

A Unified Front

By Megan L. Anderson

We live in occupied territory. The Enemy overruns our world, and we as Christ-followers comprise the minority. Our simple acknowledgment of the Savior is an act of treason and it isn't taken lightly. Look around our congregations. Attendance and participation dwindle. Petty squabbles crop up like weeds. Gossip circulates regularly. These are signs of enemy subterfuge devised to systematically choke us out. Yet, it is not this persecution that should frighten us, but rather the fact that we allow it to distract us from our mission as the body of Christ to rescue captives with the gospel. The question is: Are we willing to contend for our faith?

Despite our reputation as peacekeepers, Quakers hail from a lineage of rebels. Early Friends dissented from the Church of England and rose up against religious, professional and social persecution, resulting in prosperous communities and businesses that thrive to this day. In Jesus' name they pioneered ministries, reformed laws and campaigned for equal treatment of slaves and other oppressed people groups across the globe. Their lives were committed to spiritual battle in the understanding that the expansion of peace requires combat.

Today, that biblical notion of peace requiring sacrifice on our part has deteriorated. It seems as though many modern Friends' idea of peace is a sort of stasis within meetinghouse walls. We cocoon ourselves in regularity and tradition and call it peace but fail to get out and fight to deliver God's true message of peace to the broken world. Have we become so complacent, so afraid? Has our perspective of Christ narrowed to include only images of him with lambs and doves or welcoming children into his presence? Do we ignore passages describing a warrior Jesus declaring, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (*Matthew 10:34 NIV*)? What we believers must recognize is that the call to imitate Christ is a call to arms.

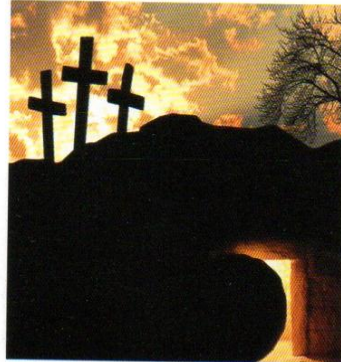
Unfortunately, in our misplaced focus on sustaining equilibrium within our individual congregations, human nature gets the better of us, and we grumble about why others don't think or act more like us as opposed to thinking and acting more like Christ. This only weakens our ranks and makes

enemy attacks all the more destructive. We are masters of reconnaissance — observing and evaluating everything wrong with the world from the safety of church walls — but we often lack the passion to step to the front lines and do anything about it. In the grand scheme of things we tend to care more about ourselves than about fulfilling our mission to rescue the perishing.

Yet, how can we effectively charge into the fray for souls if we lack unification? A right understanding of who Jesus is proves crucial here. It is his character that both unites and mobilizes us. *Ephesians 6:10-20* assures us that as we arm ourselves with the Savior's truth, righteousness, faith, salvation and word, we are readied to march out with the gospel of peace. Joined together in the

spirit of Christ, we will meet opposition and stand firm. We will face cascades of flaming arrows and we will extinguish them. Empowered by relationship with our God, victory is guaranteed if we choose to follow his leading.

Our Quaker heritage stands on a foundation of rebellion. The time to rebel again against enemy tactics of planting complacency, self-centeredness and dissension among believers is now. Christ has already won the war, but lost souls still remain unreached by the gospel of peace. As Jesus described it, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few . . . Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves" (*Luke 10:2-3*). The Commander has given us clear marching orders. Putting on the full armor of God will mean change; it will call enemy attention and invite hardship, but also strengthen community and reap eternal rewards that reach beyond imagination. Each and every congregation has a wealth of resources for initiating powerful and effective ministry, as its members possess diverse spiritual gifts. Will we come together and use these gifts for their intended purpose of professing Christ to the world? He leaves the choice to us. We can ruminate in our sanctuaries or join in the battle for peace. What have we got to lose in delivering the precious message of the gospel when the victory is already ours to claim?



Megan Anderson attends Russiaville Friends Meeting in Russiaville, Indiana. (Western Yearly Meeting)