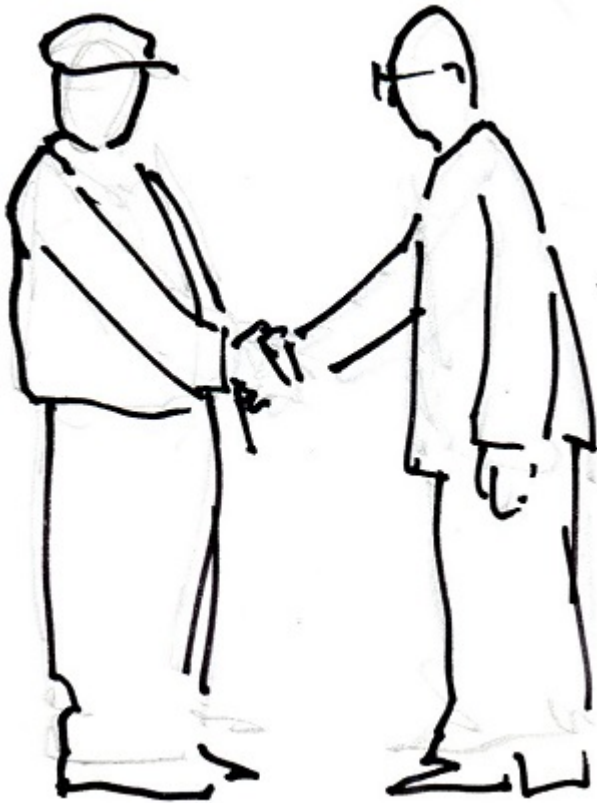


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by Pat Marrin

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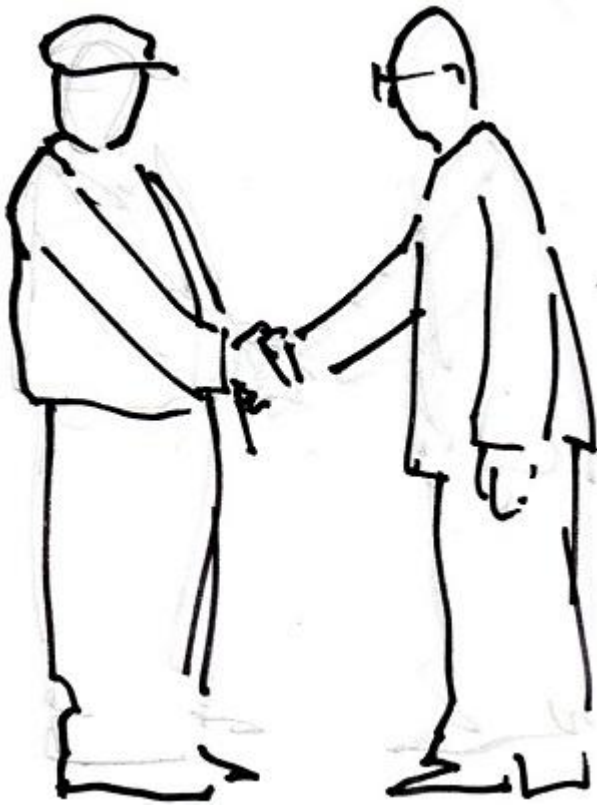
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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“Take nothing for the journey” (Luke (9:2).

The church’s approach to missionary work has evolved radically over the years. During the colonial expansion of the European powers into the newly discovered developing world, missionaries were often an extension of the conquering cultures. They brought Christianity by building churches and opening schools to teach their home country’s culture as a civilizing benefit to the primitive natives. Their secular counterparts introduced administrative order and business models that extracted local resources and imposed class structures that aped European society.

Despite the sacrifices and work of countless missionaries, this method of “saving” conquered peoples was destructive and self-defeating, and when colonial overthrow produced new independent nations, the churches were often expelled along with the sponsoring imperial elites.

When Jesus sent out his first missionaries to preach the Kingdom, his approach was much different. His disciples were totally dependent on the reception or rejection of the villages they were sent to. All they had was their good will and a message they were empowered to demonstrate to those who opened their doors to them. They could actually heal the sick and drive out evil spirits.

Villagers who risked accepting these odd strangers traveling bare-foot, without food or money or even a change of clothes or a walking stick to fend off robbers and roaming dogs, discovered they were filled with grace and goodness. Inviting them to their simple tables or offering them a place to sleep yielded miracles and a profound sense of peace.

The disciples themselves were no doubt astounded at the results. They received far more than they gave. How many of us, eager to succeed and anxious to help others, would feel comfortable arriving in a village in Latin America without resources and expertise, without getting to be generous benefactors to grateful recipients, returning safely home with a warm feeling of having made a difference for the poor? Instead, come with nothing except your faith, needing shelter, food and a place to sleep. Surrender yourselves in a reversal of roles. Encounter God by opening yourselves to God's ambassadors, the meek and humble of heart.

We learn discipleship by being disciples. Each time we surrender control and open our lives to the needs of others, we are drawn deeper into the risky and unpredictable interplay of grace and freedom, open to surprising outcomes, unplanned encounters and mutual exchanges of love and healing. Once we take the first step beyond our comfort zones, we enter God's territory and open ourselves to the larger life that is the Kingdom Jesus preached. We need nothing but faith and courage for the journey.

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