

"My eyes are dry. My faith is old. My heart is hard. My prayers are cold. But I know how, I ought to be, alive to you and dead to me.

"But what can be done, for an old heart like mine. Soften it up, with oil and wine. The oil is you. Your Spirit of love. Please wash me anew, in the wine of your blood."

Have you ever felt that way? Eyes dry, faith old, heart hard, prayers cold type of feeling? To be honest, I have.

There are many reasons; I have felt that way. Sometimes, it has happened because I didn't take care of my self spiritually or physically. Sometimes it has happened because I have just been overwhelmed with life and everything that is going on around me. Have you ever felt that eyes dry, faith old, heart hard, prayers cold type of feeling?

Many of us are looking out at the world we live in. We see the problem of terrorism. We see the challenges of the present Wars in the Middle East and it's easy to become overwhelmed. It is tempting to desire, quick, easy answers to these challenges. But quick, easy answers don't seem to be coming anytime soon.

There are voices all around us that on the one hand try and justify the wars in the Middle East and call for us to "stay the course." They warn that if we don't stay the course we will lose. They say if anyone criticizes why we are there, that that questioning makes the questioner unpatriotic.

There are other voices all around us that decry the very fact that we are there. They remind us that the reasons used for going into war have proven to not be true. They point to how things are getting worse and Iraq seems to be sliding into a civil war. They tell us that we need to leave now.

You and I hear these different voices and find ourselves wondering, what can we do? How can we learn the truth? What does God call us to?

It is easy, it is tempting to hear the conflicting voices and find ourselves overwhelmed. If you have felt overwhelmed in the midst of the violence and evil, you are not alone. I have too. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed in trying to decide what to do, you are not alone. I have too.

What can we do? **First of all, we can take time to learn about what is going on.** There are many ways we can do this. We can listen to reports from a variety of different areas: TV, Radio, and Newspapers. Now is not the time to only listen to one news source.

We can read and become informed. One of the most remarkable books I have read in a long time is Jim Wallis' book, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets it Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It.*

We can even go on-line and read what the United Methodist Church believes about War and perspectives of this conflict. By starting off at www.umc.org and following its links.

Second, we need to remember that whatever our views on this conflict are, there should be no question that those who are soldiers fighting on our behalf deserve our support. I hope we never repeat one of the greatest mistakes of the Vietnam era, by criticizing the soldiers. They deserve our support and prayers, so do their families.

What can we do in the face of violence and overwhelming evil? We can become informed and we can support our troops.

But that leads me back to the question of **what does God call us to do?** In our scripture for today from I Samuel, the prophet Samuel, who has given great leadership to Israel, has grown old. He has turned leadership over to his two sons, who frankly are failing God and failing the people.

A group of elders come to Samuel out of frustration and fear to say, "This isn't working. Your sons are dropping the ball. Give us a

King to rule over us, so we can be safe and secure and be like all the rest of the people." They were looking for quick easy answers. They were acting out of their fear. They wanted to be safe and secure. And in doing so, they turned away from having God as their King.

This scripture challenges me in our current situation to not act out of fear, looking for quick answers. God calls us to look to God and make our decisions for the present and the future out of trust in God. The author of Psalms puts it well. He says, "Some may trust in horses. Some may trust in Chariots. But I will trust in the name of our God, in the God of life." *Today is a time to ask ourselves, are we placing more trust in our military might or are we going to trust God?"*

If we are going to choose to trust the God of life, then the question becomes for me, how can we work at building the peace? Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." You and I are called to work for peace in this world. And while the military may be a part of the option toward that end, it is time that those of us, who seek to be conscientious followers of Jesus Christ, begin also working for the peace of the Middle East and in the rest of the world.

There are many ways we can begin doing this. But I want to tell you the story of a young man by the name of Shane Claiborne. He was a popular kid in his high school. He was the prom king and part of the "in" crowd. He was planning on making it big, making lots of money and living out the American dream. But something happened along the way to that path.

He went to a Christian college and had an incredible experience. He met people who were committed to living their faith and he was challenged to live his. He found himself beginning to wonder why so many people who were following Jesus acted nothing like the man from Galilee. How could disciples become so unlike the one they claimed to model their life after?

Seeking to truly imitate Christ prompted Shane to get involved with the poor and homeless in Philadelphia. He even was a

part of starting a community of faith in the inner city. After the September 11th attacks, he witnessed our country become more patriotic, initially. Within two years, he witnessed our country invade Afghanistan and set our sights on Iraq. He felt our country was blindly rushing into another invasion.

In the six months leading up to the war in Iraq, he prayed and fasted. He sought the direction of the church. He met with a small group of people from the church. In the end, he knew he was being called to Iraq to speak of God's peace. He joined the Iraqi Peace Team, which consisted of clergy, veterans, doctors, journalists, and students. In the war zone, he hoped to offer the peaceful message of Jesus. He even wrote war journals which can be read online (http://www.thesimpleway.org/macro/shane_iraq.html).

He went over to show others the love of Jesus and was amazed to find radical followers of Jesus already there. He went over to help transform the situation and was transformed himself.

Shane has inspired many people since his return to the US. He still works as a peacemaker for God. His actions have prompted many people in churches across this land to gather regularly to pray for and work for peace and reconciliation. Shane did what he could as he sought to follow Jesus.

I believe God calls you and me to work for peace. While we may certainly be overwhelmed by the evil and the violence, we may even have that eyes dry, faith old, heart hard, prayers cold type of feeling. But I believe now is the time to turn to God. Now is the time to place our hope, our trust in the one who gives life, as we work for the peace of this world.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." May you and soon be called children of God, because we work for peace.

Amen