning beyond the classroom, or want more from their university experience than just learning within their field that this is a fantastic opportunity and can be great for providing some insight into their passions and what they want to pursue after graduating. I would also tell them that they are going to meet students from various faculties who they may never have had the opportunity to meet, but who are wonderful humans and who have interests and passions similar to their own and will challenge them to think deeper and question more. That in a few short weeks those classmates will become a group of friends that you feel like you can be open with and share your frustrations and concerns with and who are willing to think deeply alongside you and push you to be your best self. Also they get to go to Mexico as a course so that's pretty dope too! (Michelle)



**Rhonda Thygesen and Kaleigh Greidanus
at Quest Mexico in Cuernavaca, Mexico**



**A new friend in
Tlmacqzapa,
Mexico**





Seeking Justice from Home: A Facebook Series

King's is blessed with a host of faculty, students, alumni, and supporters who are passionate about the work of peace and justice in their communities. In this strange and uncertain season, we've asked members of The King's University community to share their advice on how to pursue justice and cultivate hopeful imaginations while at home.

If you visit the Micah Centre's Facebook page (facebook.com/TheMicahCentre), you will find advice from a number of fellow justice-seekers on what novels to read, how to support those on the street, what social enterprises to look up, and what history books to explore while at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Check it out!

Support the Micah Centre

The Micah Centre at King's continues to grow a global vision of justice and renewal at King's and beyond during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you would like to support our work, please visit King's website (kingsu.ca/give) and designate your gift to the Micah Centre Fund.

What We're Reading

***Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee**

"History has failed us, but no matter." So begins Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko*, a sprawling saga chronicling four generations of an ethnic Korean family, first in Japanese-occupied Korea in the early 20th century, then in Japan itself from the years before World War II to the late 1980s. Writer Junot Diaz calls it a 'powerful meditation on what immigrants sacrifice to achieve a home in this world', but the novel goes beyond themes of immigration and homecoming, exploring themes of gender and justice, the role of faith and the resiliency of family in the face of suffering, and the consequences of political injustice for ordinary people. The story is well-written and deeply engaging, and the window into 20th century Japanese and Korean history is fascinating.

A commitment to justice can be fostered, in part, by an imagination shaped by the stories of ordinary men and women who find themselves on the underside of history. *Pachinko* is one story that can help foster such an imagination. Wherever you are sheltering in place, Lee's novel will make a worthwhile addition to your reading list.



A street scene in Tepetzlan, Mexico