

Called to True Pacifism

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Perhaps it is easy to call yourself a pacifist when you are not directly involved in the government or educated in history and wars. Growing up in a Mennonite home, I considered myself a pacifist because that's what my parents believed. Morally, it made sense to me. War is bad, right? The first time my simple acceptance of this belief was challenged was in high school, when my history studies focused on specific wars and their underlying causes. We discussed difficult topics like World War II and Adolph Hitler's rise to power. How could Hitler be stopped without the defense of our army?

I wondered where pacifism fit into this picture, and suddenly, peace didn't seem so simple. We can always sit back, do nothing, and call ourselves pacifists, but that doesn't accomplish anything. How does saying the words "I'm a pacifist" stop the conflict over elections in Kenya? If we truly believe in peace and call ourselves pacifists, then we need to step behind those beliefs and be politically active.

Who set this precedent for peace? In the past, Anabaptists gave up their lives. Many were martyred and persecuted about beliefs that they found important, such as believer's baptism and being able to read the Bible on their own. Today, many Christian groups maintain that passion, pushing for causes they feel convicted about. During my spring break, I had the privilege of experiencing one of these active groups.

I went on a missions trip sponsored by the Young People's Christian Association, an Eastern Mennonite University affiliated club. My destination was Jubilee Partners in Comer, Georgia. This intentional Christian community quietly grows 1/3 of their own food organically and lives simply in many other ways. Yet they are loud about their political activity, doing such rebellious and illegal things as transporting Central Americans to Canada 30 years ago. They also provide a decent burial site for those

executed by the Georgia state government and focus specifically on refugee work.

Jubilee Partners is so committed to pacifism that they purposely live below the poverty line in order to not pay war tax. They remember pacifism's purpose of working against wars and for practical peace, having worked with organizations like MCC and the Peace Corps all around the world and having witnessed for themselves the effects violence has on others.

The challenges they gave to us on our trip were not easy. Jubilee Partners embraced and suggested living simply in ways some of us had never considered before, such as relying on Christian brothers and sisters as you age, instead of investing in a retirement plan, and not purchasing more expensive foods like mushrooms or name-brand cereals. Their challenges seemed extreme at first, but as I continued to think about them, they grew on me.

I realized living simply can be complicated at first. Trusting God above money in our consumer-driven society is a difficult task. It means the figures might not fit together perfectly when you plan ahead, but instead you must trust the Lord to provide. Living simply means sacrificing some luxuries you may desire. Even though I would never pay \$500 for a cell phone, I think Apple's iPhone looks pretty sharp. Putting our desires behind us and our beliefs and God's will ahead of us is not easy. Also, finding a way to live below the poverty line in order to not pay war taxes involves so much sacrifice, because that type of lifestyle is a challenge and probably different from the lifestyle you and your friends live. Yet if these lifestyle choices are important in true pacifism, then the truth is that pacifism is hard. If we're not doing anything hard, are we truly pacifists?

True pacifism is not easy. Jesus' commands, including those of peace, don't easily fit with our government today. The Anabaptists of the past had to sacrifice much in their desires to be conscientious objectors. Gandhi's message reached the world after years of protests and hard work. Gandhi was not just a celebrity. He made sacrifices and dedicated his life to his cause, losing his life, but not losing the cause, in the end.

Are we willing to do that? In the United States today, it may seem like we will never give our lives for peace and our beliefs the way our Anabaptist ancestors did. We do not see opportunities for such sacrifices in our countries. But if we seek out these opportunities, which may include travel to the war-torn areas in Africa and Central and South America, we very well may look those sacrifices- look our own lives- in the face. Are you willing to give your life for peace? Is pacifism more than a word and a belief for you, but a lifestyle? How can you truly believe in pacifism if you don't live it?

Many of us are concerned about these issues. Mennonites are noted for their frugality and simple living. Our More with Less cookbook is a witness to the whole world about small yet relevant ways to get involved. Many people of all ages accept MCC work assignments or voluntary service. I know many college students with the "save the world" dream in their head, people who are active in travel and gaining wisdom. I affirm those of you who work hard for peace, and don't see pacifism as merely a word. But I am not speaking today merely to honor you and hold you up. I'm speaking to the people like myself who simply see pacifism as a word and something that we guess we believe in because it sounds good. Yes, it sounds good to abolish all wars and have peace and harmony! But it's not as easy as saying it and or even believing it. True pacifism is not that simple because true pacifism needs action.

There are those among us who will find the sacrifice worth it to live below the poverty line in order to not contribute to the wars they believe so evil. Those who give up their education, success, and money to spend the rest of their lives living humbly in an intentional Christian community where all work and all jobs are shared. There are also people who follow God's calling to seminary, move far from home and from family, and work jobs they're over-qualified for because that is where God wants them. Not one Christian doing her calling is better than another. But I ask you to think about your pacifism. Could God be calling you to be more active?

There are so many different ways to be a pacifist. To pray, to be more educated about peace, to contribute time or finances to peace-making... Consider if there is a way God is asking you to make a difference.

Remember that pacifism is more than a word and a belief, but a lifestyle. I could probably count on both hands the number of true pacifists I know, and I don't yet consider myself in that number. I'm working towards that goal, yes. But I'm far from it. Most of us are.

Thank you for wrestling with me about pacifism. The answers are not the same for everyone, and the answers won't come easily. Pacifism is not easy. Following Christ is not easy. As you ask yourself what you are doing for the true pacifist cause, and if you truly care about the rest of the world and doing the most you can do to make a difference, being willing to put your words and beliefs into actions, you are on your way to becoming a peacemaker. I hope you will join me on this journey.