

GAMBOA UNION CHURCH GAMBOA, PANAMA

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MAY 2010 I WAS TOLD WHEN I WAS GROWING UP that the “Wilbur nose” was probably because we had a distant ancestor who was a Seneca Indian. I am not absolutely sure about all of this, but this is how I introduced Richard Twiss, a Lakota Sioux Indian from the United States at our morning service.

Richard had been invited by Youth With A Mission to teach for a week to Indigenous students. They would learn how they can celebrate their identity and use the uniqueness of their culture to reach others within their culture. They can share the gospel thru their language, music and dance and not have to rely on the influence of a foreign culture to do it.

We were privileged to have him speak to the whole congregation. He gave his testimony that his search for identity led him down a path of rebellion, drug and alcohol abuse. While on a high from his addictions, he cried out in desperation to the God he had heard about and was instantly sobered, delivered and enveloped in the peace of God. Richard had come to know personally the Creator of the universe and now he wanted to make Him known to others.

The Indigenous people (Indians) of the United States had suffered terribly over the years from hundreds of broken treaties and betrayal by those who made empty promises leaving them with little land and as the objects of discrimination.

Richard struggled then with his identity as a Christian and as an Indigenous person or native American. Some said he needed to leave his heritage behind and become “one of us.” Eventually he came to see that his true identity was in Christ and not in some foreign cultural expression of Christianity. He could be the man God created him to be and celebrate Christ in his culture and heritage. This then is the best way to reach the Indigenous people in any country.

This may be hard for you to understand, but the day before when I learned that Richard Twiss was going to be our Sunday speaker, I knew it was going to affect me personally. Even though I never met the man, I knew I was going to have to ask his forgiveness on behalf of my people (United States) for the horrible way we had treated his people.

Even though the sins committed were done by my ancestors, the sins of the fathers can be visited onto the next third and fourth generations. (Exodus 20:4,5) This lack of reconciliation can hinder the response to the gospel and leave a whole culture under oppression and spiritual bondage.

As I heard Richard speak that morning, I was totally convinced I needed to ask the forgiveness of his people. My heart pounded as he concluded his message. The crowd gave him a standing ovation. I stood with him and then asked all the Americans to stand with us. With great emotion I asked his forgiveness for the way our ancestors had treated his people. He responded graciously and prayed with us.

Then I felt compelled to ask the Indigenous people present to stand. We had at least three tribes present. On behalf of the people of Panama I asked their forgiveness for the way they have been treated and are treated today. I could see tears in many eyes that morning as people embraced one another. It was powerful.... no other way to say it.

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Thank you for all your love, prayers and support. Bill Wilbur