

"Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, He was crucified. He has been raised; He is not here." Just as Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome were told when they came to anoint Jesus in the tomb after the Sabbath had ended. We to, realize, when looking for Jesus that He was crucified, He has been raised; He is no longer here. However, he left us with a mission and with the Holy Spirit. He commanded us to be bearers of the Good News, to be disciples. To carry out the will of God and to make his Father's Kingdom here on Earth. We are all given special gifts and unique opportunities to carry out our mission. My gifts? I'm not really sure. Some would say I'm athletically inclined, others a leader, to some even smart. But I have been blessed with some amazing opportunities, whether it's been helping out around church, tutoring classmates at school, playing basketball, performing in Godspell, or going on mission trips.

These opportunities have given me some valuable time to carry out the mission which we all bear. Whether it's been flipping pancakes, cleaning up after the garden market, setting up for the heifer dinner, or just sitting in church, I've been able to interact with people of sound faith who have taught me numerous lessons. While tutoring at school I've been able to see kids grow and learn, not only how to solve an algebraic equation, but also how to be a round person of faith, in a flat society. To have had the blessing of playing four years of high school basketball, I've learned how to work quickly and efficiently, as a team, on, and off the court. As we helped run the Special Olympics we were able to connect with many people through basketball, with whom we would never have had a chance to interact with otherwise. Performing Godspell was something I was looking forward to, that is until I learned it was a musical, and I'd have

to sing. This put me way out of my comfort zone, but also helped to share the Good news of God in a very different, and at some parts comical way. And finally the most influential opportunity, for me, and the ones I served, were the three mission trips I've been on. Two to the Gulf coast in the aftermath of Hurricane's Rita and Katrina, and the third to Ensenada Mexico.

(Silence)

Ensenada Mexico. Here the Wow Moments with God kept rolling in like the waves of the pacific, the people want you to love and care for them, and the Gospel and the will of God is at truly and humble at work. Where to start and what to share, there is too little time and too many awesome stories. I could tell you about how we played with the kids who had nothing, but still had everything. Or how we meet and shared God with the city of Ensenada. Or how we feed the workers of a migrant camp for three weeks. Or even how we put on a church service for the locals without knowing much Spanish. But the thing that touched me the most and strengthen my relationship with God was the building aspect of our trip. Yea putting on a church service, playing with kids, and feeding what seemed to be the five thousand was amazing and brought me closer to God. But looking back on the trip and realizing just how much we gave Pastor Manuel and the family is humbling, that we could do so much even though, we were just a motley crew of kids, And leaders from the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

But by replacing Pastor Manuel's soup kitchen, we not only blessed him, but we helped every person that will ever set foot in that soup kitchen. We didn't just replace a structure, one which had a dirt floor made originally of wooden pallets, scrap wood, tires, and anything else they could find, with a new one, made of a concrete foundation, four

well built walls, and roof with shingles, but we made a place where the word of God could be shared and taught and passed down from generation to generation, in a city and country where a surprising and alarming number of people have never heard of God. We gave Pastor Manuel a place where he could continue to run his mission, a mission that he pours his heart and soul into, he spends his pension to feed the kids who come to the soup kitchen. We figured that the least we could do was build them a place where it was safe to come: eat, play, and worship.

But that's not all! We didn't just build one building in the seven days we worked in the city oh no. We built two!! We built two buildings one house and one soup kitchen in a mere four days. Okay so maybe we weren't as motley of a crew as I had originally thought, or maybe we were, three things allowed us to accomplish this feat, First the people here in our church family who supported us and sponsored us the length of the trip. Second our amazing leaders and YWAM staff members that kept us focused on our mission and made sure we were safe and hydrated. Third GOD! I mean nobody can build two buildings in four days without Him.

The house we built was only two rooms, and probably smaller than everybody's garage that sits here with us today. It consisted of a kitchen and dining area, and a bedroom. We built the house for a family of three, two little girls, and their mother. They had been living in a trailer that they were renting. This house was more than a house to them; it was a gift from the heavens. You could tell they really cared about what we were doing for them. As they helped us every step of the way building the house the mother and the two girls painted with a passion. The neighbors and other family members also helped to build. The mother's brother helped to cut wood and hang

drywall. The people from adjacent houses walked down the dusty street picked up a hammer and worked whenever they could. On the second day of building the house the family surprised us with a feast of multitudes for lunch. We had tamales, real Mexican tamales, soda, and a Mexican dessert. The family had spent over a weeks pay on buying us a meal. I felt bad eating the food knowing that the family could have spent the money on things that they needed more, but it truly showed how much they cared about us and the house. After lunch our leader, Joanne, took them out to get ice cream, by this time the house was done except for the furnishing. We furnished the kitchen with a stove and oven, a kitchen table with silverware, a clock and pictures on the walls, cooking supplies and utensils, and the bedroom was completed with a bunk bed with sheets and pillows, laying on top the linens were colored pencils, books, toys, and three of our team t-shirts. When the family arrived back at there newly finished house, the front door had been locked, and we all were outside. We formed a circle including the family, and passed the keys around to each and every person that helped work on the house. We all said our words of blessing, encouragement, praise, and thanks. When the keys finally got to the mother she broke down. Crying with joy and amazement of the work of God, she spoke, stumbling for words, as you can well imagine. We then gave the family a bible which we had all signed, and let them go into the house unknowing of the furnishings, and locked the door behind them. We all crowed by the windows and doors listening at them cry and talk in amazement about there new home. After an agonizing two minutes we knocked on the door, and they answered their new front door for the first time. Letting God into their home, were He would make a lasting impression on the family, neighbors, and everyone who hears the story of how this family got their own home. Once again before saying our

final goodbyes and leaving the place where we gave our all and lost our sweat blood and tears, we prayed inside the house.

Looking back on these two amazing times during our trip I can see how we truly blessed the people we saw and helped along our journey. I notice things, now, things that I had originally overlooked and things that seem unimportant, which God did in my own life and in the lives of other teammates working around me, and in the pastor, children, and families we graciously served. But God has a plan! God wants his will and words to touch every person, he wants to love and care for every person, not just for one race or one country. But He loves every person with a love that no one or no thing can offer. God gave his only son to us, for us, through His unconditional, unwavering love. Jesus freely accepts a death on the cross, a death He did not want, but yet died for us showing his love, so that we might be saved.

When Jesus appeared back to his disciples, after triumphing over this death, John recalls Jesus saying “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And now I am sending you into the world to use the special gifts you have been blessed with to use them in your unique opportunities to carry out the will of God through the spreading of Good News.

I would like to thank you personally for supporting myself and my fellow teammates in our journey to strengthen our own relationship in God and spreading the Love and Good news of Christ throughout the world, especially in Ensenada Mexico.

Now I would like to say a prayer, one which I stumbled crossed late Thursday night, actually very early Friday morning, in the vestry house.

Let us pray,

We believe as Christians that we are called to reach out.

We pray that we recognize the opportunities that we are given.

In order that we can spread the Good news.

Amen.