



Dear Friends,

It is Easter, the 50 day season following Lent. My life among the people in their suffering and their resilience speaks to me of the Paschal Mystery: the dying and rising of Jesus. Maria Ixcoy is one such woman.

Maria who is ten years older than me, was one of the first women who reached out when I moved to Santiago Ixcán in 1999. She owns one of the few *'tiendas'* – small family-owned wood hut stores in the village where she sold the supplies that were brought in on the backs of mules: salt, sugar, soap, oil, and even Pepsi Cola! She said, "You can come here and be with me anytime." On lonely days, I would sit on the long wooden bench outside of the wide rectangular window of her store chatting with her in my early haltering Spanish. As time evolved, I saw less of her, but always her presence permeated the village in church, in her store, in her home.

A mother of eight, widowed at age 68, she knows suffering, especially in her later years (70s) with serious health issues. The latest was in August, when murmurings in the village announced, "Maria is near death, she isn't going to make it! Alarmed, I went to visit her right before leaving Guatemala for the U.S.

I stepped into the shadowed cement-floor room of the house where she lives with her daughter-in-law (son is in the U.S.) and three grandchildren. She lay on a wooden plank bed, no mattress, her head wrapped with a light-weight colored cloth to alleviate a headache. Still conscious and able to talk she said, "You came, hermana to visit! Gracias!" "Yes, I am here." I touched her forehead and stroked her arm and hand. Very weak, barely able to eat or drink, my heart sank. She isn't going to be here when I get back. After a bit, I rose and said my goodbyes. As I turned to leave she said, "I will be here, hermana, when you get back."

And six months later, miraculously she was!

When I asked about her recovery she recounted the trips to the best doctors in Playa Grande and all the way to Cobán ...with no lasting results. After the last doctor visit and spending tons of money, she told her sons, "I'm going to die. Take me home."

She shared, "I didn't get better, nor did I die. I thought, "If God is going to take me, I will go. But first I will ask forgiveness of my sins." Then, she decided to fight to live in her way-*'sacrificio'* - sacrifice. She explained, "I rose at midnight and got on my hands and knees and crawled across the room back and forth asking God to heal me. Here are the signs," lifting up her long skirt and showing me her scarred knees. I have faith. Tremendous my faith. I feel that my God is in heaven and here on earth. He is the owner of my life."

So when her brother, Marcos, invited me to join a small group of his family to visit relatives in Santa Clara, a Maya Quiché village nestled on the other side of the green peaks to the south of us, I was delighted that Maria was going! It wasn't a journey for the faint-hearted! A new road had recently been hewn through massive rock of the steep terrain and thick vegetation allowing four-wheel-drive vehicles to pass where before only foot and mule had tread. I hesitated (I knew the road would be treacherous) but decided to go – But it was dangerous. Very.

Marcos drove with Maria and I stuffed into the cab, while his wife, brother and sister-in-law, cousin, daughter and two nieces sat in the back of the 2022 four-wheel-drive truck and headed toward the towering hills. For an hour the truck powered up an incredibly steep rock hewn road flanked in places with cut felled trees. From the heights on our right, vistas that took my breath away stretched for miles in the distance, but the edge of the road looking down, plummeted to green nothingness. I focused upward on the spectacular views, making me feel I was on an adventure tour. I kept asking Marcos, "Aren't you afraid?" And always the



response was, "No. I've been on this road already and my truck can handle this." Maria calmly sat beside me chatting as we climbed.

After powering around sharp curves going up, up, and up we finally came to where the road flattened. Marcos parked at the side of an overlook and we got out of the car. From a ridge on the road, we looked down and saw the village gem of Santa Clara in the valley below. "Half the village consists of our family," Marcos informed. Maria had lived there in her early married years and later had moved to Santiago Ixcán. "It's been 43 years since I've been here," she said in awe.

We were welcomed with open arms and hugs from the people as words in Quiché rose excitedly in a joy of blessed reunion. We moved from house to house visiting uncles, aunts, cousins and close friends. But the visit that struck me the most was the one we made to pray for an elderly tia (aunt) who had suffered for over a year with a unspecified illness.

We entered a semi-lit room with a table acting as an altar pushed up against the wall, where an elderly woman sat in a chair in the middle of the room dressed in traditional Quiché blouse and multi-colored patterned skirt, her gray hair tightly pulled back in two short braids. We greeted her in Quiché "Saq'arik Nan" - "Good morning, Grandmother." When Maria stepped into the room, the tia rose from her chair saying, "Aye Maria, you were going to die and now you came!" The two women embraced, weeping in each other's arms. Maria consoled, "Don't cry tia, you are going to live, you are not going to die. Pray to God." She pulled up a chair, and they sat with heads bent toward one another and visited in their Mayan language.

I sat as a silent witness touched by the love between the two women recognizing how Jesus breaks into our ordinary yet not-so-ordinary lives with new life... like He did that day in a far-away village in the visitation between family members and two women who both felt the power of love and hope in a simple yet profound embrace and conversation.



Resurrection.

Thank you for your continued prayers and financial support of Ixcán Ministries!
May God bless you and yours in this Easter journey with HOPE and New Life!

Sincerely,

Kathy Snider

Mission Update:

The dry season is here with the temps in the upper 90s and little rain. It is HOT! (No air-conditioning but fans!) We continue to help the most needy via our outreach programs : Corn, Medical Emergency, Tinaco, Housing, and Luchadoras Women's Group. Our library is functioning at reduced hours now due to the school returning to full-time, in-person classes following the Covid shutdown. Recipients of our partial scholarships are studying. The women of Ixcán Creations microbusiness just received a payout from sales in the U. S.

Kathy is scheduled to return to the U.S. at the end of June 2023.

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OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Ixcán Ministries is a Christian lay mission serving as a ministry of presence with the Maya people in the Ixcán jungle of Guatemala. We act as a bridge between cultures for the exchange of gifts to transform lives and society.

Our programs include- Scholarships, Community Library, Women's Micro-business, Medical, Housing, and Food Assistance, Spiritual and Pastoral Accompaniment, and Promotion of Peace and Justice.

Ixcán Ministries is a 501(c) 3 organization. Your contributions are tax deductible.

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