

Anna Clissold
Ecuador Reflections
For 8/24/14 sermon

Grateful. That's how I'm feeling as I think about our pilgrimage to Ecuador.

I'm grateful for the welcoming, generous attitudes that our Sojourners showed during the trip, and for the spiritual comfort that this provided our group.

But I'm also grateful for the spiritual DIScomfort I felt on the trip. One day I was in a garden alone, thinking ahead two years, to when my son will go on pilgrimage. And it occurred to me: what a thing it is to send a child on pilgrimage, to send them out into the world with the hope that they will return a little more spiritually mature....

And that's when I felt the spirit poking me, making me uncomfortable, asking me if I was living up to *my* role in this. In that moment, I was inspired to more actively get in the Sojourners'/your kids' faces, to turn their sights away from the ordinary, and to focus on what was spiritually unique about what we were doing. I hope I may have succeeded, even if just a little.

Whatever small success I may have had, the Amazon trumped by far, all on its own, just by being. One of my favorite things about the pilgrimage were our Amazonian travels up and down the Arajuno [Ar-a-hoo-no] river, which reminded me of rafting down the Nantahala river in North Carolina, when I was not much older than the Sojourners are now. Those rafting trips of my youth—just us teens—were at turns relaxing, exhilarating, and even frightening. But we somehow navigated even the most ferocious rapid, and my memory of these trips came back with a rush of joy and pride. For that I'm grateful. For that and so much more.

So to the people of St. Christopher's I say: I'm grateful for the support you showed our Sojourners and gave to this pilgrimage, and I'm especially grateful for the church family you are and will continue to be to these young people, and to me and my family.

To Daniel and Barbara: I am grateful for the chance to have been on this adventure with you, for getting to know you better over the last two years, and better still on this trip, whether during our relatively relaxing planning meetings (either with or without snakes), or whether during a tubing-down-the-river misadventure, from which Daniel and I recovered through a series of branches, boats and helping hands. Why we found this hilarious, rather than terrifying, I'll leave to the greater wisdom of the Spirit.,

To the parents of our Sojourners:

I am grateful for the privilege of getting to know your children over the last two years. They may cringe to hear it in public, but I love your kids, each & every one. And I'm *proud* of HOW they were and WHO they were on this trip, both as individuals and as a group. You can take pride in this, too.

And to the Sojourners: Aaron, Dallas, Henry, Justin & Susana:

I am most grateful to you, for the chance to have accompanied you on this part of your journey. You are wonderful people. You continually surprised Daniel and me with your insights, your willingness to engage on any topic, and your caring for each other. I'll say it again. I love you all. And my hope and prayer for you is that you, too, will have occasion in the future to remember this trip--with joy, pride, and most of all, gratitude.

Amen