

**Message – Cincinnati Friends Meeting  
May 2, 2010**

**For Goodness' Sake  
by Donne Hayden**

*“Human beings are naturally violent and warlike ... War is part of human nature because people are evil. It is human nature to be greedy, hateful and selfish.”<sup>1</sup>*

Do you agree with this assessment of humanity? Are we innately calibrated to harm others? Doomed to perpetuate war and other violence?

Looking back over this week, it is very clear to me how I was led to what I am going to say today. In my mind, a truth was revealed to me, like curtains opening one by one. If any of you have stopwatches, I hope you're not turning them on today. I don't to talk too long, but I also want to get this all said. I toyed with rearranging events to make them build to a climax, but realized I want you to hear the message as it came to me: little-by-little, step-by-step; this tidbit of information, that tidbit of information. Here is how I came to say today that violence is a deadly disease, but there is a cure. Contrary to much of what we read, hear and experience, we were created not for evil, but for *goodness'* sake.

It began on Monday when I listened to an interview on NPR on the subject of spanking children and new evidence that the slightest use of physical force can leave permanent scars on one's personality. One woman held that not all spanking was bad; for instance, a spanking given without anger to correct or protect a child, such as to keep him or her from running into the street, surely would not be damaging. I listened to the whole thing; I have never resolved the ambiguity in how I feel about this issue. I resisted spanking my own daughter, but like many of

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Chappell, *Will War Ever End? A Soldier's Vision of Peace for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Weston, Connecticut: Ashoka Books, 2009), pp. 5-6.

you I suspect, I was a product of spanking, and as one man who called in said, “I turned out perfectly okay.” But how do we know, really?

On Thursday, afternoon, I was in Waynesville at Quaker Heights Community Care Center, training as a new Trustee. We watched a video produced by the Friends Council on Aging in which a nursing home resident commented that death was sometimes a “precious friend.” Later, talking with the part-time chaplain, I learned that in the past year, she has attended funerals for 33 Quaker Heights residents, officiating at six of them. (Since I find funerals so difficult myself, I could barely imagine attending 33 of them.) After the training session, I walked to the parking lot with the young and very efficient Director of Quaker Heights, who was on her way to the funeral of an elderly family member. I commented on how present death is all the time at Quaker Heights. “Often it is a friend,” she reminded me, and I said carelessly, “Oh, I don’t fear death; I’m comfortable with death.” And then, inappropriately I added “I’m ‘down with’ death.”<sup>2</sup>

On the way out of town, I stopped at the Waynesville McDonald’s to get a cup of coffee. While I waited in the drive-thru, I received a phone call from a friend. That morning, she said, the 31-year-old daughter of one of my best friends had been found shot to death in her home that morning. Eventually I learned more: The death was “suspicious,” i.e., it did not appear to be suicide, and the local homicide department was investigating. By Friday morning, autopsy results determined that indeed, the young woman was murdered. Privately, my grieving friend suspects it might have something to do with the fact that her daughter, a nurse, had started working for a local women’s clinic where abortions were performed. The clinic has received

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<sup>2</sup>I understand the current slang phrase “I’m down with something” to mean “I get it,” or “It’s okay with me.”

bomb threats and is the site of frequent anti-abortion demonstrations. No one knows yet, of course, who the guilty person is or what the motive was. The young woman was beloved by all who knew her. Among her many sorrows, my friend must live with the possibility that she may never know who killed her daughter or why. As a mother, I feel the weight of my friend's permanent loss; nothing can un-do this deed; *nothing ever* will bring her daughter back. My careless comment to the Quaker Heights director about death came back to me. The death of a 31-year-old is not a death I am "down with." A violent death is not a death I am "down with."

The violence was the most shocking part of all.

On Friday morning about 9:00, I was getting dressed to go to Richmond to be with some of Margaret's other friends to pray for her and her family, when I got a phone call from my daughter telling me to go upstairs and talk with my grandson, Hyland, who was crying. First of all, Hyland was supposed to catch the school bus at 8:30, so I wondered why he was upstairs in their apartment. Second, Hyland, who is twelve, rarely cries. He's a cheerful little soul, generally easy-going and optimistic. I found him sitting on the couch, tears streaking down his cheeks, and asked him to tell me what happened.

The bus was late, he said—over half an hour late. As the group of kids waited for it, a deer came out of the woods alongside the road and trotted toward and then past them. One little girl named Kayla began screaming. She was afraid of the deer, afraid it would run over her. She screamed until the deer veered off into the woods again, and then, for no reason Hyland could imagine, she flew at *him* and began punching him in the face. And I noticed the red marks on each cheek where her fists had hit him.

"Did you say something to her?" I asked.

“No, I was just standing there,” Hyland answered. “She *always* comes after me. Yesterday, she pushed me down,” he said, rolling up his pants leg to show me a scraped knee. Caught by surprise, and finding himself attacked by a little girl, Hyland had no idea how to react. It didn’t occur to him to hit her back. I don’t think my grandson had ever been hit before— certainly not in the face and not in anger and hatred. He was, of course, humiliated. But what I saw mostly in his eyes was hurt bewilderment.

I took him to school and went in with him to tell the school secretary why he was tardy.

“What was the girl’s name?” she asked.

“Kayla,” Hyland responded.

“Do you know her last name or what grade she’s in?” The secretary held several sheets of class lists.

“No. Just Kayla. I think she’s in 4<sup>th</sup> grade.”

At that point, a little boy sitting beside the counter said, “Kayla hits me too.”

“You know Kayla?” I asked.

He nodded. “She’s in my class.”

The secretary asked him Kayla’s last name and found her listed in a second-grade class.

The Principal was out of the office that day, so Hyland wrote up a report of what happened and the secretary said the Principal would read it and probably call him. I don’t know what, if anything, the school can do about Kayla, But for me, the violence in her little body and soul was the most shocking part of this, the rage. And I wondered where such rage comes from. It evidently begins early for some of us.

The incident with Kayla, of course, was minor compared to what happened to my friend's daughter, but it was the violence, the attack out of nowhere that linked the two events for me.

Yesterday, trying to discern a message for this morning, I picked up and read a book I had ordered week before last. It's a thin little book that addresses issues of hatred, violence, and war. It gave me hope and reassurance and was a key link in the chain of revelations for me this week.

First some background. Last January at the Peace Church Brunch, Paul Chappell, a young Army captain who served in Iraq from 2006-2007, was the guest speaker. His topic was *Will War Ever End?* based on his book by the same title. I never heard anyone speak with such gentle authority and brilliant clarity on the subject of war. I was moved and impressed with the young man, and I can't remember why I didn't purchase the book that day, but I finally ordered it and yesterday, I read it.

Chappell's father was half Caucasian, half African-American; his mother was Korean. His father was a career-military man who joined the army when it was still segregated and who fought in both the Korean and Viet Nam wars. He suffered from PTSD throughout Chappell's childhood; at times he was violent and suicidal. Chappell said he has been obsessed from childhood with finding the causes of war, recognizing even as a child that war was what had done this to his father. In high school, he asked a teacher "Where does war come from?" and she responded with the words I began with today: "Human beings are naturally violent and warlike ... War is part of human nature because people are evil. It is human nature to be greedy,

hateful and selfish.”<sup>3</sup> This answer did not satisfy Chappell who determined at that moment “to study war the way a doctor studies an illness.”

As a freshman at West Point in 1998, Chappell read *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* by Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, former West Point psychology professor. The book is required reading in peace studies programs at Berkeley, in Mennonite and Quaker colleges as well as by the U.S. Marine Corps, in courses at West Point, and at the FBI Academy. Chappell quoted Grossman who wrote:

*War is an environment that will psychologically debilitate 98 percent of all who participate in it for any length of time. And the 2 percent who are not driven insane by war appear to have already been insane—aggressive psychopaths—before coming to the battlefield.*<sup>4</sup>

Chappell became convinced by his own experience and Grossman’s research that “. . . human beings have an innate resistance to killing other human beings,” a resistance that military training and propaganda is designed to overcome.

Chappell makes a convincing argument that it is possible to end war. For instance, citing examples from ancient Greece to the present, Chappell concludes “the most powerful motivator that convinces people to stay and fight [i.e., that keeps soldiers from running away] is not a natural propensity for violence or killing, but their capacity for love and compassion.” “The U.S. Army,” he writes, “uses compassion and love to motivate its soldiers to cooperate and survive in the harshest circumstances” teaching them to treat their military unit like family

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Chappell, *Will War Ever End? A Soldier’s Vision of Peace for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Weston, Connecticut: Ashoka Books, 2009), pp. 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Chappell, pp. 6-7

and to fight to protect each of them. Noting that most Medal of Honor winners are recognized not for killing but for sacrificing themselves to help others, Chappell concludes: “The most admired trait in soldiers is not their ability to kill, but their willingness to sacrifice for their friends ...” (12) (This is an old truth: “Greater love hath no one than that he lay down his life for a friend,” Jesus said.) In order to fight and kill and risk death, people have to be convinced they are doing so to protect family and loved ones.

On the question of whether or not human beings are naturally violent, Chappell writes:

*. . . when people with no military training are placed in dangerous situations such as combat, their flight response is much stronger than their fight response, which would urge them to kill. However, even people with no military training find that their flight response is weak in comparison to their instinct to protect their loved ones . . .our instinct to protect our loved ones is the strongest instinct in a human being. It is even more powerful than our instinct for self-preservation (18).*

Particularly compelling to me this week is Chappell’s distinction between fury and rage:

“Fury is a survival instinct that makes us natural protectors, but not natural killers, since our fury is satisfied when hostilities end and our loved ones are safe,” he writes.

*Unlike fury, rage does not seek to stop a fight and end hostilities, but to escalate the violence. Rage is less concerned with protecting the person being harmed and more focused on hurting the person committing the offense . . .(28).*

*“Hatred, like an illness, occurs when something has gone wrong, when we have strayed from our highest potential” (32).*

*“ . . . hatred and violence, like an illness, are not necessary expressions of our humanity but occur when something has gone terribly wrong” (62).*

Something has gone terribly wrong with the person who shot my friend’s daughter, a person filled with rage. Something has already gone terribly wrong for Kayla who, at seven or eight years old, is filled with rage. Both are ill with violence. Fortunately, for that illness, there is a cure. Great healers through the centuries have known the cure; in the Western tradition, Jesus brought us a prescription for curing this deadly disease, a prescription too simple for many: “Love one another as I have loved you” and “Love your enemies.” Unfortunately many who accept Jesus reject his medicine, finding it too hard to swallow. It was heartening to see Jesus’ teaching echoed in Captain Chappell’s book, though in non-religious terms. Here for instance, is his summary of his argument that humans are not naturally violent and war-like:

*. . . it is a fact that war drives people insane, that the greatest problem of every army is how to stop soldiers from running away, that being loving allows us to be brave, that cooperation is the key to our survival, that unconditional love builds an indestructible bond between people, that we have a stronger instinct to posture than to kill, that fury motivates us to protect our loved ones, that hatred is always painful, that unconditional love is inherently joyful, and that unconditional love is stronger than hatred. This is simply who we are and these facts prove that human beings are not naturally violent. War is not inevitable, and we all have the power to help end war and ensure the survival of humanity (37).*

I was comforted, knowing that this man, who has a great deal of experience with violence in its most horrific forms, sees it as an *aberration* and *not* the norm.

Finally, last night I was working on this message, trying to figure out how to put it all together. At one point, I stopped to check my email, and there was an e-newsletter notice about this week's "Speaking of Faith" radio show, an interview with Bishop Desmond Tutu. I skimmed through the newsletter, stopping short at the title of his most recent book: *Made for Goodness and Why this Makes All the Difference*. I promptly went to Amazon.com, searched for the book, clicked on "See Inside This Book," and found the following:

*We are fundamentally good. When you come to think of it, that's who we are at our core. Why else do we get so outraged by wrong? When we hear of any egregious act, we are appalled. Isn't that an incredible assertion about us? Evil and wrong are aberrations. If wrong was the norm, it wouldn't be news. Our newscasts wouldn't lead with the latest acts of murder or mayhem, because they would be ordinary. But murder and mayhem are not the norm. The norm is goodness.*

...

*You and I, too, are fundamentally good. We are tuned to the key of goodness. This is not to deny evil; it is to face evil squarely. And we can face evil squarely because we know that evil will not have the last word.*

*Evil cannot have the last word because we are programmed—no, hard-wired—for goodness. . . . To be hateful and mean is operating against the deepest yearnings that God placed in our hearts. Goodness is not just our impulse. It is our essence.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, *Made for Goodness and Why this Makes All the Difference* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), pp. 5-6.

Later in the book Bishop Tutu cites the passage in Matthew's gospel in which Jesus tells the disciples: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." And it occurred to me that THIS was the message Jesus brought to humanity. This is the prescription to cure the disease of violence. The yoke I wear is love, he said—it is light and easy to carry; watch how I do it. Discover that unselfish love is your natural state, he said, your essence; know that it is more natural for you to love others than to harm them. Remember who you are; return to the deepest yearning of your heart. We must teach the children, and remember ourselves, that we are made for goodness' sake.

I leave you with a meditation from Bishop Tutu's book: he writes: ". . . turn with us into the stillness and listen to God speak with the voice of the heart."

*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,*

*for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

*Match your pace to mine, imitate me.*

*You are free to choose, you can choose to be like me.*

*Wherever you are you can create beauty.*

*Moment by moment you can create joy.*

*Instant by instant you can offer kindness.*

*Now and always you can make me seen.*

*You can be as I created you to be,*

*The visible likeness of the invisible.*

*You will see as I see.*

*And your heart will break  
for all the sadness in the world.  
For all the hunger and pain.  
You will cry every tear with me  
And share every joy with me.  
You will see every sparrow fall.  
You will see each dying blade of grass.  
You will hear every child's cry and every father's despairing sigh.  
The terrified screams and hungry moans will be woven into the  
song of who you are and your heart will be broken and broken again.  
And then you know a heart of flesh and not a heart of stone.  
You will be alive!<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> Tutu, pp.54-55.