

Worship and Action for Peace
March 24, 2006

“When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion,
we were like men who dreamed.
Our mouths were filled with laughter,
our tongues with songs of joy.
Then it was said among the nations,
‘The Lord has done great things for them.’
The Lord has done great things for us,
and we are filled with joy.

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He who goes out weeping,
carrying seed to sow,
will return with songs of joy,
carrying sheaves with him.”
(Psalm 126 (NIV))

Dear Friends,

Yesterday the remaining three members of the Christian Peacemaker Teams in Iraq taken captive in November—Harmeet Singh Sooden, Jim Loney, and Norman Kember—were freed. They are headed home (or already have arrived home) to Britain and Canada.

Doug Pritchard and Carol Rose, the co-heads of CPT, have issued a statement announcing the captives’ release, which is included at the foot of this Letter (and may be found at the CPT Web site: <http://www.cpt.org/iraq/response/06-23-03statement.htm>). Friends may also appreciate a reflection on the release of the CPTers by Rose Marie Berger, an associate editor of Sojourners (<http://www.sojournal.net/index.cfm?action=sojomail.display&issue=060323>).

In the CPT statement, Doug and Carol capture the bittersweet sense of joy at their colleagues return, mixed with continued grief over the death of the fourth CPT member, Tom Fox, and the continuing agonies of all those caught in the on-going mayhem in Iraq:

“Our hearts are filled with joy today as we heard that Harmeet Singh Sooden, Jim Loney and Norman Kember have been safely released in Baghdad. Christian Peacemaker Teams rejoices with their families and friends at the expectation of their return to their loved ones and community. Together we have endured uncertainty, hope, fear, grief and now joy during the four months since they were abducted in Baghdad.

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“We remember with tears Tom Fox, whose body was found in Baghdad on March 9, 2006, after three months of captivity with his fellow peacemakers. We had longed for the day when all four men would be released together. Our gladness today is made bittersweet by the fact that Tom is not alive to join in the celebration. However, we are confident that his spirit is very much present in each reunion.

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“With Tom's death, we felt the grief of losing a beloved friend. Today, we rejoice in the release of our friends Harmeet, Jim and Norman. We continue to pray for a swift and joyful homecoming for the many Iraqis and internationals who long to be reunited with their families. We renew our commitment to work for an end to the war and the occupation of Iraq as a way to continue the witness of Tom Fox. We trust in God's compassionate love to show us the way.”

In a reflection written in 2004 (<http://www.cpt.org/archives/2005/nov05/0037.html>), Jim Loney wrote about his father Patrick's fears for Jim's safety and the corresponding fears of an Iraqi father, Ismael, for his son being held prisoner in Abu Graib. Jim then related his response to a recent telephone conversation with his father:

“When the call was done, I closed my eyes and saw my father, his arms reaching helplessly across an ocean and pleading for the return of his son. I saw Ismael and Patrick, searching blindly for their sons, united - if in no other way - by their vulnerability. First grief, and then strength poured out of my heart into my arms. I had work to do.”

We can share in the relief and joy Patrick must now be feeling at the safe return of his son, while we continue to grieve and pray for all the parents whose vulnerability over the fates of their sons and daughters continues.

At the time of his travel to Iraq to participate in the Christian Peacemakers Team, Norman Kember identified the call to prophetic witness that informed his decision: “I've done a lot of writing and talking about peacemaking. I've demonstrated ... but I feel that's what I'd call cheap peacemaking.” (Taken from an article in The Guardian on the release of the CPT members: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,,1738610,00.html>.)

We can join in CPT's call for remaining faithful to “the spirit of prophetic nonviolence”, particularly when the urge to vengeance is most strong:

“Today, in the face of this joyful news, our faith compels us to love our enemies even when they have committed acts which caused great hardship to our friends and sorrow to their families. In the spirit of the prophetic nonviolence that motivated Jim, Norman, Harmeet and Tom to go to Iraq, we refuse to yield to a spirit of vengeance. We give thanks for the

compassionate God who granted our friends courage and who sustained their spirits over the past months. We pray for strength and courage for ourselves so that, together, we can continue the nonviolent struggle for justice and peace.”

In the Fellowship of Peace,

Linda Chidsey & Fred Dettmer for the
Worship & Action for Peace Working Group

CPT rejoices in the release of our peacemakers

by Doug Pritchard and Carol Rose

Our hearts are filled with joy today as we heard that Harmeet Singh Sooden, Jim Loney and Norman Kember have been safely released in Baghdad. Christian Peacemaker Teams rejoices with their families and friends at the expectation of their return to their loved ones and community. Together we have endured uncertainty, hope, fear, grief and now joy during the four months since they were abducted in Baghdad.

We rejoice in the return of Harmeet Sooden. He has been willing to put his life on the line to promote justice in Iraq and Palestine as a young man newly committed to active peacemaking.

We rejoice in the return of Jim Loney. He has cared for the marginalized and oppressed since childhood, and his gentle, passionate spirit has been an inspiration to people near and far.

We rejoice in the return of Norman Kember. He is a faithful man, an elder and mentor to many in his 50 years of peacemaking, a man prepared to pay the cost.

We remember with tears Tom Fox, whose body was found in Baghdad on March 9, 2006, after three months of captivity with his fellow peacemakers. We had longed for the day when all four men would be released together. Our gladness today is made bittersweet by the fact that Tom is not alive to join in the celebration. However, we are confident that his spirit is very much present in each reunion.

Harmeet, Jim and Norman and Tom were in Iraq to learn of the struggles facing the people in that country. They went, motivated by a passion for justice and peace to live out a nonviolent alternative in a nation wracked by armed conflict. They knew that their only protection was in the power of the love of God and of their Iraqi and international co-workers. We believe that the illegal occupation of Iraq by Multinational Forces is the root cause of the insecurity which led to this kidnapping and so much pain and suffering in Iraq. The occupation must end.

Today, in the face of this joyful news, our faith compels us to love our enemies even

when they have committed acts which caused great hardship to our friends and sorrow to their families. In the spirit of the prophetic nonviolence that motivated Jim, Norman, Harmeet and Tom to go to Iraq, we refuse to yield to a spirit of vengeance. We give thanks for the compassionate God who granted our friends courage and who sustained their spirits over the past months. We pray for strength and courage for ourselves so that, together, we can continue the nonviolent struggle for justice and peace.

Throughout these difficult months, we have been heartened by messages of concern for our four colleagues from all over the world. We have been especially moved by the gracious outpouring of support from Muslim brothers and sisters in the Middle East, Europe, and North America. That support continues to come to us day after day. We pray that Christians throughout the world will, in the same spirit, call for justice and for respect for the human rights of the thousands of Iraqis who are being detained illegally by the U.S. and British forces occupying Iraq.

During these past months, we have tasted of the pain that has been the daily bread of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. Why have our loved ones been taken? Where are they being held? Under what conditions? How are they? Will they be released? When?

With Tom's death, we felt the grief of losing a beloved friend. Today, we rejoice in the release of our friends Harmeet, Jim and Norman. We continue to pray for a swift and joyful homecoming for the many Iraqis and internationals who long to be reunited with their families. We renew our commitment to work for an end to the war and the occupation of Iraq as a way to continue the witness of Tom Fox. We trust in God's compassionate love to show us the way.

Living through the many emotions of this day, we remain committed to the words of Jim Loney, who wrote:

“With God's abiding kindness, we will love even our enemies.

With the love of Christ, we will resist all evil.

With God's unending faithfulness, we will work to build the beloved community.”

Addenda

23 March 2006, 9 p.m. ET

We have been so overwhelmed and overjoyed to have Jim, Harmeet and Norman freed, that we have not adequately thanked the people involved with freeing them, nor remembered those still in captivity. So we offer these paragraphs as the first of several addenda:

We are grateful to the soldiers who risked their lives to free Jim, Norman and Harmeet. As peacemakers who hold firm to our commitment to nonviolence, we are also deeply grateful that they fired no shots to free our colleagues. We are thankful to all the people who gave of themselves sacrificially to free Jim, Norman, Harmeet and Tom over the last four months, and those supporters who prayed and wept for our brothers in captivity, for

their loved ones and for us, their co-workers.

We will continue to lift Jill Carroll up in our prayers for her safe return. In addition, we will continue to advocate for the human rights of Iraqi detainees and assert their right to due process in a just legal system.