

Listening for Hope



A season of prayer for Iraq

The situation in Iraq appears to be at a tipping point. Your prayers and actions should be included in the precarious balance.

Turn loose our imaginations!

When you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, the citizens of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I handed them over to you. I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove out before you the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of vineyards and olive yards that you did not plant. —Joshua 24: 11-13

No one who reads the Old Testament can deny that there have been times when the people of God used violence. And no one who reads the New Testament can deny that Jesus took a different path. Even in the Old Testament we see God pushing people away from trust in weapons for security. I am your protector, Yahweh reminded repeatedly. Do not place your trust in horses and chariots.—2 Kings 6-7

Scripture shows that God works for the healing of creation in ways humans find difficult to understand. Hornets as deliverers? Loving the enemy as a way to disarm? Dying at the hands of religious and political authorities brings release from bondage? These seem futile responses to those who trust in the burnished sword.

The first challenge in making room for God to work for healing in the way God intends is this: can we relax our own human imagination? When we insist that we know what is “realistic” in human affairs and what is not, we place ourselves higher than God. “We know what is possible,” we say in effect. By relying on the methods of security comfortable to human understanding, we shut out God from working in God’s own mysterious ways.

In the presence of dangerous people we fear for our security. How might we open space for God to bring us security in God’s own peculiar ways, in ways that end once and for all the cycles of bitterness and hatred perpetuated by human violence?

We can read and re-read Scriptures that point us to surprising initiatives of love. We can tell and re-tell the stories of Gandhi and King, of Manz, of Quaker interaction with America’s

native people, of Mandela and his white jailers, of victims and offenders restored in our own communities today.

We can turn loose our imaginations and talents on ways to remove the sources of frustration and misunderstanding that motivate those who endanger us. We can continue to experiment, as we have done for generations through our mission, development and peace work, with ways to build trust with those who may consider us enemies. We can model and refine and teach these strategies to a skeptical world.

We can encourage our national leaders to relax their own narrow understandings of how to create security. “When the only tool that you have is a hammer, everything that you see is a nail.” If we chose to invest generously in things other than hammers, we would see possibilities we cannot now imagine. Our nation would at last begin to make space for God to work in the ways that God knows will make us truly safe. We would become repairers of the breach we now perpetuate through faith in our own muscularity.



Prayer

You alone protect us, God.
We find security only in you and your ways.
Suspend our disbelief.
Cancel our sense of what is possible and practical.
Turn loose our imaginations.
Teach us how to experiment with peacemaking.
Open our eyes so we see the miracles you offer us.
Open our ears so we hear your call.
Open our hearts to the mystery of your ways.
Amen.



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