

## “Making the Connection”

When the National Khalso Day Parade came to Washington D.C. on April 10, 2010, several hundred people gathered to celebrate and reclaim their Sikh identity, unity, religion, and national sovereignty. They gathered on a hill near the Lincoln Memorial to give speeches, to eat favorite Indian cuisine, to renew commitments, and to educate Americans about their cause. They wore head coverings and orange dress. Their roots are in India, but currently they live as a scattered family, persecuted people, and exiled nation. The history of the development of the Sikh in India is very similar to that of the Jewish people and nation.

“The first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak, laid the foundation of a grand catholic and activist religion, which proclaimed the unity of all castes and creeds under one God. He regarded God as the sole fountainhead, the eternal spring of all life and light, glory and grace. He believed that all souls come from Him and are of the same essence. He emphasized universal love and an egalitarian social order as the goals of a progressive and forward looking society. In his life affirming worldview, there is no dualism between the inner life of spirit and the outer life of the temporal world. The Guru stressed the role of service and sacrifice as directive forces in the socio-political life of his followers. He believed that religion should not lose sight of the vital problems of human life. Rather, it should promote social and moral values. Thus he allotted to religion a new dynamic role in human affairs and imparted a new direction to history. The first Guru bequested to the Sikhs the concept of Miri-Piri (temporal and spiritual authority). In setting down his idea of true religion, the Guru stressed inner awakening through Naam (one’s contemplation on God’s name) and outer service of His creation through noble and righteous deeds. The tenth Gobind Singh, inaugurated the order of Khalsa and led the birth of a nation with the political agenda of freedom from the shackles of a) earlier religion, b) earlier deeds, 3) caste bondage, 4) earlier taboos, 5) earlier customs and rituals. The Khalsa (army of God, chosen people, Singh lion) was created in Guru’s own image and is directly aligned with the Ultimate Reality. The Khalsa follows the path of truthful conduct and never surrenders to evil under any circumstances.

The Khalsa never loses his morale in any situation and cultivates a positive spirit. The Khalsa tries to imbibe the Divine qualities of remaining fearless and without animosity . . . even on the battlefield. . . The right to wield a sword in order to defend truth and justice was made into an article of faith by the Guru (from Sikh literature).

The Sikh on the Washington Mall were friendly and welcoming people. When I traced the points of faith in their story, I found common ground in their honoring of the essential principles of love, freedom, equality and unity in God. I could identify with the power of God at work in their social justice activism, courageous spirit, the practice of not returning evil for evil; refraining from hate, and the cultivation of a positive spirit. But they lost me as a supporter of Sikh baptism around three points of disagreement; 1) power and leadership centered in the earthly authority of Guru, 2) no separation of religion and goal of national sovereignty, 3) right to wield a sword to defend the Sikh goals.

In her book, *Making Connections*, Beverly Harrison wrote:

Our knowledge of God is in and through each other. Our knowledge of each other is in and through God. We act together, or we deny our relation and reproduce a violent world where no one experiences holy power (Imaging the Word, p. 209).

When I thought about why I really liked some parts of the Sikh identity and purpose and disagreed with other practices, I came to a simple conclusion. I am a Christian --- born and bred in the American Protestant church tradition. I am steeped in one expression of the Church Universal that builds communities of faith who act together as friends in Jesus and who rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to unite us in Love. I trust in the power of resurrection that I see at work in the Biblical accounts of the formation of the first Jesus communities of Easter faith.

In Acts, Luke tells the church development story about the time when the Christian evangelists entered the city to preach the good news of

the Risen Jesus. On the way, *The God Who Was Still Speaking*, stopped human traffickers from making a profit on a woman Diviner by speaking through the apostle: **“I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.”** The drama then intensified when the slave owners realized that they had lost their source of income. They got really mad and took the apostles to court to stop them. In court they complained: **“These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Roman to adopt or observe.”** The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Like the earthly prophet Jesus who had been persecuted for challenging and upsetting the economic, political, and social system of his time, the apostles suffered the same outrage and backlash.

But the good news for us is that their story did not end there. Luke went on to record that about midnight in jail, right in the middle of their prayer meeting and hymn sing, an earthquake hit the prison and opened the doors wide. When the jailer awoke and thought that the prisoners under his charge had escaped, he drew his sword to take his life. But when the apostle saw it, he shouted in a loud voice: **“Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.”** As a reader of the story, we do not know why the disciples did not escape prison when they could have. All we know is that they did not run. But what we do know is that the jailer was so shocked that they stuck around, that he asked how he might become like them. Keeping it simple, they said: **Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.** After that they told him about Jesus’ life, death, and God’s raising of Jesus from the dead. Then they went to the jailer’s home, washed their wounds, ate together, and the whole family was baptized in Christ Jesus.

From this story we can learn of God through other people; understand better how God works through people of faith; and see that

when we are united in love and in the larger purposes of God---God gives, transforms, and renews life. When we connect the dots of Holy Power in this story we note three things that distinguished the first Jesus communities of faith.

First. Biblical scholar Ron Hansen noted: “*The difference of Christianity is in its refusal to sacrifice anyone, even an ill-regarded slave or a jailer, for gain or expediency* (Christian Century). Christians loved, but did not use people. They refused to harm or kill themselves or anyone else. Like Jesus, they never raised up a military unit to save themselves from the forces of evil. Second. Although their work of healing and social justice challenged and threatened the political, economic, social, religious, and personal spheres of human existence, like Jesus, they neither attempted nor built a nation state. National sovereignty is not goal of Christianity. Third. In the early Biblical church there was no pope. The locus of God’s power and authority did not lie in any earthly leader. The power of God rested in the Risen Christ and those who gathered together and prayed in his name.

In our congregational tradition, Christ Jesus remains as the head of the church. The Good News is that when we gather together to sing God’s praise and to pray in the name of Jesus, the Living Word unites and empowers us for loving service, just as it did in those Christians in the Eastertide days.