

Episode 13

Faith in Action

RICHARD AND JOANNE LOOSLI – TURKEY

[BEGIN MUSIC]

PRESIDENT MONSON: I extol those who with loving care and compassionate concern, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and house the homeless. He who notes the sparrow's fall will not be unmindful of such service.

HOST: The Mormon Channel now presents Faith in Action.

Welcome to Faith in Action on the Mormon Channel, a show about welfare, humanitarian aid and service around the world.

[END MUSIC]

Today we welcome Richard and Joanne Loosli who recently returned from one of the oldest continuously inhabited regions in the world, Turkey. Just fascinating, I have been looking forward to this. Welcome, nice to have you here today.

JOANNE: Thank you.

RICHARD: Thank you.

HOST: I always like to start off by saying; the envelope comes from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I would assume it is just a regular sized envelope. Which of you gets to open it first? How does that work when you are expecting that call to come?

JOANNE: Well, we opened it together. In fact, we waited for our children to arrive and the one son that didn't live with us, we called him on the phone, and we, just like young missionaries, we just waited for the family to gather round and opened it together.

HOST: Then when you saw Turkey, what was your first reaction?

RICHARD: I would say huge surprise, shock. I had no idea that the Church even had a presence in Turkey. It is a 99 percent Muslim country. The Church is not recognized there yet, but we did not know that until we went there.

HOST: I found this statement. It says, "Turkey is a secular state with no official state religion. The Turkish constitution provides for freedom of religion and conscience," but just because it is a Muslim state it is difficult or we are just not recognized? What is the situation there?

RICHARD: I do not know if the Church has ever applied for recognition there yet, or what needs to be put in place. I am sure there would be some contact before something like that took place. There are other religions there. There are some protestant religions that were functioning there, but it is not an open type awareness.

JOANNE: It was difficult to find a place to have a church because mostly it was the landlords that were cautious about having Christians meet in their buildings.

HOST: Okay. Let's step back again. I kind of got ahead of myself. You step on the airplane and you get off in, is it pronounced Ankara?

RICHARD: Well we actually, we went to Istanbul.

HOST: Istanbul, oh

RICHARD: Although there was another couple in Ankara and another couple in Izmir.

HOST: So there is six, three couples serving then in Turkey.

RICHARD: That is correct.

HOST: Okay, so you go to Istanbul.

RICHARD: Correct.

HOST: Then my mind just opens up to all kinds of things in Istanbul, you know the markets and the camels in the streets and the....

BOTH: [LAUGHING]

HOST: Is this how it is, or is this just a big city like everywhere else?

RICHARD: Well, what you have expressed is something that crossed our minds as well, but it is quite a modern city. In fact, the only camels we ever saw were at places where tourists might visit where they could get on a camel and be led around like a ride at a circus or an amusement park. Other than that, buses and trains and taxis galore, so it was a fairly modern country in that regard.

HOST: You arrive in Istanbul. Do you have a driver, or do you take a taxi? How do you get to your apartment or your first place that you lived?

JOANNE: Our interpreter met us. Actually, the couple that we were replacing met us at the airport, and they had the interpreter with them. Then we took taxis to get to where we had to go.

HOST: Was it a wild ride? Is it...

JOANNE: Yes, the taxis are like the Wild Mouse ride. It was unreal.

HOST: Did you kind of get used to it over the 18 months?

JOANNE: I never did, but he did.

RICHARD: I did. I got, you know, there were always near misses, but we were never in any accidents, and that was our primary mode of transportation was by taxi. We used buses rarely. There were places to get over to what was called Sultanahmet, where the Blue Mosque and the Hagia Sophia and Grand Bazaar are that has a tramway similar to Trax here in Salt Lake that we would ride to go there.

HOST: So the infrastructure is developed well

RICHARD: Yes

HOST: At least in this .

BOTH: Yes.

HOST: There is not a problem getting around.

BOTH: Very well organized.

HOST: What is the apartment like, the first place that you show up, fairly modern, fairly sparse? What are your living conditions like.

JOANNE: We were in a small apartment building that was, the apartment building was as wide as the apartment, and there were three apartments in there, and we were up on the third floor. There was no elevator and these skinny spiral stairs because it goes straight up and down.

RICHARD: Wooden stairs.

JOANNE: Yes, and uneven, but the apartment was one bedroom in the living room was where we had our kitchen, I mean our dining area, our desk for computers, things like that, a TV. We had a couch and chairs.

HOST: Did you have a market nearby where you shop? Was that a problem? Was that a challenge, or was that fairly simple to get food?

JOANNE: It was quite simple. There were a lot of open markets on the street, and you could get all kinds of fresh fruits and vegetables, and there would even be cart vendors going up and down the streets pulled by horses or donkeys, and you could buy fish, fruit, vegetables, nuts, all kinds of things up and down the street.

RICHARD: There was a small grocery store near where we lived. In fact, it was in the same building where the branch met on Sundays that we frequented all the time too.

HOST: When you mentioned that the people, that the couple going home met you, did you have a chance, did they stay for a week or so and kind of help you get acclimated, or were they just gone and you were on your own? How did that work?

RICHARD: No, there was actually a two week overlap. They were there two weeks training us. There was another couple who went out with us who were replacing a couple in Izmir, so they spent a week with the two couples training both of us, and then the couple going to Izmir left and went down to be further trained by the couple they were replacing, and then the couple stayed an additional week to help train us with the specific responsibilities we had as country directors.

HOST: Is this, how does the system work? Who do you report to? Is there a mission nearby, a mission president or is it... Where do the correspondents come from generally?

RICHARD: In times past, Turkey has been under the Athens Greece Mission or the Sofia Bulgaria Mission, but that has since been, what

JOANNE: Dissolved.

RICHARD: Discontinued, and so we answered to the area presidency.

HOST: Oh.

JOANNE: In Moscow.

RICHARD: Yes

HOST: In Moscow?

JOANNE: East Europe Area Presidency.

HOST: Did you have a chance to travel to Moscow, or is this mostly just through correspondence or phone or computer?

RICHARD: We never traveled to Moscow. They either visited us, or it was by telephone or by e-mail.

HOST: Okay. So you arrive and have a couple of weeks to kind of break in, and I am certain that the couple that is going is home, they are in the middle of some projects that you are picking up now.

RICHARD: Yes.

HOST: Let's talk a little about what exactly do you do while you are there and who is kind of coordinating this. Is it government agencies in Turkey? Is it relief agencies there? Who are you working with to do these things?

JOANNE: We were meeting with, we would work with organizations that were already established there in Turkey, and usually they were organizations for handicapped, disabled, and so a lot of the projects that we would do were for disabled people or handicapped. Like wheelchairs or crutches and canes and we did a lot of computers for schools to help people for training to get jobs. We did shoes and clothes.

HOST: So, wells and water. I am hearing water just about everybody we talk to at some point is.

RICHARD: The only water project I am aware of that was done in Turkey was by a couple who, the couple we replaced did, and it was done in the eastern province of Turkey, but other than that, that is the only water project that I am aware of that we did. There wasn't that many, I guess, needs determined in the cities where we were because they were quite modern, and water and transportation was readily available, tap water and those types of things.

HOST: Interesting.

HOST: You are listening to Faith in Action on the Mormon Channel. Today we are visiting with Brother and Sister Loosli who recently returned from a humanitarian mission in Turkey. I forgot to mention the weather. Everybody is always interested. Is it hot and steamy or what are the conditions like.

RICHARD: Well, the latitude is the same, almost the same as Utah or Northern Utah. Of course we are at sea level there. We didn't see a lot of snow. It snowed a little bit while we were there. It does snow in some of the higher elevations, of course, and that is where they get their water from.

HOST: That surprises me.

RICHARD: It got cold in the winter time. Cold enough that we had to wear our coats to stop the cold, and got very hot in the late summer.

JOANNE: It was mostly rain instead of snow in the winter, but it was humid.

RICHARD: Yes.

JOANNE: Very humid.

HOST: Out of all the things, you know you talked about shoes, you talked about computers, and you mentioned help for the handicapped with wheelchairs. Out of all of these things that you were doing, does one kind of take your heart, kind of capture your, this is the one I really like doing the most?

JOANNE: Well, I think the wheelchairs were probably the most rewarding.

HOST: I am sure it is very difficult to see and very rewarding to see the people that receive them.

RICHARD: Yes, in fact, before the couple we replaced left, we went to a wheelchair presentation ceremony. When we get a container of wheelchairs in, the plan, or the process is that we then invite up to 25 recipients that will be getting these wheelchairs to come to a location organized by the organization that we are working with to provide those wheelchairs.

HOST: And they are the ones who are determining who gets them, not you?

RICHARD: Exactly.

HOST: Not you, okay.

RICHARD: We go there and they invited government officials, media to attend, so it is really quite a ceremony. The whole idea being that here is what we are doing, and we are working with LDS Charities to get this done, so it kind of gets us out in front of the people. We really stood on the shoulders of those who preceded us. Our reputation for donations that we would bring what we promised, whereas other organizations who had made promises to these same organizations fail to follow through with what they had promised. So we were readily sought out through our interpreters to visit potential projects, and wheelchairs is one of those that was just so heartwarming. Many of these people have been homebound for several years. It provides a means now for them to get out of their homes. Many of these organizations also have training seminars for these people to teach them skills, ways to seek out employment.

HOST: Interesting. Do you know where the wheelchairs were made? Were they made in county, or do you know where they came from. Now, I ask you this because one of the countries I spoke to recently, they were made in that country to provide jobs. So were these made in Turkey or were they made in another area?

RICHARD: They were actually from China, manufactured in China.

HOST: Okay, and specifically for one person or just for all of them. Were there specific need wheelchairs if somebody needed to lie down or had another need.

RICHARD: The only wheelchairs that we got, they came in various widths depending on how large the person would be that would be using the wheelchair. They did not order them. I mean they did go around and... the wheelchair containers we ordered came in quantities of 250.

HOST: Wow.

RICHARD: They wouldn't go down and measure everyone that had a potential to receive it. They came in, I think the smallest was 12 inch and I don't remember how big.

JOANNE: I think 24 inch.

RICHARD: Twenty four inch, something like. So it would accommodate a whole range of mass, body size.

JOANNE: And they would order so many of each size.

RICHARD: Exactly.

JOANNE: The organization would tell us how many of each size they wanted, which added up to 250.

HOST: Was there an unlimited number available to you, or did you have a quota? You can only do so many a year, or how did that work?

RICHARD: We were asked the year before, so the couple we replaced said "Okay, we can use this many chairs next year?" When we were there I said "How many can you use next year?" This would have been for the year 2008. So we told them how many we could probably use, and then they would assign us a quota because they are shipping these all over the world, and the money only goes so far, but we were very blessed, in that we got all the wheelchairs we needed or wanted I guess. We could always use many, many, many more of them.

JOANNE: And they were free to the recipients. They didn't pay anything. The organization would have to pay some of the port fees, but we would pay, the church would pay all of the freight fees.

HOST: So the import duty would be paid for locally.

RICHARD: Exactly.

HOST: You mentioned computers. This is amazing. Let's talk a little bit. Let me go back. Let's talk about the country and about the people. It sounds like it is a big beautiful city with good infrastructure, so there is electricity, running water, and so computers are a natural fit then. Are you looking mostly for young people, or was it just anybody. How did you determine who was going to get a computer and get trained on this?

JOANNE: Well, once again we worked through the organizations on that, but some of the computers we ordered were for schools. We would work through, like, elementary schools. I don't remember that we ever worked through middle or high schools. It was always an elementary school or some type of an organization that was training handicapped people or disabled.

RICHARD: There was a school for the deaf that included

JOANNE: Adults.

RICHARD: I would say elementary grades up through high school, but there were not many in the school, so the computers we donated to them were, and they were always, well not always, mostly laptops with a few desktop computers. In this case it laptops so they could be moved from room to room so they could all utilize the technology.

HOST: You mentioned shoes. The same thing, you get a request from an organization that you need shoes. The church provides those as well.

JOANNE: They do. We ordered winter boots and shoes. It was a government organization for this group that we ordered it through or for.

RICHARD: They were produced locally. We had a local manufacturer who produced those.

JOANNE: Everything we bought or contributed was through, was produced locally, so we were also helping the country that way, except for the wheelchairs. Everything else we would go through local vendors.

RICHARD: The manufacturer would always contribute additional pairs.

JOANNE: So they were very generous, because they recognized what they were receiving for their community, which, and they wanted to help the community too.

HOST: So the deal is, we will buy X number if you will donate X number?

RICHARD: No, that was never part of the agreement.

HOST: They just did it.

JOANNE: It was a volunteer thing for them.

HOST: That is wonderful.

RICHARD: They could see what we were doing and wanted to help. Now the other other, we are talking a lot about what we did as a couple, but there were other couples there as well. We are talking about coats, the same thing. Ordered them locally. The manufacturer threw in some extra coats. The couple in Ankara, I won't say built, but I guess refurbished rooms in an existing school to accommodate a library. A couple that was serving in Izmir. Turkey has ceased growing tobacco in the country, so this left a lot of famers without any means of income, as it were. As a way to respond to that, the couple who were serving in Izmir started buying fruit trees to be planted as orchards, and they did a number of projects with pomegranate and apple and cherry trees. Their legacy down there will be, and I mean they take cuttings from these trees and plant additional. It is an amazing project.

JOANNE: Completely sustainable.

HOST: To go back to the cigarettes from the tobacco for a moment. Because of healthcare costs in country, or because of the faith of the people, or why would we stop growing tobacco?

JOANNE: Well, we were told that Turkey wanted to become part of the European Union and the word we heard, we did not get it officially, but the word that we heard was that if they wanted to be part of the European Union, they could not grow tobacco.

HOST: Oh, okay.

JOANNE: But Turkey is a smoking country. Everyone was smoking there. I am not sure what that did to their economy.

HOST: If it became a big black market situation for them?

RICHARD: Yeh, well

JOANNE: You could buy the cigarettes, I am sure.

RICHARD: Yes, I suppose that is so, but we saw trucks that would deliver, specifically, tobacco products. So there was an open purchase for the stores for that.

HOST: You are listening to Faith in Action on The Mormon Channel. Today we are visiting with Brother and Sister Loosli, who recently returned from a humanitarian mission in Turkey.

The people, we talked about, you mentioned just kind of a glancing blow about finding a place to worship. So there are some members then in Turkey. There are some branches established in Turkey.

RICHARD: There are four branches in Turkey. There is one in Istanbul, one in Ankara, one in Izmir and one in Adana. Adana is on the southern, southeastern coast of the Mediterranean and is a military installation no longer owned by the United States. They turned it back over to the Turkish government, but there are U.S. government employees, military people, a few who help maintain that base down there, and they are all Americans.

JOANNE: But there are no Turkish people that attend that branch. It is strictly American.

HOST: Strictly American? So in Istanbul was there a branch meeting every week?

RICHARD: Yes, all the branches held meetings every week. Over there, though, we only met on a two-hour block. Anyway, so we did not have the full three hours.

HOST: What would a typical sacrament meeting be like? How many people would be attending in Istanbul?

RICHARD: Istanbul, when we left, we were approaching 30 to 45 people in attendance. A lot of those were Americans that were working in the city. Ankara was a very small branch, maybe a dozen at the most might attend on any given time. Izmir much the same. We would all get visitors from time to time that were traveling through that were members of the Church and would look up the branch and attend. That was always exciting.

HOST: That would be exciting. The language, a problem? You just go in and sit down at the branch and just kind of let them do whatever they are going to do or not have the faintest idea what they are doing, or did you have an interpreter that would go to the meetings with you and kind of help that way?

JOANNE: We did have an interpreter with us. In fact, our branch president spoke English very well, and he did a lot of the interpreting, but his father, who was not a member, for the largest part of our mission was our interpreter for our meetings, not only for our humanitarian projects, for our branch meetings as well. Excellent job. He knew several languages. He passed away while we were serving our mission, and his son, who was our branch president at the time picked up that slack and became our interpreter.

HOST: Interesting. The interpreter, a paid employee of the Church? How does that work? That is a question I haven't had answered yet, and it just dawned on me.

JOANNE: We would actually pay them by the hour. We would not pay them for their services on Sunday with the Church interpretation, but for our humanitarian efforts, we would keep track of the hours they would spend and try and estimate how many hours they would spend on the phone when they were not with us trying to set up some of these meetings. We would basically pay them by the hour.

RICHARD: But they were not employees of the Church. They worked for

JOANNE: For us.

RICHARD: The missionaries, exactly.

HOST: Oh, okay. Very interesting. So you did not worry about taxes. You did not worry about it, you just handed over the money and whatever they did with it was up to them.

JOANNE: We paid them out of our budget, our humanitarian budget.

HOST: Would you go back.

RICHARD: I would.

JOANNE: Sure.

BOTH: Yeah we would, you bet.

HOST: Tell me something about something that just really touched you. I know this is very difficult because I can tell your emotions are very close today, but something that really you will never forget that perhaps there is somebody out there today that is teetering on a humanitarian mission or a senior couple.

JOANNE: Well, I can tell you about one. We were donating canes to an organization.

RICHARD: More like crutches.

JOANNE: Well they were crutches. They were crutches that go on the wrist. Anyway, there was one lady there and she had a stick in her hand, looked like a broomstick. It had a rubber stopper on the bottom of it, but she had this stick in her hand, and she had a horrible callus in the palm of her hand from holding on to that stick to get around. We handed her the crutch, and she handed me her stick, and in Turkish she said "I won't need this now, I have this crutch." She hugged me. She kissed me. She was so grateful for that simple little crutch.

HOST: Just something that simple in her life.

JOANNE: It was so touching.

HOST: Brother Loosli.

RICHARD: We were fortunate to be able to participate in a neonatal resuscitation program while we were there that had been set up by the couple who we replaced that came to fruition in June of 2008. The Church does this all over the world. I cannot remember how many doctors and their wives do this. Half a dozen comes to mind, but don't quote me on that. Our couple who came to Turkey was Dr. George and Marsha Bennett, and we had this in Ankara. Turkey had, had this program before, so they decided this time they would invite representatives from five other countries surrounding Turkey to come to this conference seminar in Ankara and be trained in this neonatal resuscitation procedure. It was unbelievable. There were five countries that came, five doctors from each of these countries came and received this training. It appears pretty simple, but it rescues and saves so many lives of newborn infants that otherwise would have been lost, strictly because they fail to breathe correctly upon birth. It was just a

phenomenal thing. Then these doctors go back to their countries and train other doctors through the country. So it really expands beyond there, and it really opens up countries where the Church has not been able to go in before. Now these countries who attended or others requesting this program be brought to them. The Church provides them with these lifelike infant dummies to practice on and the equipment to do it.

JOANNE: Mannequins.

RICHARD: It is just remarkable what is accomplished by that.

HOST: You know we have, in the last few weeks, have been interviewing a lot of returned humanitarian missionaries, and I am hearing just story after story of how wonderful this is. What a great opportunity is for everyone. Everyone comes back and says oh I want to go again. In fact, someone that was here yesterday, this was their third.

JOANNE: Good for them.

HOST: They had returned from their third mission and twice in the same place, which I thought was interesting.

Did your children visit you? Did you have any family that you were able to show around Istanbul?

JOANNE: We did. His brother and his wife were taking a cruise that stopped in Istanbul for one day, and so we were able to meet them at the dock. We took them around Istanbul, and our children came at a later time. We had our son and his wife and a daughter came to visit us for about 5 or 6 days, which wasn't very long, because you cannot see Istanbul in five or six days.

HOST: It is that large of a city? There is so much to see just in the city itself?

JOANNE: Yes, oh yes.

RICHARD: The time they got there, we were also having a wheelchair presentation ceremony, as well as winter boots presentation for the same branch.

JOANNE: Organization.

RICHARD: That required we take a ferry to another part of Turkey across the Marmara Sea, so they got to participate in that and see how it was done.

HOST: That would be interesting, very interesting. We appreciate you coming in today. It has been nice speaking to you. Anything that I have missed that you would like to touch on?

RICHARD: Well a thought comes to me why you want to go back and do this is because it is so rewarding, not only to the people you are helping but you

see the love of Christ being personified, I guess, for lack of another term in helping these people, and they are so grateful. I don't know that they ever understood that we represented a Christian organization, and it didn't matter to us or to them, but just to see and feel and be shown to us the gratitude for what we did for them was just so rewarding and such a builder of testimony and faith.

HOST: The blessings are many in service, and you have blessed so many, and we are blessing so many around the world. It is difficult to even comprehend for me how many people the Church is blessing at the moment.

JOANNE: It was a life changing experience for the two of us. A testimony builder.

RICHARD: And we discussed that several times. We said "this is what we are doing in Turkey, now you put that all over the world." It is just amazing what the Church is doing all over the world to address these needs.

HOST: Did you ever feel, you know there is only six of you in this huge country. Did you ever wonder, what am I doing here? Did you ever feel any kind of frustration or fear that you were alone or how did you feel about that?

JOANNE: We did have a lot of isolation feelings, just because we had, because these other missionaries were an hour flight away from us, but we spent a lot of time on our knees, and that helped us to feel that we were not alone.

HOST: Here you are surrounded in Istanbul, Turkey, and you are from Orem, Utah. Did you ever stop and think, "What are we doing here? How is the Lord, what does he think, you know, to send us here?"

RICHARD: Yes, more than once we reflected on that. It was just always a comfort to know that we had been called. We did not specify on our application where we wanted to serve. We threw that open to the Lord. Put us where you need us or want us, and we were amazed, as we said at the beginning, how shocked we were to open and find out that we were going to Turkey, but once we were there and worked through the initial shock and trepidation, and feelings of inadequacy, it was just a – it was fun to do that.

JOANNE: And we had to keep reminding ourselves that the Lord sent us here for a reason, and it is our responsibility to find what that reason is.

HOST: Let's stay in tuned to why we are here.

BOTH: Yes

RICHARD: And we were never, we never felt threatened all the time we were there. In fact, quite the opposite. After we were some months there, then we felt free about going out. We got to know the city, at least the area where we were serving or lived, and we would go out around and walk to places,

mostly walking, or to the Grand Bazaar places, and people were always very helpful. There is always someone around who could speak some English that we could talk to. Even if we could make through hand signs or pointing or the name of something, always very helpful and on more than one occasion walked us to the exact place we were looking for, even though they might have been going the opposite direction. Always very kind and very courteous, always willing to help.

HOST: Wonderful people in Turkey.

RICHARD: Wonderful people.

JOANNE: They were.

HOST: You have been listening to Faith in Action in the Mormon Channel today. We are pleased to have visited with Brother and Sister Loosli, who recently returned from a humanitarian mission in Turkey. Thank you so much for coming by. We appreciate it.

RICHARD: This has been our pleasure.

JOANNE: Thank you.

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