

Out of the Strong Came Something Sweet

A reflection by Rev. Jackie Clement

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On Friday night, after the presentation by Combatants for Peace, I was talking to Yaniv, the former Israeli soldier who spoke that night. I was asking him about the work of Combatants for Peace, and he said this was his first speaking tour outside Israel. He was only able to come at the last minute because he had been laid off from his job. When I expressed regret that he had lost his job he said, “No, no, from something strong comes something sweet.”

That line is a reference to the biblical story of Samson who kills a strong lion and later finds a swarm of bees and their sweet honey in the carcass. Yaniv was only talking about the fact of losing his job as an opportunity to be on this trip, but it seemed to me an apt expression of the work everyone involved in that evening was doing. Out of the losses of September 11, Andrea came to host the tour. Out of his experience in Israeli jails Bassam came to work for understanding and dialogue. Out of his years as part of the occupying Israeli army in Lebanon and Gaza Yaniv came to work for a peaceful solution. Out of the strong came something sweet. Not just a turn from strength of power to the sweetness of peace, but, as we heard them say, a turn to the understanding that peace is more powerful than violence, and that to create peace requires more strength than to perpetuate violence.

And the metaphor holds for us as well. Out of the strong we, too, have the opportunity to make something sweet. The programs that were presented Thursday and Friday evenings were powerful. They were informative and moving. They were even inspirational, but I don't think I would choose the word sweet. There were enjoyable moments of being with friends and meeting new people; there was the satisfaction of learning something and feeling like we might be moving, however infinitesimally, forward, but I wouldn't say “sweet.” This was the strong.

It was hard for me to hear the condemnation of the United States for complicity in keeping the conflict going for reasons of greed and self-interest. It was hard for me to hear the harsh things Noam Chomsky said about President Obama, a candidate I supported and a man I have a great deal of faith in. It was hard for me to hear the stories of Bassam and Yaniv's lives and know they are the reality for a great deal of the world, in the Middle East and far beyond it.

At the end of Thursday evening, I said that every last ounce of hope had been sucked out me. I, Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm and Pollyanna rolled into one, she who dwells perpetually on the sunny side of the street. Not a shred of hope left. But on the drive home I had time to absorb a lot of what was said. With that further reflection was the return of hope because I saw that there is something I can do about it. If it were just a question of convincing Palestinians and Israelis to forgive or convincing Palestinian and Israeli governments to change policies, I didn't really have much of a voice there. But in

asking the United States government to change its policies that perpetuate the conflict I do have a voice. I can write to representatives and senators and presidents. Nothing I haven't done before. I can call the Boston Globe and the New York Times and ask them why they don't present more balanced coverage on the issues. Nothing I haven't done before. I can, and I do, vote.

But in order to do all those things, I think it needs more than the knowledge that I can do them. It also requires the knowledge that I must do them.

Another of the fallout of the two nights' presentations besides a temporary loss of hope was some serious denial. I really wanted this *not* to be my problem. But that just won't do because, first of all, it's everyone's problem. As Martin Luther King wrote "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." But it's easy to get overwhelmed by all the injustice in all the many places in the world and it's easy for the feeling of being overwhelmed to strangle action. Sometimes we need a more immediate connection to the pain in order to seek the solution.

So the next level of connection is that, as an American, the policies of my elected government are a huge part of the problem, and that is partly my responsibility. The final level of connection became clear only after I returned home Friday night.

When I was talking to Yaniv I was telling him about when I worked in Israel in the 1980s. It was only after I got home that it dawned on me why I was working in Israel. I was there because I was selling cutting edge computer graphics equipment to the Israeli army. And that is part of the problem. As Yaniv said of his time in the Israeli army, it didn't seem like a problem at the time. He thought he was just defending his country and I thought I was just doing my insignificant little engineering job. I was in my twenties and welcomed the opportunity to travel. I worked with hundreds of customers over four continents, and this one was no more special than the chance to swim in the Sea of Galilee or climb Masada. But the perspective of 20 years and a lot more information makes it horrifying. And, frankly, embarrassing.

The realization was one of those cosmic dope slap moments and a life lesson for never saying the words, "well, that's not my fight." I'm just a humble country parson. What have I ever done to cause world unrest? Well, I didn't mean to, and I wasn't even aware of doing it at the time, but nevertheless there it is.

Maybe we can all ask ourselves not only what have I done, but what can I do. Perhaps out of the strong we can make something sweet.

Namaste.

Por lo tanto, puede ser.