



Gale Stutz

I am entering my fourth year as associate pastor at Indianapolis First Friends Meeting and continue to be surprised at how comfortable I am among Friends. Ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 2007, there are things I bring from my tradition that fit very well in the Society of Friends. And there are things I never dreamed I could discard that don't seem nearly as important now as they once did.

I so appreciate the freedom in Quakerism to explore and wrestle with the difficult issues facing the church today. In our high-tech and fast-paced world, Quakers seem strange. Our emphasis on simplicity, peace, integrity, community, and equality seems to be at odds with the values of the world. And, yet, our message is one our world needs to hear.

May we continue to lift our voices and shine our lights.

In the photo above, I enjoy a moment on the beach with girls on a youth group work trip on the Gulf Coast.

BIBLE READING: Psalm 104

I have accompanied lots of young folks on work trips during my years in ministry and, in June 2010, I had the opportunity to travel to the Gulf Coast with our youth group. It's been five years since Hurricane Katrina ripped through that area and even after all these years there is still a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done.

Before we set out on our trip, I asked the kids to keep this thought in their minds: "Where do you see God at work in this place?"

While we were there we cleared chunks of asphalt from the shoreline, helped to install video projector mountings in the classrooms of an elementary and middle school, and assisted in the summer reading program in the local library.

We saw God at work in the people of Mississippi and Louisiana, whose gratitude made us feel that our work, no matter how seemingly insignificant, was important. We saw God at work in a man named Chris, a disaster response supervisor in Mississippi, who loves the Gulf Coast so much that he spends most of his evenings clearing the shoreline of asphalt and other debris carried in by the tide. We saw God at work in the hundreds of volunteers who are still there—rebuilding homes, schools, and businesses destroyed by Katrina.

Friends, God is still hard at work in Mississippi and Louisiana—in the form of children, young people, and adults who realize that we are all connected. May God's work continue and may we heed the call to step up and lend a hand.

SONG: Great Is Thy Faithfulness

PRAYER SUGGESTION: O loving Creator, help us to remember that we are all connected. Give us the strength and courage to answer your call to care for one another, just as you have cared for us.

—Gale Stutz

BIBLE READING: Matthew 10:26-39

My favorite new term is *God-bumps*. My good friend uses it when referring to a situation or event which seems to possess a Divine quality. It's a heavenly version of "goose bumps."

Last spring, I was asked to preside at the graveside memorial service of the brother of my college roommate. Her brother was a 49-year old father of five who died from ALS and I dreaded conducting this service because I'd known and loved him since he was a young boy. I also dreaded it because torrential downpours were in the forecast for that afternoon and I knew it was going to be miserable.

I discovered earlier in the week that my friend's brother had become an avid birdwatcher. So, I decided to bring a large bucket of birdseed to the funeral and ask the folks to scatter the seeds as they left the service. But, how could that possibly work when the rains came?

As I pulled up to the little country cemetery that afternoon, the sky began to clear and the sun came out. Throughout the service, the singing birds seemed to be lifting their voices in honor of this man. And people scattered the seeds throughout the small cemetery as they made their way back to their vehicles. It was a "God-bumps" kind of day and I will never forget it.

Matthew tells us God is aware of every sparrow that falls to the ground and knows the number of hairs on our heads. And that gives me "God-bumps"! What about you?

SONG: His Eye Is on the Sparrow

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Loving God, we are thankful to be loved by a Creator who knows even the number of hairs on our heads. Every life is precious to you, God, and for that we are grateful.

—Gale Stutz

BIBLE READING: 1 John 4:7-8

A wise and “weighty” Friend asked me a question on Easter Sunday morning as I walked into coffee hour following worship. He asked, “So, what do you suppose happened to all those people who died *before* Jesus was crucified and resurrected? Do you think they were ‘grandfathered in’?”

To say I was caught off guard would be an understatement. The tantalizing aromas coming from the Easter brunch distracted me: pastries, fruits, cheeses of all kinds, crackers, punch, and coffee. And I still buzzed with excitement from the Easter Egg Hunt Extravaganza earlier that morning! Given all this, the answer I gave was not my best effort. I believe I said something like, “I sure *hope* so!” and then went on my merry way.

A day or two later, after my head had cleared a bit and I’d come down from the sugar high since pillaging my children’s Easter baskets, I realized how badly I had handled that question. I wanted a “do-over.” If I had a “do-over,” I would say something a bit more thoughtful. I would say, “What a wonderful question! What you’re asking seems to be more about how we understand the nature of God, than about Jesus and his resurrection.” And I’d go on to ask, “What do you think? Do you believe all those people who died before Jesus have been ‘grandfathered in’? What do you believe about God and salvation?”

My friend and I have not had the chance to finish this conversation but it’s still on my “to do” list.

SONG: Our God Is an Awesome God

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Our loving God, continue to reveal to us your loving spirit. Help us to open ourselves to receive your unconditional love.

—Gale Stutz

BIBLE READING: Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

I love this passage from Ecclesiastes. Don't you? We hear it a lot at funerals but it really shouldn't be restricted to times of sadness and mourning alone. It is more than just a message about coping with hardship. It's a message of hope and celebration, too! The writer wants us to know there is a time and a season for everything, a time for both the bad things *and the good things* that happen in all our lives.

Look again at verse four: "...a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance." A time to dance? Who has time for dancing anymore? In our ever-changing, rapid-paced, over-scheduled, under-appreciated, multi-focused lives, who has time to dance? At what cost have we filled our days to such an extent that we don't even have time for dancing? I use "dancing" here as a metaphor for "celebrating". What do we celebrate these days?

In the book, "Love Poems from God," the beloved Persian poet, Hafiz, writes:

"If God invited you to a party and said,
'Everyone in the ballroom tonight will be my special guest.'
How would you treat them when you arrived?
Indeed, indeed!
And I know there is no one in this world
Who is not upon His jeweled dance floor."

My hope and prayer is that we each find time to dance and that we all feel that we're standing upon God's "jeweled dance floor." Dance, my friends. Dance!

SONG: Lord of the Dance

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Loving God, help us to remember there is a time for everything under heaven. And, most especially, help us find time to dance.

—Gale Stutz