

Worship and Action for Peace Letter, 12/19/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

Robert Holmes, an attender of Rochester Monthly Meeting, visited the small village of al-Jazeera in Iraq with a Christian Peacemaker Team delegation on December 1. Bob is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Rochester and Rajiv Gandhi Chair in Peace and Disarmament at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India. From his report (full text at www.cpt.org/archives/2003/dec03/0021.html):

[O]n November 22, at 5 pm, Ibrahim, his brother Sabah, and Mohammed, a guest, arrived at [Ibrahim's] house to find it surrounded by U.S. soldiers. The soldiers stopped them, handcuffed them and sat them on the ground. Suspecting that there were armed resisters in the house the soldiers entered from two different sides. There was no electricity and in the dark one group mistook the other for the enemy and opened fire. The U.S. soldiers killed four of their own. The distraught soldiers came out of the house and shot the three handcuffed Iraqi men dead and then ordered the house destroyed by helicopter and tank fire.

The story was told and retold by relatives holding Mohammed's fifteen day-old son and two-year-old daughter. Ibrahim's nine-year-old son stood silent in our midst. Lunch was prepared and served in the home of one of the villagers. This Iraqi hospitality was warmly extended to foreigners whose country's soldiers had done such wrong. But they asked, "What kind of liberation is this?"

Alfred Delp, a Jesuit priest, was condemned as a traitor for his opposition to Hitler. From prison shortly before he was hanged in 1945, he reflected on the message of Advent (full text at www.bruderhof.org under "Advent Caravan"). He wrote that God shocks and shakes our world so that the scales may fall from our eyes and we may be awakened to the Inner Light in our hearts and be transformed:

There is perhaps nothing we modern people need more than to be genuinely shaken up. Where life is firm we need to sense its firmness; and where it is unstable and uncertain and has no basis, no foundation, we need to know this too and endure it.

We may ask why God has sent us into this time, why he has sent this whirlwind over the earth, why he keeps us in this chaos where all appears hopeless and dark and why there seems to be no end to this in sight. The answer to this question is perhaps that we were living on earth in an utterly false and counterfeit security. And now God strikes the earth till it resounds, now he shakes and shatters; not to pound us with fear, but to

teach us one thing - the spirit's innermost moving and being moved.

Here is the message of Advent: faced with him who is the Last, the world will begin to shake. Only when we do not cling to false securities will our eyes be able to see this Last One and get to the bottom of things. . . .

If we want to transform life again, if Advent is truly to come again - the Advent of home and of hearts, the Advent of the people and the nations, a coming of the Lord in all this - then the great Advent question for us is whether we come out of these convulsions with this determination: yes, arise! It is time to awaken from sleep. It is time for a waking up to begin somewhere. . . .

The Advent message comes out of an encounter of man with the absolute, the final, the gospel. It is thus the message that shakes - so that in the end the world will be shaken. . . .

Then the great question to us is whether we are still capable of being truly shocked or whether it is to remain so that we see thousands of things and know that they should not be and must not be, and that we get hardened to them. How many things have we become used to in the course of the years, of the weeks and months, so that we stand unshocked, unstirred, inwardly unmoved.

Advent is a time when we ought to be shaken and brought to a realization of ourselves. The necessary condition for the fulfillment of Advent is the renunciation of the presumptuous attitudes and alluring dreams in which and by means of which we always build ourselves imaginary worlds. . . .

This shocked awakening is definitely part of experiencing Advent. But at the same time there is much more that belongs to it. Advent is blessed with God's promises, which constitute the hidden happiness of this time. These promises kindle the inner light in our hearts. Being shattered, being awakened - only with these is life made capable of Advent. In the bitterness of awakening, in the helplessness of 'coming to,' in the wretchedness of realizing our limitations, the golden threads that pass between heaven and earth in these times reach us. These golden threads give the world a taste of the abundance it can have.

The first thing we must do if we want to be alive is to believe in the golden seed of God that the angels have scattered and still offer to open hearts. The second thing is to walk through these gray days oneself as an announcing messenger. So many need their courage strengthened, so many are in despair and in need of consolation, there is so much harshness that needs a gentle hand and an illuminating word, so much loss and pain in search of inner meaning. God's messengers know of the

blessing that the Lord has cast like seed into these hours of history. Understanding this world in the light of Advent means to endure in faith, waiting for the fertility of the silent earth, the abundance of the coming harvest. Not because we put our trust in the earth but because we have heard God's message and have met one of God's announcing angels ourselves. . . .

Let us then live in today's Advent, for it is the time of promise. To eyes that do not see, it still seems that the final dice are being cast down in these valleys, on these battlefields, in those camps and prisons and bomb shelters. Those who are awake sense the working of the other powers and can await the coming of their hour.

Peaceable greetings,

Linda Chidsey, Vicki Cooley, Fred Dettmer, Lu Harper, editors
Worship and Action for Peace Letters

*The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the
shadow of death
a light has dawned.*

* * *

*Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and peace
there will be no end.*

Isaiah 9:2-7 (NIV).