

## Waiting In the Light

"Be patterns, be examples in every country, place, or nation that you visit, so that your bearing and life might communicate with all people. Then you'll happily walk across the earth to evoke that of God in everybody. So that you will be seen as a blessing in their eyes and you will receive a blessing from that of God within them." George Fox

These words head the web log of Tom Fox, a Quaker from Baltimore Yearly Meeting who is one of a 4-member Christian Peacemaker Team that was abducted this week in Iraq. As Tom and his colleagues wait in captivity, may we take their example into our hearts, uphold their witness, consider how we might be led to act, and hold both captives and captors in the Light.

Tom Fox wrote this statement in October of 2004 as part of the regular updating and statement recording that the Christian Peacemaking Team asks for those volunteering.

If an attacker inspires anger or fear in my heart, it means that I have not purged myself of violence. To realize nonviolence means to feel within you its strength--soul force--to know God. A person who has known God will be incapable of harboring anger or fear within him, no matter how overpowering the cause for that anger or fear may be.

When I allow myself to become angry, I disconnect from God and connect with the evil force that empowers fighting. When I allow myself to become fearful, I disconnect from God and connect with the evil force that encourages flight.

The French theologian Rene Girard has a very powerful vision of Satan that speaks to me: "Satan sustains himself as a parasite on what God creates by imitating God in a manner that is jealous, grotesque, perverse and as contrary as possible to the loving and obedient imitation of Jesus"

If I am not to fight or flee in the face of armed aggression, be it the overt aggression of the army or the subversive aggression of the terrorist,

Then what am I to do? "Stand firm against evil" (Matthew 5:39, translated by Walter Wink) seems to be the guidance of Jesus and Gandhi in order to stay connected with God. Here in Iraq I struggle with that second form of aggression. I have visual references and written models of cpters standing firm against the overt aggression of an army, be it regular or paramilitary. But how do you stand firm against a car-bomber or a kidnapper? Clearly the soldier disconnected from God needs to have me fight. Just as clearly the terrorist disconnected from God needs to have me flee. Both are willing to kill me using different means to achieve the same end--that end being to increase the parasitic power of Satan within God's good creation.

It seems easier somehow to confront anger within my heart than it is to confront fear. But if Jesus and Gandhi are right then I am not to give in to either. I am to stand firm against the kidnapper as I am to stand firm against the soldier. Does that mean I walk into a raging battle to confront the soldiers? Does that mean I walk the streets of Baghdad with a sign saying "American for the Taking?" No to both counts. But if Jesus and Gandhi are right, then I am asked to risk my life, and if I lose it to be as forgiving as they were when murdered by the forces of Satan.

Standing firm is a struggle, but I'm willing to keep working at it.

On April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Tom Fox wrote:

The ability to feel the pain of another human being is central to any kind of peace making work. But this compassion is fraught with peril. A person can experience a feeling of being

overwhelmed. Or a feeling of rage and desire for revenge. Or a desire to move away from the pain. Or a sense of numbness that can deaden the ability to feel anything at all.

How do I stay with the pain and suffering and not be overwhelmed? How do I resist the welling up of rage towards the perpetrators of violence? How do I keep from disconnecting from or becoming numb to the pain?

After eight months with CPT, I am no clearer than I when I began. In fact I have to struggle harder and harder each day against my desire to move away or become numb. Simply staying with the pain of others doesn't seem to create any healing or transformation. Yet there seems to be no other first step into the realm of compassion than to not step away.

"Becoming intimate with the queasy feeling of being in the middle of nowhere makes our hearts more tender. When we are brave enough to stay in the nowhere place then compassion arises spontaneously" (The Places that Scare You by Pema Chodron, pg. 120).

Being in the middle of nowhere really does create a very queasy feeling and yet so many spiritual teachers say it is the only authentic place to be. Not staking out any ground for myself creates the possibility of standing with anyone. The middle of nowhere is the one place where compassion can be discovered. The constant challenge is recognizing that my true country of origin is the middle of nowhere.

The entries in Tom's blogs show a person faithfully struggling to be present to the condition of those he is with, to witness to their sufferings; a person who is trying to see clearly in a very complex situation. Can we stand with Tom and his colleagues in feeling the pain & distress of the Iraqi people? Can we feel also the fear of those who mistakenly believe they have no choice but violence? Can we be in that space where, by our example, we speak to their condition?

A statement from Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) reads:

At the center of our Quaker faith and practice is the Friends' Peace Testimony, which grew out of our religious experience that all life is sacred, having been given the Light Within by God, and that each of us is called to answer to that of God in everyone. One outward expression of our inward experience is exercising a personal concern to engage conflict with a respect for life and without threat or harm to our opponent. We seek to transform conflict through truth and love and without violence. Many Quakers feel so strongly about this that they will risk their lives to stand in loving witness to rebuke the violent actions of others and to rely only on the force of truth and the power of love.

We know the work of the Christian Peacemaker Teams in Iraq, particularly in helping the Iraqi detainees at U.S. run prisons and their families. Our FCNL staff who have worked in Iraq remind us that Christian Peacemaker Teams were among the first to expose the truth about and speak out against the abuses of the U.S. government against detainees at Abu Graib and other U.S. prisons.

Here at FCNL, we recognize that many have been kidnapped and abducted in Iraq. We pray for the release of all people illegally detained in Iraq. We also urge the release of the unknown number of people detained without due process by the U.S. military or other agencies and held without providing access even to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

War is Not the Answer. There are no military or violent solutions to the conflict in Iraq. More troops, more guns, and more killing will not bring peace or justice to this region. We will continue to work in the United States for an end to the U.S. occupation and withdrawal of U.S. forces and bases.

Chuck Fager & John Stephens have set up a website advocating the release of Tom and his team at <http://www.freethecaptivesnow.org>. Chuck ended a recent email about Tom Fox with the following: "I last heard from Tom in an email in September, as he was preparing to return to Iraq. It was short, and I will include here only the quotation with which he ended it. It is from Hildegard of Bingen, but it could just as well be from Tom himself, and expresses his sweet spirit:

"Holy Spirit, giving life to all beings, moving all creatures, root of all things, washing them clean, wiping out their mistakes, healing their wounds, you are our true life, luminous, wonderful, awakening the heart from its ancient sleep."

Worship & Action for Peace Working Group,

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