

RAISED RIGHT

*How I Untangled
My Faith
from
Politics*

A person stands in the center of a crowded, blurred city street, holding a large white sign. The person is wearing a grey t-shirt, dark jeans, and white sneakers. The background is a motion-blurred scene of many people walking in the same direction, creating a sense of a busy, crowded environment. The overall color palette is warm and slightly desaturated.

ALISA HARRIS

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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To my parents, who taught me justice and love.

Prologue

A Firmer Foundation

*I*n 1997 I was the picture of bold countercultural style. I wore my hair in a french braid dangling over an outré homemade green gingham jumper and was hanging out in the goat barn at the San Juan County Fair when the announcer said, “And we have a special guest this evening!” I looked over and saw one of my heroes, the man whose leadership I thought would bring America to its knees again: Bill Redmond, candidate for US representative. Dizzy

with worship and seized with a boldness that came over me only when I was rallying for a political cause, I dragged my sister to his side and wedged us next in line. He cocked his head to the side, took my hand in his, and replied to my sputtering with a kind “Well, thank you so much.” He had a pastor’s trick of making it sound like a postsermon “Well, bless your heart. Praise the Lord for that.”

Once, I heard him speak to a group of Christian teens at the state capitol. Just as a pastor would take a text from a book of the Bible, he announced, “Today we’re going to look at the most important phrase in the most important sentence in the most important document in American history: the Declaration of Independence.” This key phrase was “endowed by their Creator,” he explained. If God, not government, gives rights, then government has no authority to take rights away—but if we didn’t stand up and fight for our God-given rights, government *would* take them away. And if we didn’t keep God in the public sphere, the basis for understanding inalienable rights would crumble.

He expounded in that distinct pastoral intonation, every consonant crisp, with three tidy main points, impeccable transitions, and a peroration that applied the Word to your own life. As he painted a picture of the stakes should we lose this election, my heart was clutched by the fear that others

felt when they heard sermons of damnation and hell. I saw a future where we crept forth in the dead of night to worship God in the dark like the Pilgrims did in England and the Christians did in Soviet Russia. This was why we fought. This was why we voted and campaigned and knocked on doors.

So when Redmond ran for office again and faced a Republican primary challenger who had less fervor for America's history as a Christian nation, I was ready to fight for the man who knew God was the source of America's greatness.

I arose early on a Saturday morning to learn the inner workings of the Republican machine and how to sanctify it for God's cause. My dad and I climbed into a private plane piloted by another Republican and took off for the GOP state convention. I looked out the tiny window and watched the golden land recede beneath us as we floated into the clouds. The roar of the engine shut out the conversation in the front, and I sat in the back floating off in my own world, remembering all Redmond had said about the stakes of this election and how any election could turn the tide of the world for good or ill. Just as one bad man could push America to ruin, one man anointed by God and in God's proper timing could turn the world upside down and then set it

aright. Revival could bring revolution, and who better than a pastor turned politician to bring both at once?

Shortly after our plane landed, we entered the convention center, where candidates set up booths and distributed anything to which they could affix a campaign sticker. I wandered, collecting campaign paraphernalia for candidates I liked, conscientiously refusing buttons from moderates I despised, and drinking water from a bottle covered with campaign stickers for Redmond.

When it came time to vote for the candidate whose name would be first on the ballot, the county chairman—who was technically not allowed to take sides in primary elections but had not been called by God to a party leadership role to let liberal Republicans win primaries—gathered up the ballots for absentee voters and handed them all to me. I was too young to vote, but I checked off Bill Redmond's name on each one and stuffed the ballot box. "The pastors can preach," the county chair was fond of saying, "but they should leave the political machinations to me. I can get my hands dirty for God."

A few weeks earlier my family had gone to White Sands, New Mexico, a desert where scientists tested the atomic bomb. While the rest of the kids rolled in the glittering sand, I tore myself from my biography of Ronald

Reagan long enough to trot across the sand and spell out a political campaign message: “REDMOND.” There was no one for miles, and the wind would blow it away, but still I shuffled through the sand, spelling R-E-D-M...with my footsteps. I’m not sure who the message was for, since no one would see it but God.

For nearly all my childhood and adolescence, on into early adulthood, politics gave my faith meaning. Politics expressed my faith. Politics was my way of fighting for “a future and a hope,”¹ my way of proving I believed what Jesus said: “Take heart! I have overcome the world.”² A surge of political fervor marked my soul’s revival, and the vision of a godly America was my promised land. My faith was so intertwined with conservative politics that I viewed them as one and the same. In my ironclad worldview, faith and politics were inseparable.

So when I ventured out into the complicated world and found it shaking my confidence in the goodness of culture-war politics, my faith shook too. With the conservative political accoutrements of my evangelical Christianity stripped away, little of my faith remained.

This book was borne out of my search for a faith that’s more than the sum of my political convictions and for a meaningful way of living it out.



WHEN IT COMES TO POLITICS, the children of old-school evangelicals are undergoing a shift. We have yet to convince our parents that we are not rejecting what they taught us but living it out in a different way. My parents taught me to be suspicious of power, so when I see power concentrated in big corporations, big government, and big money, I become suspicious. My parents taught me to fight for the disenfranchised and weak—the child who couldn’t pray in school or the businessman who couldn’t work without government bullying. Today I feel compelled to combat injustice when I look at families torn apart by harsh immigration laws and when I see men wearing three-thousand-dollar suits while orchestrating the crash of the American economy. I hear a dad talk fondly of the American Dream as he enters a lottery to get his son into a decent school, and it outrages me that his son’s fate rests on a gamble. My parents’ hearts broke over the ugliness they saw in abortion clinics, and I am heartsick over the ugliness of wars in Iraq and elsewhere. But the lesson they taught me remains: when you see injustice, you have to speak up.

When I mention I’m writing a memoir about leaving the culture wars behind, people’s first question is, “Aren’t you

young to be writing a memoir?” This is a delicate way of saying, *What can you possibly have to say? And what if you change your mind once you actually know what you’re talking about?* Sometimes I think they’re right. But most of the time, I think that I have no choice but to write this—for myself, for my peers, and for anyone interested in understanding us.

Yes, this book is for me. Writing is not just how I communicate my thoughts but how I actually think. It’s the way an experience or a fleeting thought becomes real to me instead of floating away. It’s the way I catch my thoughts and turn them over and over, testing their weight and deciding whether to keep them or throw them away. For me, to write is to become, and I can’t become that older, wiser person without skewering these youthful thoughts to paper, without holding them up for my scrutiny and yours. The first drafts of this book illuminated my own failure to love. Working to correct those first bad drafts has made me strive for more charity in my everyday life. It has shown me that I don’t always live out the things I know to be true because complaining about falsehood is so much more convenient than living out a radical alternative.

I am also writing this book for other ex-culture warriors who, like me, grew up with signs in their fists and are trying to figure out what to do with their now-empty hands. Like

me, they were raised to be activists, and like me, they probably have felt lost as their belief in the nobility of the culture wars fades away. They are looking for some worthy cause where they can channel the passion for justice and truth, bestowed by their parents, into something that actually builds people's lives instead of tearing apart relationships and destroying faith.

Some of these young Christians know what they believe. Some don't. Some have fully embraced left-wing politics; some have just decided they are no longer Republicans. Some are trying to change their chosen political party from the inside, while others remain skeptical of the entire spectrum. But all of them recognize that something is deeply wrong with the evangelical politics in which our childhoods were immersed. Today, half of young churchgoers say Christians are "too involved in politics."³ Almost half of young born-again Christians think the "political efforts of conservative Christians"⁴ are a problem facing America. Less than half of young evangelicals identify as conservatives, compared to nearly two-thirds of their parents.⁵ Fewer and fewer identify with the Republican Party. Where do we fit?

I hope this book reassures these young Christians that they are not alone as they navigate these difficult waters where the currents of faith and culture collide. I hope it helps

them to remember that what our parents taught us about the importance of standing for truth remains valid. Perhaps their understanding of truth was wrong or incomplete. Perhaps their frenzied application of it was fruitless. But we cannot fault their passionate pursuit.

I'm also writing this for people who want to make sense of this strange new breed of Christian. Politicians are fumbling to connect with this growing segment of the population, trying to find what moves them to act. You can see it in Barack Obama's pointed outreach to the young evangelical vote—in the biblically redolent title he picked for his youth outreach, pitched so perfectly to the evangelical soul that a conservative Christian group immediately accused him of stealing it from them. Activist authors like Jim Wallis and Shane Claiborne are trying to recruit young Christians to their causes. Organizers are trying to mobilize them. Journalists are trying to understand them. You can see it in the spate of fawning articles that trot around phrases like “young evangelical” and “broadening evangelical agenda” and “increasing passion for poverty and social justice.” So often in these articles and focus groups and books, the ex-culture warriors are presented as experimental subjects or generalized as a group. But rarely are they given a voice, beyond the punchy sound bite, that explains how they got to where they are today.

Our parents are the ones most earnestly trying to make sense of it all. My own mother is sympathetic but does not understand. She said she never expected to have a child who became Catholic, as my sister has done, nor one who voted Democrat, as I have done. She thinks if that's the worst we ever do, then she has little reason to complain. But still, why the change? I hope this book will help her and others to understand that this change is not a rejection of the core truths they've passed on to us but a different application of them. Our actions and beliefs are an expansion of the principles of justice and love that they imparted, not a rejection of those principles.

This book is not a liberal credo or a political platform; in fact, this book is borne of a struggle to find a faith that transcends credos and platforms. It is a halting, flawed attempt to hew a faith that is more solid and graspable than the slogans I once traced in sand.

Flesh and Blood

I marched down the side of a highway, clutching a sign in my fist. My baby sister bounced in the carrier on my mother's back while her left hand gripped my sister and her right hand held a sign. My dad led the way with my three-year-old brother on his shoulders and his own sign held in front of him. I lifted my sign as high as I could.

Cars blew past as people put their heads out the windows and screamed, "Go to hell!" "Separation of church and

state!” They honked their horns and stuck their fists out the windows, raising their middle fingers in salute.

“Why are they doing that?” I asked my mom while mimicking the gesture.

“Don’t do that, honey. It’s not a very nice thing. They’re just not being nice.”

The Oregon sun seared my head, and my feet ached from thumping against the hot pavement, but we kept marching, indifferent to jeers. The woman behind me started asking God to bind the forces of darkness and cast out the demons who sat on young women’s shoulders and urged them to murder their babies. The people around her took up the murmur. Soon the line of marchers was murmuring, “Amen,” and as the woman reached a crescendo, they said, “Thank You, Jesus.”

A car drove past. The driver rolled down his window and made the not-nice gesture while his twenty-something passenger rolled down her back window and gave us the thumbs-up—a gesture of derision from the front seat and a gesture of support from the back.

I didn’t understand why we were here, where we were trying to go, and why we had to care so much that we trudged so long. I was too young to know we were fighting a war, but I was a child soldier on the front lines.



I HAD BEEN PICKETING since before I could walk. Before my parents moved to Oregon from New Mexico, they had bundled me into a carrier twice a week and hauled me and their signs to the local abortion clinic, where they paced the road across the street, praying as pregnant women walked in and empty women came out. They preached the pro-life message to churches and pastors, building contacts and a network of people who could mobilize activists quickly. My father could rattle off Supreme Court cases and grisly facts in church presentations while my mother told the pastors the story of her own abortion long ago and her lingering regret.

When the local hospital bought the building where the doctors performed abortions, my father, who worked ten-hour days in the mud of the oil field, changed from his Levi's into a suit and went to meet with the hospital administrators. Not above some good old-fashioned political pressure, he explained that he and his group would continue to picket the clinic twice a week if the hospital kept performing abortions. They would also take their own wives, who would give birth to several more children than the American average, all the way to a hospital in another state. He gave the

administrators the pro-life newsletter he helped compile and explained it had a mailing list three hundred citizens long: three hundred citizens, in a tiny community, who would know and care that San Juan Regional Medical Center owned a clinic where doctors killed babies. Plenty of people to take picketing shifts.

The next time he met with the hospital administrators, they said they were relieving the offending doctors of their duties. “We don’t do abortions in San Juan County,” an administrator said. And from that day on, they didn’t.

When we read Old Testament passages like the story of Rahab and I asked my mom what a prostitute was, she said, “Women that men paid to act like their wives,” which conjured confusing pictures of paid cooks and housekeepers. When I asked how the single mom in our church had a baby without a husband, she said the mom “acted like she was married.” Apparently I was too young to know how people made babies but not too young to know how they killed them. Once, at one of my parents’ pro-life action meetings, I left the children with their tedious games and went to see what the adults were doing. I crept into the room at the moment an image of a dead baby, swollen with blood and thrown on a trash heap, flashed onto the screen. The image would continue to haunt me whenever I saw pictures of un-

born babies floating—fragile, with veins lacing their eyelids, their tiny toes curled and their thumbs in their mouths—in clouds that looked like jellyfish frills in the sea.

At home we had two tiny pink plastic embryos that bounced from room to room. Once used at the crisis pregnancy center my parents helped start to encourage women to “choose life,” the babies now rattled around with the Legos and Lincoln Logs. We played with them as we would with born babies, since they looked like tiny babies crouched into balls. The fingernail-sized gold pin that my mother fastened to her fifth child’s diaper bag showed two feet with ten perfect toes about a quarter-inch tall, the exact size of an unborn baby’s feet at ten weeks gestation. Even a child like me could see they were a baby’s feet and not a blob of tissue.

Growing up in pro-life circles, I heard people give the exhortation, “Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.”¹ They said, “A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more.”² My aunt was an obstetrician, and if she had performed abortions, my father said they would have paced her sidewalk too, holding signs: “Abortion stops a beating heart” and “Unborn babies are people too.”



I STOOD AT ANOTHER RALLY years later, this time as a journalist instead of a protester. A bill legalizing gay marriage had just smoothly passed the New York State Assembly and was waiting for approval in the Senate. Thousands of people, bused in by Hispanic clergy to protest, pressed behind barricades the New York Police Department had positioned in front of the Manhattan office of David Paterson, the governor. NYPD cops—exuding that impassive, genial objectivity I also strove for—expanded the barricades again and again to let more people in. The crowd throbbed to a Dominican beat, lifted Bibles, and raised signs that read “*Un hombre and una mujer = Voluntad de Dios.*” One man and one woman equals God’s will.

The pastors mounted the platform and bellowed Leviticus 18, with all its bald, blunt commands: “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.”³ They quoted Romans 1: “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of

their error which was meet.”⁴ A pastor turned state senator read the names of Hispanic assemblymen who had voted for gay marriage while the crowd booed after each name. A Jewish leader pointed to the size of the crowd and rejoiced, “There are many more God-fearing citizens in this state than there are deviants and perversions.” Despite this assertion of such a “moral majority,” he painted a picture in which all Christian freedom would disappear, yelling, “Where will we go when the state says we’re bigots? Who will take us out of jail?... If, God forbid, you pass this legislation, next year the perverts will come to you: We demand that uncles can marry nephews. We demand that nephews can marry aunts, and this will also be taught in the schools. You are making this into Sodom on the Hudson.” And hearkening to that picture of destruction, he shouted, “We pray to You, God—do not punish us because of the evil and wicked ones.”

Detestable. Vile. Against nature. Perverts.

Then the pastors roared prayers to the heavens, prefacing their rebukes to Governor Paterson with, “Oh, almighty God!” No one in the crowd bowed their heads or stretched their arms; they cheered and booed as the prayers required. One pastor shouted, “The noise that we make is not political; it’s worshipping the God of heaven.” Then he prayed for

mercy on Governor Paterson, saying he was “doubly blind: physically blind, spiritually blind.” They called on Paterson to use his political power to reform immigration instead.

As the crowd yelled, I would at times forget that these were supposed to be prayers until I would catch an “Almighty God!” or “Lord, we pray!” Then I’d unbow my head from my scribbling and remember that I was hearing words directed at God but intended for the people filling the streets—these pastors, these protesters, and especially those cameras right over there. Their efforts projected the same deafening roar I’d heard in prayers before, where people seem to be shouting so loud that no one could possibly hear God’s response to their pleas. I couldn’t help but think of the kind of ostentatious prayers Jesus chided: “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.”⁵ He must have meant, *Pray to Me and not to the cameras. When you pray, talk to Me.*

On my way to the heart of the protest, I had followed the crowds threading through the barricades and passed a modest counterprotest. The real, much larger counterprotest took place in another part of the city, where city council members, the mayor, and the gay senator who’d sponsored

the bill were making speeches. Just a few people came here for appearances' sake, doing their best to throw the others into bigoted relief with a beatific display of forgiveness.

They lifted signs that said "Thank you, Governor" and "Marriage is so gay." They chanted, "Hate is a sin!"

The Christians screamed back, "We don't hate you!"

The gays: "Yes, you do, and you're probably gay!"

"Adam and Eve!"

"God created Adam and Eve. Then He created Adam and Steve."

And a gay, not a Christian: "God bless you!"

"We're just trying to get our voices heard, that society is trying to promote perversion as normal," a Christian protester told me. "God loves the homosexuals. He loves the lesbians. He doesn't love the sin." Another protester told me, "True Christians do not hate anyone."

If this was love, why did it sound like a curse?

I left the protest and took the train to Brooklyn to have brunch at a friend's house, watching the graffiti-covered concrete hurtle past the windows and thinking about the scene I'd left behind. Jesus said they would know us by our love, and love was the stated reason for all these signs and picket lines; the sign wavers believed they were protecting

homosexuals from their self-destructive sin and helping them find a better way. Perhaps they believed their rebukes communicated love, just as a caring parent rebukes a child. That the child sees the chastising as cruel doesn't change the fact that the parent has the child's best interests at heart.

Then I realized why these efforts at love sounded hollow—because this love was not the way I experienced love every day. Even setting aside the arrogance suggested by viewing all other sinners as children and saved sinners as the world's *in loco parentis*, I know my parents love me because they sacrificed to feed and clothe me every day. In the end that burden of labor and sacrifice is what gives them any right to be heard or believed when they say, "I love you" after they say, "You're wrong."

That scripture my parents taught me—about delivering those who are going to death and holding back those who are stumbling to slaughter—held a different meaning for me now. The image in my mind was one of physical sacrifice, of throwing one's entire body into the rescue with no regard for self. Carrying a sign seemed a cowardly kind of love, one that isolated you behind a barricade, futilely shouting at the world while it stumbled past. I was looking for a more incarnational love, and while I couldn't define it in so many words, I knew it when I saw it.



ON ANOTHER ASSIGNMENT I traveled deep into the belly of Queens, where I knocked on the door of a tiny house. A stooped elderly woman greeted me, and I squeezed into a kitchen piled high with coolers and pans of rice, meat stew, pasta, and vegetables. I followed her single file through a narrow aisle that led to her bedroom off the kitchen. Murmuring apologies that she spoke no English, she gestured for me to sit down on the bed, then took a folding chair and knotted her arthritic hands in her lap. Her grandson—a bright-eyed little boy of five—took over the conversation and asked where I worked, if I wanted to watch TV, if I wanted to play catch. We tossed a ball back and forth in the living room as we waited for his mother and uncle to come home.

Meanwhile the grandmother moved her folding chair to the kitchen and supervised a younger woman and a quiet young man as they dished the food—a little meat, a little rice, a bagel—into foam containers and neatly packed them in the coolers. They moved deliberately, as if they were cooking a family dinner for one hundred people, with none of the rush I'd seen at other mass dinners.

By the time Jorge Munoz arrived, three hours after I did,

I felt like the day should be over. But for the bus driver who has commandeered his mother's home for a soup kitchen, it was just beginning. We sat in the living room on an old car seat that doubled as a couch.

Jorge, a short man whose hands have been roughened with labor, said he feels sorry for his mom, her house filled up with boxes of food and her kitchen full of people cooking all day. "It's not a house anymore—it's a storage! Look at this," he said and laughed, gesturing to the boxes of oatmeal and bags of rice stacked everywhere. He said, "She's happy," despite the boxes of Frosted Flakes piled high in her living room.

Four years earlier Jorge had been waiting in his school bus to pick up a load of kids from summer camp when he saw two camp employees throwing away aluminum pans full of leftover food. Appalled at the waste, he asked why, and they said they had to throw out leftover food every day. He asked for the food so he could give it away. He passed it along to a needy family at his church at first, but then he noticed day laborers standing on corners waiting for work.

"Then one night I saw that a guy who had been there earlier in the day was standing at the street corner again, along with other men," Jorge tells me. "So I asked him, 'What are you guys doing here?'"

“‘Waiting for the police to leave so we can creep under the bridge to sleep,’ they told me.”

Jorge says he then asked them if they had eaten.

“We don’t work, we don’t eat.”

He told them to wait, and he would bring them food.

He fed eight men under the bridge each night the first week, twenty-four men the second week. Forty men came each night for the rest of the first year and more each year after that. When Jorge lost his job and was unemployed for six weeks, he prayed for food and kept feeding them. Once, a boy from Jorge’s home country, Colombia, sold brownies and iced coffee to send Jorge a twenty-five-dollar donation; and once, a man Jorge had fed came back after he found a job and a home and gave Jorge twenty dollars to thank him for his care. “Things like that make me be moved to do more and more. God is the one who supports me... You ask how I started and how I keep doing this. It’s God.”

Hidalgo, the quiet young man in the kitchen packing up food, had stood in Jorge’s line and slept on the street for nine months until someone lobbed a beer bottle at him, slicing his face. The boy was afraid to go to the doctor and hadn’t showered in two weeks, so Jorge took him in, and his mother treated Hidalgo like another son.

Jorge and Hidalgo packed the coolers into a pickup

truck, and I climbed in the front seat next to Jorge. We drove through the dark night and bright lights of Queens, stopping by a local bakery to pick up some leftover bread as the employees turned the chairs upside down on the table and swept the empty shop. Then we drove on and made our second stop at his church, where he picked up three volunteers. Jorge bustled around, shuffling crates of food until he could wedge them into the backseat. I turned around and tried to make conversation, but they smiled the same polite, apologetic smiles of Jorge's mother. No English spoken here either.

As we drove on, Jorge told me that one night when it was ten degrees, he saw twenty-three men sleeping under the bridge. He clicked his tongue: "That's a lot." Once, two of the men snoozed under the bridge after sunup, and they awoke soaked in gasoline, their flesh on fire. Jorge doctored one man with antibiotics and painkillers to deaden the pain in his scarred right arm and face; the other man disappeared.

By the time we drove up to the bridge, a group of men waited silently in the pools of rain and sodden refuse. Jorge hopped out, tied a garbage bag around a fire hydrant to collect the trash, and threw open the coolers, spearing a plastic fork into the top of each foam container before he passed it to a man in line. A helper stood in the truck bed and handed

out loaves of bread from white grocery bags. The men squatted in the rain with their backs against a brick wall and ate.

I asked Jorge if he got tired of waking up at five in the morning, working all day, then coming home and doing all this. “Sometimes I get home around five, five thirty, a little bit tired, but every time I get tired, I put myself in that position,” he said. “I just put my energies and—okay, let’s go. They waiting. They gonna be waiting for food.”

As I walked away and climbed the slippery stairs to the subway platform, Jorge was still breaking loaves of bread in the rain.



UNLESS YOU ARE SMUGGLING SOUP to the Jews in your attic, I think a political act can’t be an act of love. It can be a good act, even noble and heroic, but love is not something that takes place behind a barricade; it happens in the breaking of bread and the passing of cups. Political love is theoretical, directed at some vague “humanity,” and Jesus didn’t say to love humanity but to love your neighbor. A quote from Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* comes back to me. “In my dreams,” an older man tells a younger, “I have often

come to making enthusiastic schemes for the service of humanity, and perhaps I might actually have faced crucifixion if it had been suddenly necessary; and yet I am incapable of living in the same room with anyone for two days together.... But it has always happened that the more I detest men individually the more ardent becomes my love for humanity.”⁶

I am like that old man. The more ardently I see humanity as a glorious abstract that must conform to my ideal of how the world should be, the harder it is for me to love the person on the other side of the picket line who is holding up progress. I can love the downtrodden in abstract, but as I shivered under the bridge that night with Jorge, I realized that it's harder to love the illegal immigrant with the bottle-slashed face and the body unwashed for weeks, the workers gathering to eat day-old bread and chicken and rice out of foam containers, the crowd of thousands clamoring for bread and fish and healing, the unclean woman hoping to touch the hem of the Savior's robe. Dostoevsky also said, “Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams. Love in dreams is greedy for immediate action, rapidly performed and in the sight of all.... But active love is labour and fortitude.”⁷

Physical involvement is implicit in the command, “Hold

back those stumbling to the slaughter.”⁸ It commands bodily sacrifice—labor—that goes beyond the holding of a sign or the giving of a speech. It commands us to be not bystanders but participants in a dangerous world. Love in dreams is fatigued by its neighbor’s needs for food and safety. Love in action works for the unwashed and hungry people who are waiting in the pools of rain and soggy trash. The world as a whole may not change, but our neighbor’s world, and by extension ours, grows brighter—even when breaking loaves of bread in the rain.



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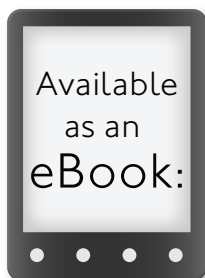
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