

It is a Monday morning in May 2020, lockdown has been our 'norm' for over two months now and so many things are different, and some are unfortunately the same and perhaps even intensified. I am with a work colleague and he is driving us through zone 1, one of the poorer and slightly more dangerous parts of Guatemala City. We are on our way to a 'comedor,' food kitchen, where we will join with a small team to help prepare food for the homeless and vulnerable.

Life seems to be going on as normal here in zone 1, shops are open, even 'non-essential' businesses are operating, business as usual.

I wonder what that even means, 'non-essential?' Because honestly most of these people will view their businesses as essential because if they don't work, they and their families don't eat. That seems pretty essential to them and to me. I would understand more if the government were more willing and able to provide compensation.

One thing I do see is everyone in masks, one of the enforced rules here in Guatemala from early on in our lockdown and curfew restrictions. I can see all manner of masks, colourful, patterned, different shapes, it's nice that people can still express themselves a little through them.

We stop at some traffic lights and I look to my right, a small 'tienda,' shop, is open and in the small entrance two men stand drinking beer and chatting, their masks pulled under their chins. A bit early for alcohol and any sign of social distancing is out the window.

To my left I see three ladies stood on the opposite street corner. It is obvious from their dress and stance that they are prostitutes. It might be the first time I have seen ladies so openly stood on a street corner at this time of day, in such a public place. I imagine times are especially hard for them, 'business' must be slow, and they still need to feed themselves and probably children. Something inside me breaks as I see one of the ladies, maybe 20 years old, approach two men on a motorbike that has stopped just in front of them. She leans into the driver and speaks into his ear, resting her hand on his lap. I will refrain from describing in further detail what went on as she tried to entice him into doing business with her. Some sights are better forgotten, although it is unlikely that I will forget quickly. The lights changed to green and we



drove on, and as quickly as that life goes on. We arrived at the comedor and started preparing breakfast in the form of 'café y pan,' coffee and sweet bread.

As I folded bread in napkins, I couldn't help but be saddened by the things I had seen on the drive into the kitchen.

The truth is that at times like these it is always the poorest who suffer the most and how unfair is it that they were already suffering and now that is heightened, intensified, and increased.

I think of the families we work with and am pleased to know that they are getting food supplies and rent paid through our generous supporters and donors. Yet, there are so many more people who are not.

As the day goes on we prepare lunch for over 150 people, as 12:30 approaches the line in the street grows, people of all ages, even whole families, gather to receive what might be their only meal of the day. It warms my heart to know that people have been coming together to help the less fortunate. To see that people are willing to volunteer their time and resources to bless others in these challenging times is a real encouragement and sign of hope. But I still question and doubt, I battle the niggling thoughts, these people that we serve here today were already suffering before Covid-19, and most will continue to struggle after all this is over. I push those thoughts aside because it is great that people are helping today, right here, right now. It gives me hope, hope that these new projects to help the more vulnerable that I have seen pop-up all-over Guatemala City, and I imagine in many other places too, that they will continue.



I have seen several food kitchens, projects that are providing food parcels for families, the white flag movement where people can ask for food and support in the street with a white flag, shelters for homeless people, which are especially important because of the curfews here. At first no one could be outside after 4pm-4am, now it is 6pm-5am, with no thought on a governmental level as to where homeless people would go. Projects and movements like these give hope to vulnerable families, they give hope to the homeless and they give hope to me.

I hope that they will inspire lasting change and support for those who need it. I choose to be hopeful in stead of cynical. It is not always an easy task, when I see so much brokenness and so many hurting people, but I choose hope because God give hope.

