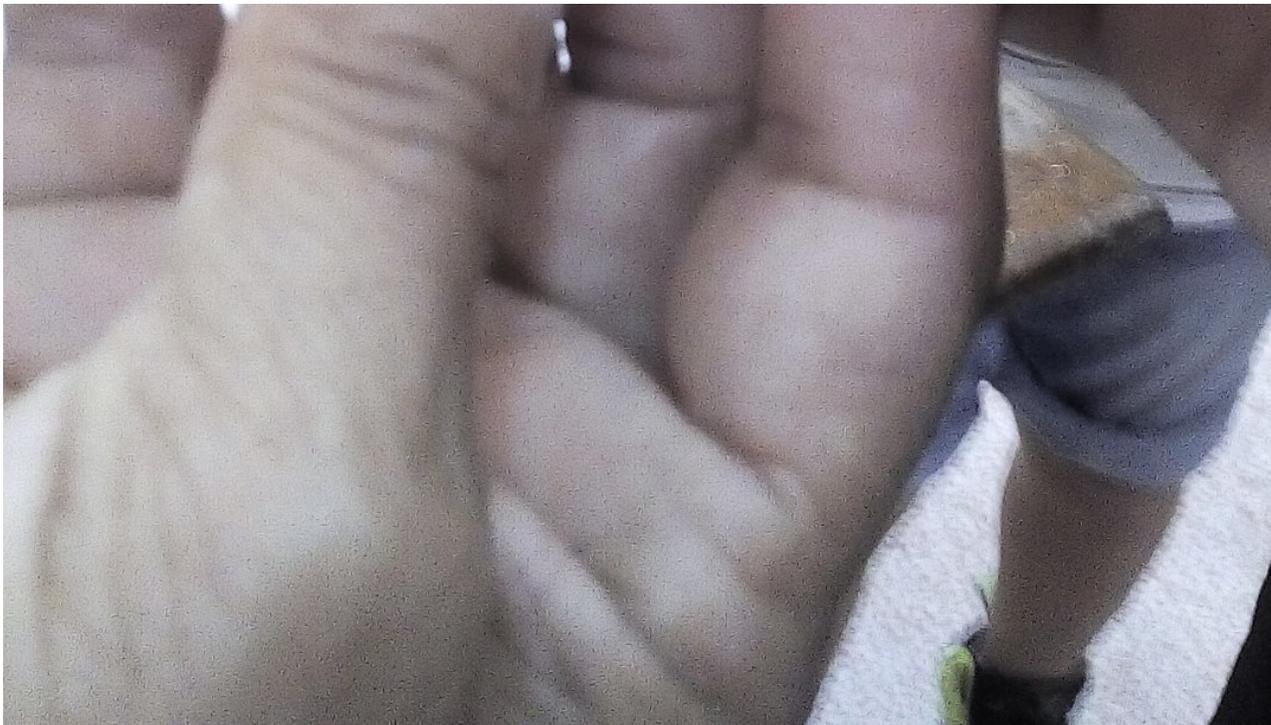


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Tough and Tender Touchstones: Memories and Mosaic Making in Cuba





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Although I haven't completely found the words to articulate my experiences in Cuba last week, I wanted to share with you a few impressions that I hold in my heart from there.

I spent the first 4 days in Havana and Matanzas preaching and facilitating 3 expressive arts and healing workshops before heading to Holguín to co-create a memorial stained-glass mosaic with families affected by a plane crash last year.

On May 18, 2018, in route to Holguín, Cuba, **Cubana de Aviación Flight 972** crashed shortly after takeoff, near [Santiago de las Vegas](#), 12 miles from Havana. Of those on board, 112 died and one passenger survived with critical injuries.

Twenty pastoral leaders from the Nazarene church of Cuba, were among the passengers that were killed in the crash, leaving ten children between the ages of 7-16 orphaned, now being raised by grandparents who, at the same time, are grieving the loss of their own adult children. Nine Nazarene congregations continue to be deeply impacted by this loss as well.



Now approaching the one year anniversary of the accident, I was invited to artfully accompany Baptist pastors, Ernesto and Marisol Bazán, the Cuban Council of Churches, and the Nazarene Churches of Cuba as they walk alongside those intimately impacted by this tragedy. Though there were many poignant moments of sadness and grief, I also experienced a profoundly sacred sense of delight in the ordinary and awe-inspiring

resiliency of my Cuban friends. The following is...

What I saw:



*Inspiring art installations of whimsical music-loving doves, mosaic filled neighborhoods, and paintings of Cuban campesino couples. I also was thrilled to spend time with two of the artists who created them!

*Impeccably restored classic cars and homes in all kinds and colors

*Crumbling, old and hurricane-damaged buildings alongside big and beautiful new cultural architecture projects



*Public parks and plazas filled with families, book and food vendors, history, music, dancing and most appreciated, internet access to aid in communication with distant loved ones

*Stunning white sand beaches alongside the deep aqua blue ocean

*Affection between parents and children

*Simple yet elegant table settings full of sweet potatoes, yucca, congri, tomatoes and cucumbers, eggs, bread, juice, and strong coffee



*Grandmothers cooking, sitting, weeping, lamenting, comforting, reading poetry, coloring, collaging, creating, admiring, connecting, smiling

*Youth chatting, testing the waters, jumping, playing, leading, unraveling, naming worries, engaging, placing, creating, honoring, moving forward

*A table filled with plates of broken colored glass, clear glass cabochon pebbles, glue and photos of loved ones lost

*Hands exploring individual pieces of glass, noticing the texture, shape, and transparency when lifted to the light



*Hands placing photo pebbles onto the sticky surface where the road was marked, curiously close to where the road ended



*A table crowded by many eager to fill in the empty spaces with their own piece of glass, finding their place in relation to others and the road that is shared

*A bit of a mess when we lost sight of the road and then relief when we found it again by filling in the edges

*Tears of resonance, remembering and relief

*Smiles of appreciation, pride of accomplishment and collective inspiration when the mosaic was lifted to the light

*People taking photos: up close of their people and with family next to the finished work

*On many separate occasions, hands rubbing the smooth pebble that protected the picture of the loved one lost while sharing stories

What I heard:

*Waves crashing on the rocks near the Morro Castle and Fort

*The cañonazo (canon blast) at 9:00pm to close the city of Havana

*Music, car horns, horse drawn carriage-taxis, laughter, conversations, stories

*Accounts of where they were and what they were doing when they first heard of the accident



*How they were related and connected to those who were lost

*The poems, Anger by *Joanetta Hendel* and Caminante no hay Camino by *Antonio Machado*

*The book, *Edna* by *Susan Paradis* (All helpful readings for navigating complicated grief)

*Silent solidarity

*Negotiations about design, placement and color combinations while creating the mosaic

*A grieving woman speaking words of regret and forgiveness to her deceased sister while touching her photo within the mosaic

*"I had no idea or didn't expect that what we would make together would turn out so beautiful."

What I felt:

*Humbly honored to be invited into such a tender space

*Terrified that I might add to their pain by saying or doing something out of my own ignorance

*Brave enough to enter in anyway, instead of avoiding it or shying away



*Though at times exhausted by the weight of the collective grief; connected, empathetic and buoyed by the companionship along the way

*Supported by a good team of co-facilitating counselors as well as friends from around the globe who were lifting us up in their prayers throughout the process

*A sense that I was made for this

*Awed by the creative power of the arts to heal and to restore

*Moved by the Spirit of God expressed and witnessed in, through, and beyond us



*Profound gratitude and hope

What I learned:

*The road to healing is long, slow, complicated and different for each of us

*I don't need to have answers or be in charge. My presence, not my perfection can be a gift to another



*Clean-up can be the hardest, messiest and loneliest part of the process. Though, when others join in and take ownership of the final tedious steps, it can be the most enriching and satisfying part.



*I don't have to see the end of the road or even know the destination. I make the road by walking and moving forward one step at a time, speed doesn't matter

* I don't walk alone, whether I recognize it or not, it matters how I do it

*Making art, creates an opening to understanding and meaning that cannot be accessed in any other way



*The creative collaboration process and the resulting visible and tangible object becomes a place where stories and memories can be held, healed and honored.

What I hope:

*That this is a beginning and not an end to our journey of accompaniment

*That what we created will serve as a witness and reminder that beauty heals and can be found in brokenness, that we are not alone, and that new paths can be walked no matter how much time it takes.

*That you and I will be inspired to walk alongside others, to see the glimpses of grace in our neighbor's pain, to feel the kindness of others when we share our own struggle, and to create something more beautiful together than we can create on our own.



*That if you find yourself in a tough place, that you'd be tender with yourself and that you will find something to touch that touches you and reminds you that you're not alone. You are loved by the Maker of the Way.

Thanks for walking with me and making it possible that I might walk with others,



Mylynda