

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.

“Please, you are a message of peace.”

We were in the midst of a meeting with the headmistress of the Rahmaniyya Girls’ School in Baghdad. Several young teachers had gathered in the room to listen to the conversation with our group of foreigners. I was struck by the beauty of one teacher in particular. Her dark eyes shone with life.

Later on, two of us spoke privately to her. She told us her name was Majida, that she had been teaching English for eleven years, and that she was “still” single. I wondered if perhaps she had delayed marriage because of the difficult times. As we prepared to leave, he whispered to us, “Please...you are a message of peace.”

It was February, 2002. Our group was visiting Iraq to learn about the impact of a dozen years of sanctions. President Bush had just made his famous comment about Iraq as part of an “axis of evil.” We did not know what that would mean, but there was a sense of foreboding in the air.

Ever since that visit more than two years ago, I have often thought about Majida. I have wondered if she is still alive, safe and well. I have wondered if her dark eyes still shine. Most of all, I have pondered her whispered words: “Please...you are a message of peace.” The words are profound, for they invite us to *be* peace—not only to say or write or sing or carry a placard with a message of peace—even though all of these things are important. But they invite us, by the very way we live our lives, to *be* peace.

The scripture texts for this week help us to understand what it means to *be* peace.

- **Turn from evil.** Psalms 34 and 37 urge us to turn away from anger and from wrath. They caution us not to “fret over those who...carry out evil devices” (Ps 37:8). When we are consumed by the evil deeds of others, we open ourselves to doing evil—to becoming the very thing we deplore. Rather, we are called to turn from evil, to do good, to seek peace and pursue it (Ps 3:14).
- **Remember God’s promises.** Isaiah 49 and 60 speak of God’s promises. In time, God’s salvation will reach to the ends of the earth (49:6), and the suffering ones will no longer hunger nor thirst. Violence, devastation and destruction will be things of the past (60:18); nations will be governed by justice and righteousness. These promises sustain our hope.

- **Be prepared for suffering.** Jesus sent his disciples out as sheep into the midst of wolves, telling them to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matt 10:16). He encouraged them to be prepared for suffering but not to fear it nor resist it. We too are to be prepared, trusting that the Spirit will be with us.
- **Keep your minds on Christ.** In his letter to the Philippians (4:9), Paul encourages his readers to “keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me and the God of peace will be with you.” Paul’s life was a testament to the power of Christ to transform. As we keep our minds on Christ, we open ourselves to ongoing transformation and we are assured that God’s peace will surround us.



Prayer

God of life and of love, of justice and peace,
We offer you our worship and praise.
May your name be honored.
May your will be done on this earth.
We confess to you our sins.
Our hatred of others’ evil has allowed evil into our own lives.
Turn our hearts from anger and judgment.
Fill us with your gentle and loving spirit.
Give us wisdom, courage and strength to be your witnesses.
Keep before us your promised reign of justice.
Keep our hearts and minds fixed on Jesus.
Open us to your transforming power.
Help us to live and to be a message of peace.
Amen.



May 2004. Words: Esther Epp-Tiessen, MCC Canada peace program coordinator.
Design: Cynthia Friesen, Peace and Justice Support Network Volunteer. Peace advocate office, 330-683-6844; SusanML@MennoniteUSA.org. For additional resources on Iraq, see www.MennoniteUSA.org (Peace resources).