

Witness to Reconciliation
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Finding Strength in the Face of Adversity

There is a bit of backstory I need to share with you before I can get to the experience I had and how it would weave into my life and my faith from that day on.

Lazlo Tokes was a Romanian born Hungarian Reformed Church Pastor who was said to be the spark that began the revolution in Romania that overthrew Ceausescu, the communist dictator of Romania in 1989. He was persecuted for his requests for Hungarian Bibles, songbooks and Christian literature for his young parishioners which was considered dissent to the communist dictator.

He remained supportive of the people and he and his family suffered. He nonetheless stood up to injustice and became a friend of "the people" in Romania. His father, also a Hungarian Reformed pastor, said "Protest" in the name Protestant!

Because of his dissonance with Ceausescu and his favor with the people, he was considered a threat to the communist regime and became a wanted man.

Before his arrest he fled to his church to avoid the police. He experienced a life changing event in that he witnessed, in an ethnic and religious diverse country, not only his parishioners but those of other ethnicities and faiths, forming a human shield around the church to try to protect him and his family from capture.

His experience lead him to understand this: seeing diverse faiths and people of different ethnic background defending him, he had to work for reconciliation between the different faiths and ethnic boundaries.

He and his 8 month pregnant wife were taken under house arrest by the police to a tiny village called Mineu in the outback of the Carpathian Mountains. There they were kept under armed surveillance 24 hours a day. The women of that

small congregation supported Tokes and his wife by bringing them food each day, but knowing that passing by the armed guards could trigger their death at any time.

And here begins my story, my connection.

Right after the overthrow of Ceausescu a group of 4 of us from our church met Lazlo Tokes in Romania at what we later found out was the first ordination dinner of Reformed pastors since the fall of the communist regime and the death of its leader. He sat across the table from me. Reverend Tokes and his wife....(That dinner was also an interesting story but I only have 5 minutes)!

After that dinner we traveled long and dusty roads to the village of Mineu, where he was held under house arrest. We attended a church service there, women on one side, men on the other. (I wanted to sit with the women but gracefully and skillfully our guide shuffled me to my seat with my group as that that would be considered disrespectful.)

After church we greeted the congregation. A woman pulled me aside after everyone had gone. Through the interpreter she told me that she had made a linen for her husband for their wedding day now long past. He was one of the men that left his village to move into the high rises Ceausescu built in the cities and was not coming back. She gave me this linen, made by her hands, to bring to the women of my congregation with these words:

" I give you my linen to take to the women of your congregation as a reminder to be strong in the face of adversity, to speak truth to power and to be faithful to God, and as a symbol of support from the women of Mineu to us in our efforts to bear witness to the love of God especially in difficult times."

I share this story of the change in heart of Rev.Lazlo Tokes seeing love transcend ethnic boundaries ,but also how the women of a tiny village of Mineu helped me to understand how to graciously receive love from others and powerfully accept the peace given thru Christ. .. I witnessed strength in their faith and acts that can only come from the grace of God.

Those lessons I learned have never left me. The way of Jesus that lives in all of us is not easy, and could be uncomfortable, even dangerous but that.. I believe..is what we are called to do.

To find the peace in each other that connects us. To pursue that bit of peace that comes from Him and allow it to be evident in all my human efforts.