

Quaker Sayings6 *Let Us Then See What Love Will Do* Philip Gulley

Read Luke 8:26-39

We've been reflecting on significant Quaker sayings these past few weeks. Proverbs that have lasted hundreds of years, finding an appreciative audience since they were first written. Proverbs endure for several reasons. Sometimes they endure because they confirm a universal truth—*Don't count your chickens before they've hatched*. Who of us hasn't counted on something to happen that never came about? Sometimes a proverb endures because it inspires the best in us—*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*. Sometimes two proverbs endure, though they teach the exact opposite lesson: *He who hesitates is lost*. *Look before you leap*. Some proverbs persist, even though they aren't true. *A barking dog never bites*. Just last summer, I was bit by a barking dog. I wondered at the time how that could have happened since barking dogs never bite. Then it occurred to me dogs can't read, so consequently had no idea he was supposed to bite me quietly.

Today, I would us to think about the Quaker proverb, *Let us see what love can do*. I'm partial to that proverb for the same reason I like the Golden Rule. It inspires us to summon that which is best in us. It calls us to act thoughtfully and graciously, not impulsively and maliciously. You and I like who we are when we follow that proverb.

The saying, *Let us see what love can do*, originated with William Penn, the early Quaker. I don't want to call him the founder of Pennsylvania, since the Native Americans found it first, so let's just refer to him as a writer, which is a noble enough vocation on its own. ☺ In his collected sayings, The Fruits of Solitude, Penn wrote, "We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive, or gain by Love and Information. And yet we could hurt no Man that we believe loves us. Let us then try what Love will do: For if Men did once see we Love them, we should soon find they would not harm us. Force may subdue, but Love gains: And he that forgives first, wins the Laurel."

We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive... Last weekend, I went to visit my parents and my mother asked me if I heard what had happened in Tucson. I hadn't, so turned on their television and watched the news coverage about the shooting at the supermarket that killed or wounded twenty people (6 killed, 14 wounded). I immediately felt great anger and hatred. When I learned one of the persons killed was a nine-year-old child, I grew even more upset and wondered what kind of subhuman monster would commit such evil. Having read many articles and listened to numerous people comment about the shooter, Jared Lee Loughner, I know I'm not alone in feeling that way.

In her column of January 11th, the *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist, Debra Saunders, refused to use Loughner's name. It reveals the depth of our loathing when Debra Saunders will use Hitler's name, but not Loughner's. I imagine that in a world of nearly 7 billion people, not one of us wants to be a friend to Jared Lee Loughner.

When I first saw his picture this week, with his head shaved, and his odd smile, I thought of that story in Luke's gospel about the demoniac from Gadara, the man who was so deranged and inexplicably vicious his fellow citizens believed him to be possessed by demons. They bound him with chains and stood guard over him in the cemetery, where he lived among the tombs. This was the kind of man you hoped never to meet, the kind of man you warned your children about. "If that man comes anywhere near you, you run. You get away as fast as you can."

But Jesus wanted to see what love could do. He went to him and asked him his name. "Legion," the man said. Luke was offering a little political commentary here. *Legion* not only meant a significant number of people, it was also the name of the Roman conquerors who in their own way seemed every bit as demonic as that man. Think of that, Luke was saying this crazed man was every bit as contemptible as the most evil group of people he knew. If this story were set in modern times, the demoniac might have said, "My name is Nazi, or Al Qaeda, or Jared Lee Loughner."

What this man chained in the graveyard probably was, was mentally ill. Something had gone terribly wrong in his brain, corrupting his judgment, distorting his sense of right and wrong. But I don't think he was demon-possessed. I think he was demonized, because that's what we do with people who are mentally ill. It's what we've always done. I tell you something I would never wish upon even my worst enemy. I would never wish their child were mentally ill. There is nothing so terrifying, so wrenching, so hopeless, as seeing someone you love slip into the abyss of mental illness.

How we treat these broken people says as much about us as it does about them. Those villagers were wise to carry that man out to the graveyard and chain him to a tree. In a way, it was a mercy. They could have killed him. They didn't. They would have known his parents. Probably even related to the boy themselves. So they got together and said, "Let's chain him up before he hurts himself or someone else." It's wise of us to put Jared Lee Loughner someplace where he can't hurt anyone else. But let's remember what William Penn said and let us see what love can do. Let what we do to that young man not be about vengeance, let it be about love, seeking that young man's healing, hoping not for his death, but for a restored life, where he is once again the promising young man who just a year ago spent a Saturday volunteering at a community book fair.

I suspect that somewhere in that unremarkable house where Jared Loughner grew up is a box of photographs. Probably tucked away on the shelf in a closet. In that box is a picture of Jared Lee Loughner, neatly dressed, hair combed, ready for his first day of school. He is smiling. His parents are proud and full of hope. They see not, nor know not, the demons of mental illness that will one day haunt their child. They see only the promise. Across the city, at the home of John and Roxanna Green, there is, I have no doubt, a similar picture of their bright and lovely daughter Christina, who was murdered last Saturday.

Neither young person is still alive. The heart of one is stilled and will never beat again. The sanity of the other is gone and might likely never return. Many people will be calling for the life of Jared Lee Loughner. They do not realize it has already been taken.

To see what love can do is to live in the hope that even the most warped and troubled people among us are as precious to God as the most precocious and peaceful. So let us see what love can do. There are times in our nation, and this is such a time, when our only viable option, having seen the terrible consequences of vengeance and evil, is to love as deeply as we are able, to see what love can do. We know all too well what vengeance can do. Christ calls us to discover what love can do.