

Worship and Action Update, 4/4/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

How do we see heroes in our midst? Can we hear the testimony of prophetic voices? Do we perceive the Light in acts of witnesses? Where do we find role models?

Times of war exacerbate a public yearning for heroes and heroism. As Friends discern the leadings of heroes and the visionary in our meetings and communities and families, we may recall the words of Jesus reported in Luke (9:48):

“Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all - he is the greatest.”

Heroism reverberates in intentional choices to take risks for faith. This past week, a young man in California waiting to be shipped to Iraq with his Marines troop grappled with his conscience and found he could no longer serve in the military. (See “Marine Who Said No To Killing On His Conscience,” by Duncan Campbell, *The Guardian*, April 1, 2003, www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,3604,926884,00.html , also available on the Web site of Every Church a Peace Center at www.ecapc.org/newspage_detail.asp?control=598 .) His story has prompted recollections of Friends who experienced similar revelations of faith after entering the military. At the FWCC Peace Conference, a moment was taken during a plenary session to recognize those who had registered their conscientious objection to war during the past half century and those who had gone to prison for their consciences. Can we also recognize those whose consciences lead them to accept military service in times of great crisis?

Friends in New York Yearly Meeting and throughout the United States continue to grapple with paying taxes that feed a war machine. A recent article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (“For War Tax Resisters, Big Moments Converge,” by Chris Gray, April 1, 2003, available online at www.philly.com/mld/philly/news/local/5528284.htm), reminds us of the ongoing efforts and struggles of people like Priscilla Adams, who mounted a legal challenge and continues to withhold her tax money from military uses, and her employer, Haddonfield Quarterly Meeting in Pennsylvania, which resists Internal Revenue Service attempts to garnishee her wages; or Peter Goldberger, a Philadelphia lawyer who has handled cases for war tax resisters, including Rosa Packard’s case in New York (see NYYM Amicus Brief on the NYYM Web site at www.nyyym.org/qr/nyympa/amicus-rp.html); or Representative John Lewis, who annually introduces the Peace Tax Fund bill into Congress; or Mary Loehr, coordinator of the National War Tax Coordinating Committee in Ithaca, who notes an increase in inquiries about war tax witness since the commencement of the war on Iraq.

Young Friends in New York Yearly Meeting and throughout the United States also continue to grapple with issues of military registration. We may remember the adoption at Representative Meeting in December 2002 of a Minute on Registration for Selective Service forwarded from Purchase Meeting and Purchase Quarter that reiterates our

commitment to those caught between fidelity to their faith and conscience and the demands of the state.

Heroism also echoes in nonreflective actions led by the spirit. Friends every day attend to those in distress without asking, "what does this demand of me?" Heroes feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, sit with the housebound, heal the sick, visit prisoners, guide children, mediate disputes, and on and on and on.

We may hearken to models of daily heroism in the peace potluck of Quakers and Mennonites planned for this weekend at the Rochester meetinghouse; or the talk about peace action Ken Maher will be giving at Alfred Meeting this Sunday; or the study series on nonviolent civil disobedience being offered by Purchase Quarterly Meeting. We may remember the workshops on draft counseling and civil disobedience that have been sprouting throughout New York Yearly Meeting. We may recall too the invitation into their meetinghouse extended by Friends at Poplar Ridge to a group dedicated to aiding Iraqi children.

Carolyn Baker Cooley, who grew up in NYYM and now attends Olympia Friends Meeting in the state of Washington, sends word of an effort to foster public dialogue during this time of war:

"Every Tuesday and Thursday, a group of us here in Olympia sponsors an event we call 'Tea and Topic'. From 5 to 6 P.M., we set up an outdoor café at a busy intersection downtown that also happens to be right next to the harbor, with a nice view of the Olympic Mountains beyond the water. We serve free tea and treats, and each day there is a question posed, the day's 'topic,' a conversation-starter (although people are not required to only discuss the question) which is printed on cards that sit on each table, as well as on a giant sign that faces the street so people passing by in cars can read it. We have a sandwich board that says 'Tea and Topic' and 'Everyone invited,' and tablecloths, jars of flowers and umbrellas to make the whole scene more inviting. This idea came out of our sense of isolation, and a sense that war shuts down public dialogue. We created this space to foster public dialogue, with a clear understanding that people with all points of view would be welcome (although we do have some guidelines about listening and talking respectfully). We decided that this event was NOT to be advertised or thought of as an anti-war event, but we are clear that our motivations are to create something – public conversation - that is the opposite of war. We hope that our consistent presence and some outreach will increase participation. And we have found light in talking with each other and in the challenges that have emerged from conversing with folks from a nearby 'peace camp.'"

Linda Chidsey reports on recent meetings with legislators by a delegation from the New York State Community of Churches Collegium:

“Members of the Collegium traveled to Washington, DC from Monday, March 31st, through Wednesday, April 2nd, to meet with legislators and voice concern for a number of Community of Churches’ initiatives, including the war in Iraq, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families reauthorization, medicare, medicaid, the New York State fiscal crisis, and the President Bush’s economic stimulus package. Briefings were held Monday and Tuesday mornings before visits were made to the offices of Senators Hillary Clinton and Charles Schumer and Representatives Peter King, Major Owens, Elliot Engel, James Walsh, Maurice Hinchey, Louise Slaughter and John McHugh. Briefings on war issues were provided by Jim Wallis, *Sojourners* magazine; Corrine Whitlach, Churches for Middle East Peace; Tom Andrews, Win without War; and Bridget Moix, Friends Committee on National Legislation

“The majority of those with whom we met expressed feelings of anxiety, frustration, and grave concern for the rhetoric and ideology of the administration, the dismantling and erosion of so many programs and treaties and policies created by the national and international communities working together over many years. Walking about the city with Peter during unscheduled time brought home the changes from earlier trips to Washington: the sight of barricades and armed police has become almost commonplace; the scanning of bags and person, expected. I felt a sense of sadness and loss, a desire to somehow recapture on film an earlier time in our nation’s capital.”

In times of war and all times, God’s heroes are everywhere present when we stare past the haze and listen through the din. Especially when the media and government seek to exalt the warrior, we can cherish the heroism of the prison visitor, the teacher, the parent, the vigiler, the activist, the prisoner of conscience and the civil disobedient, the healer and the caretaker, the speaker and the listener, the sharer, the seeker.

Peaceable Greetings,

Linda Chidsey, Vicki Cooley, Fred Dettmer
NYYM Worship & Action working group

*Pray to whomever you kneel down to:
Jesus nailed to his wooden or marble or plastic cross,
his suffering face bent to kiss you,
Buddha still under the Bo tree in scorching heat,
Adonai, Allah, raise your arms to Mary
that she may lay her palm on our brows,
to Shekinhah, Queen of Heaven and Earth,
to Inanna in her stripped descent.*

Hawk or Wolf, or the Great Whale, Record Keeper

*of time before, time now, time ahead, pray. Bow down
to terriers and shepherds and siamese cats.
Fields of artichokes and elegant strawberries.*

*Pray to the bus driver who takes you to work,
pray on the bus, pray for everyone riding that bus
and for everyone riding buses all over the world.
If you haven't been on a bus in a long time,
climb the few steps, drop some silver, and pray.*

*Waiting in line for the movies, for the ATM,
for your latté and croissant, offer your plea.
Make your eating and drinking a supplication.
Make your slicing of carrots a holy act,
each translucent layer of the onion, a deeper prayer.*

*Make the brushing of your hair
a prayer, every strand its own voice,
singing in the choir on your head.
As you wash your face, the water slipping
through your fingers, a prayer: Water,
softest thing on earth, gentleness
that wears away rock.*

*Making love, of course, is already a prayer.
Skin and open mouths worshipping that skin,
the fragile case we are poured into,
each caress a season of peace.*

*If you're hungry, pray. If you're tired.
Pray to Gandhi and Dorothy Day.
Shakespeare. Sappho. Sojourner Truth.
Pray to the angels and the ghost of your grandfather.*

*When you walk to your car, to the mailbox,
to the video store, let each step
be a prayer that we all keep our legs,
that we do not blow off anyone else's legs.
Or crush their skulls.
And if you are riding on a bicycle
or a skateboard, in a wheel chair, each revolution
of the wheels a prayer that as the earth revolves
we will do less harm, less harm, less harm.*

*And as you work, typing with a new manicure,
a tiny palm tree painted on one pearlescent nail
or delivering soda or drawing good blood*

*into rubber-capped vials, writing on a blackboard
with yellow chalk, twirling pizzas, pray for peace.*

*With each breath in, take in the faith of those
who have believed when belief seemed foolish,
who persevered. With each breath out, cherish.*

*Pull weeds for peace, turn over in your sleep for peace,
feed the birds for peace, each shiny seed
that spills onto the earth, another second of peace.
Wash your dishes, call your mother, drink wine.*

*Shovel leaves or snow or trash from your sidewalk.
Make a path. Fold a photo of a dead child
around your VISA card. Gnaw your crust
of prayer, scoop your prayer water from the gutter.
Mumble along like a crazy person, stumbling
your prayer through the streets.*

"Pray for Peace" by Ellen Bass

(More information about Ellen Bass and her newest book of poetry, *Mules of Love*, is available at <http://www.ellenbass.com> .)