

Earlier this month, Leymah Roberta Gbowee was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for her leadership in a nonviolent movement (carried out by thousands of women of faith) which brought an end to a civil war that ravaged the land and people of Liberia for the last fourteen years.

Her story, and that of her partners in peacemaking, is remarkable. It is a much greater story than I can offer here, so I will just say a little, and encourage you to go deeper when you have some time.

After years of waiting for the men (who held all of the political power in Liberian society), and watching them fail time and again to end the violence and heal the division of their people, Leymah realized that ancient boundaries would have to be broken to make their people whole again. She and dozens of other women, representing both the Christian and Muslim faiths, began to organize.

They reached out to other women, leading and encouraging them to stand up and speak out for "the good," as Leymah has put it, and join the work of peacemaking. Soon there were thousands, boldly proclaiming a message of reconciliation and peace while marching in the streets, praying openly in churches and mosques and public squares, and demanding that government and rebel leaders come together and call for an end to their war.

Such actions were dangerous (or at the least, regarded as foolish and futile) for women in a culture such as Liberia's, but their conviction and commitment to peace made a difference in the end.

It is a remarkable story. It is uplifting and hopeful, and a reminder that violence need not be the answer to difficult political situations. But more importantly, for people of faith, the story of Leymah and the thousands who rallied behind her vision and leadership is a reminder of the power of God and God's call.

Leymah recognized that her faith as a Christian child of God called her to hope beyond the sorrow

of Liberia's troubles. It called her to act for the sake of what God was already doing.

Her faith, and the strength it gave her, called Leymah to see that hope is not passively waiting for things to simply run their course and come to an end. Like her, we believe in a God who is constantly and actively seeking healing and wholeness for God's people.

We do not belong to a God who made the world and left it to its own devices, but rather, to a God who is intimately connected. We belong to a God who seeks the lost and wounded...who stands with the oppressed and dispossessed. We belong to a God who wades through the troubles of our world and our lives with love and mercy to bind the broken. We belong to a God who imagines into being a new future of wholeness.

Like the Muslim and Christian women of Liberia, we all are called by God's grace and the faith it pours into our lives to do the same.

As God's hope for this world remains an active thing, so is the hope of God's people. By faith and God's grace, we are called to join the work of God's Spirit in healing the world and imagining together a new future of wholeness. We are called to take risks – to stand up, to step out, and to speak out for "the good."

To actively hope in such a way is not an easy thing. I imagine that Leymah and her fellow peacemakers experienced many difficult and dangerous obstacles along the way, but in so doing, I have no doubt that they also experienced the fullness of their faith and identity as God's people. What a gift!

We may not have a bloody civil war to end for the sake of our people in this nation, but we all know that our context offers plenty of opportunity to actively hope for something better.

In this most wealthy of nations, poverty remains a very real and painful reality for far too many. In

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this land of freedom and equality, systems of oppression, institutional racism, white privilege, and general anti-immigrant sentiments remain powerful forces that stand in the way of being a society that honors and values all people.

We are becoming a nation increasingly at odds with itself as deep political divisions, fear and mistrust are tearing our people apart.

We have plenty to hope for.

In the midst of our troubles, we know by faith where God is – marching in the streets, standing in the unemployment lines, sitting in the hospital rooms, the classrooms, the shelters and food pantries, standing with the voiceless on the margins, and calling us to do the same.

In the midst of our troubles, we are called to risk for the sake of imagining a new future. We are called to join the work of God's Spirit.

Should you answer that call, you may well experience difficult and dangerous obstacles along the way, but be assured that you too will experience the fullness of your faith and identity as a child of God. May we all, one day, experience such a gift together!

Thank you for reading my thoughts this month.  
Until next time, grace and peace to you all!