

Voices: Justice looks like other Mexicans

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EDITOR'S NOTE: "Justice looks like ..." is a special series in the Voices column. Readers will have the opportunity to consider justice from numerous viewpoints. The series is based on each writer's understanding of Scripture and relationship with Jesus Christ. Writers present their own views independent of any institution, unless otherwise noted in their bios.

You are encouraged to listen to each writer without prejudgment. Then, engage in conversation with others around you about what justice looks like to you.

[Click here](#) for more information about the series. [Click here](#) to read the full "Justice looks like..." series.

"You're not like other Mexicans."

This was how the assistant to the director of missions greeted me after speaking at a youth camp service. Did he intend this to be a compliment? Did those words sound as weird as I felt hearing them?

He mentioned something about the way I communicated, but the rest of the conversation is hazy. The only other thing I remember was a tangential recommendation that I read Dallas Willard.

That phrase has periodically boomeranged back into my mind. Sometimes, it led me to moments of exploration. Sometimes, it caused self-analysis. Sometimes, it caused anger or frustration. Other times, I struggled to understand the perspective of how people see "Mexicans" and "other

Mexicans.”

One of the ricochets of that phrase led me to a confession.

Any other Mexican

Years after that post-sermon conversation, I recalled that phrase while in my first full-time pastorate.

Sitting with several pastors from the small town of Hereford, Texas, our conversation turned to the growing trend of dressing casually in church. I mentioned that, except for funerals and weddings, I rarely wore a suit and tie to church and definitely did not do so during the week.

A first-generation immigrant pastor, dark-skinned and short in stature, who appeared to be in his 60s said in Spanish, “I have to wear a suit and tie every day and wherever I go. Otherwise, I get treated just like ‘any other Mexican.’”

My heart broke. I wondered how many times he suffered humiliation or abuse, based solely on his appearance—how the Father had knit him in his mother’s womb. How many times was he laughed at because of how he pronounced words? Or presumed ignorant just because of his accent? Had he automatically come under heightened suspicion in stores or by authorities due to the color of his skin? Was he ever subjected to physical violence?

It was abundantly clear his first-generation Spanish-dominant Mexican immigrant experience was not my third-generation English-dominant Texan experience.

Kat-Kits and privilege

Serving as a Baptist Student Ministry summer missionary at a migrant center in Hermitage, Ark., I was given the responsibility of taking five or six boys to kids' camp. We were the only Hispanics in the entire camp for the week.

I joined two other volunteers overseeing the snack cabin, and kids from the migrant center came to the window and ordered. The last one asked for a chocolate bar—a “Kat-Kit.” After the kids left, the teens busted out laughing: “Did you hear him? He called it a ‘Kat-Kit’ instead of a Kit-Kat!”

I didn't know how to engage them; so, I started with a grammar lesson. I explained to the teens that in Spanish, adjectives usually come after the noun, which is the opposite of the general practice in English.

A native Spanish speaker is thinking, “*Día caliente*,” and if not privy to the rule, literally will translate it to “day hot.” I told them this probably didn't play a role in the “Kat-Kit” flub, but they should be aware of it for future reference.

Their response was, “You're Mexican?” I explained that my grandparents were from Mexico.

They saw me differently. And, because of it, they treated me differently.

My confession? I have experienced this privilege regularly in my life.

Is it the lighter skin? Or the fact I'm 6 feet, 2 inches tall? Was it my lack of an accent? Or, maybe it was that I conveniently dropped in conversation that fact that I went to law school.

Whatever it was, I know I was asked to sit at tables where less-accultured Hispanic leaders were not invited. I did not suffer the same frustration and

humiliation at border crossings as my darker-skinned pastor friend, who has more degrees than I do.

Whether sincerely or not, I was treated with the kind of respect I did not see many of my own Primera Iglesia Bautista pastors receive.

I never read a Dallas Willard book.

I did, however, find an interesting quote from his book *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge*: “Justice without love will never do justice to justice, nor will ‘love’ without justice ever do justice to love. Indeed, it will not be love at all.”

What does justice—with love—look like for Mexicans, Latinos or Hispanics?

Justice is not when I don’t get treated like “other Mexicans.” Justice is when “other Mexicans” get treated like me.

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[Click here](#) to read the full “Justice looks like...” series.