

# 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.*

### Cost of the Cross

*Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. So therefore none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up everything. — Luke 14:26, 33*

The Iraqi people have taught me about the cost of discipleship in the presence of struggle. On February 23, 2004, our Christian Peacemaker Team delegation stood near the banks of the Tigris River in the small farming community of Abu Siffa. In the backdrop of a school-teacher's demolished home, we stood with Mohammed. Mohammed is one of two men remaining in this village; all other 83 men were detained by the U.S. military on December 16 and sent to the Abu Ghraib prison. The village is now made up of women, children and two men.

Our time in the village of Abu Siffa was part of CPT's ongoing work for justice for the 18,000 Iraqi detainees and the families that miss them. Many things are a part of this work (a Lenten fast, an Adopt-a-Detainee letter writing campaign, meetings with the military and more) but at this moment, a CPT worker was talking with Mohammed about the vigil that CPT was doing during the Lenten season. The vigil and fast was in accord with Isaiah 58:6, "Is this not the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?" CPT engaged in a 40-day vigil in Baghdad and villages like Abu Siffa as a way of standing in solidarity with the detainees and their families.

With only two men remaining in Abu Siffa, long-term CPT member Jim Looney addressed one of the men, asking if the vigil could visit the village again. Mohammed looked at Jim and expressed something CPT had not known: "Why do they come in the night after you leave?" He explained that following every CPT visit, the U.S. military awakened the remaining women and children in the night.

Jim empathized with the terror of being awakened in the night and told Mohammed he understood if they wanted CPT to stop coming. "Can you get a permit from the military to have the vigil?" Mohammed asked; "maybe then there will be less trouble." While this is something CPT usually would not do, they were willing to approach the military in effort to ensure the safety of the village. However, knowing the current situation in Iraq, they could not assure Mohammed that a permit would be possible.

Jim continued to ask (maybe 10 times) if they wanted us to come with or without a permit. The question posed tremendous risk for the village; they only have two men left. In this patriarchal society, there is no one to tend their fields, no one to teach in their schools and no men left to father their children. The risk of one of the two men remaining being taken or detained by the military like all of the others, without visitation rights or information of their disappearance, is a stark reality. It is a risk in their minds every moment of every day.

Finally, in a clear and pointed question, Jim said, "Mohammed, what if we cannot get a permit to come to your village, what if the military will not grant us a permit to come? Should we still come to Abu Siffa and share in the vigil?"

Mohammed looked at us in silence; the seconds stretched. He looked at those remaining in the village. He began to speak in strong and slow words: "Come and I will stand with you."

I learned something from Mohammed, a strong, powerful and gentle Iraqi man that day about discipleship, the cost of discipleship. He has far more courage than I can muster, but he has taught my feeble self to risk, to walk in the struggle for justice even when fear is overwhelming and the future is unknown. Mohammed's words remind me of the words of Jesus in Luke calling his church to carry the cross and give up all for the sake of the gospel. How is Jesus calling his church to respond in discipleship like Mohammed? I suppose Jesus is asking us to walk with courage and compassion that overcome fear and carry the cross of hope in a world of injustice.

### Action

- Pray without ceasing for peace in Iraq.
- Read more about the village of Abu Siffa and other detainee stories on the CPT website. [www.cpt.org](http://www.cpt.org)
- Join the Adopt-A-Detainee Letter Writing Campaign. (See CPT website.)



### Prayer

Lord God, we humbly acknowledge:  
We have built our lives on the shifting sands of desire for safety and security.  
Teach us to risk.  
Teach us to struggle for justice when we are afraid.  
Teach us to walk with courage and compassion  
So we can carry your hope to a world overwhelmed with fear.  
Amen.



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