

How well do we know our neighbors?

Every time I talk with one of our adult children, he will ask “Are you getting to know your neighbors?” I love this question. I’m still inspired, motivated and challenged by it.

How well do we know our neighbors? Let’s begin with a look at Thailand itself.

The Kingdom of Thailand, once known as Siam, has 68 million people and the second largest economy in southeast Asia. This is a beautiful country with most gracious people however a 2017 study revealed the median monthly Thai income to be less than \$900. Poverty is rampant and overwhelming. Medical tourism as well as sex tourism flourish.

The hills of northern Thailand are filled with southeast Asian tribal people, many here as refugees from other parts of Asia. Our Free Methodist ministry supports a hostel for children among the Lahu tribes in the hills outside of Chiang Rai. The tribal people are often relegated to the most menial work.

How well do we know our neighbors? Let’s look at Chiang Rai. This is both the name of a province and a city in the far north of Thailand in what is known as the “Golden Triangle” infamous for its opium production. More on that later. Our apartment is north of the city, so last weekend we went into the heart of the city and stayed at a guest house / hostel for three nights to help us better get to know this fascinating city. Our hostel offered a simple breakfast in an outdoor patio garden. Each morning we sat at a table and met more people – a woman from Argentina (and yes we were able to speak with her in Spanish), a retired French navy officer who served on Le Vigilant (a strategic nuclear powered submarine) and his wife, as well as many young back packers from North America and Europe trekking through Thailand. We walked the daily night bazaar market and then walked the much larger Saturday night market. We enjoyed Thai food in restaurants and road side carts. And we walked – our peak according to FitBit was 19,000+ steps one day – just taking in the sights and sounds of the city.

How well do we know our neighbors? Not as well as we want. Not as well as we will. Yet we find we love them already. Why? It’s not just that their land and their hearts are beautiful. They too are created in the image of our God of unfailing love. A God who calls us to look, live and love like Jesus as we live among them.

a friend,
Roger and Ellen