

October 3, 2021

Today is World Quaker Day. The Friends World Committee on Consultation suggested we consider the theme:

Resilience and hope: drawing strength from our Quaker faith.

Let's join with other Friends' Churches and Meetings in voicing appreciation of our heritage this morning.

For our scripture let's go back a couple of millennia, way before Quakers, and consider the commission God gave to Joshua as he was poised to lead the Israelites into the promised land.

Joshua 1:1-9

1 After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, **2** "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. **3** Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. **4** From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. **5** No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. **6** Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. **7** Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. **8** This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. **9** I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Many years after Joshua, Jesus came telling us of God's Kingdom -- describing it in the Beatitudes, teaching us to pray for it, and instructing his disciples to teach others of this hope. Jesus has set an even better promised land before us.

Many years later we were given an example in our Quaker spiritual ancestor George Fox, who encouraged us to "walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone."

England in the 1600s was far from perfect and George Fox suffered discouragement, ridicule, and even imprisonment for telling others of this hope. Yet he held fast and was resilient when faced with hardship. How did he come to this positive attitude?

As a child he had been quiet and sensitive. He studied scripture and came to realize he needed wisdom. This eventually led him to travel, searching out and questioning priests, professors, and even dissenters.

No one had satisfactory answers for him. Because of his knowledge of scripture he could see the error in their thinking, but still had not found the understanding and wisdom he was compelled to find.

Finally, he heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition." And when he heard this his heart "did leap for joy!" saying: "Christ has come to teach his people himself."

In his Journal Fox wrote:

"For though I read the Scriptures that spake of Christ and of God, yet I knew him not, but by revelation, as He who hath the key did open, and as the Father of Life drew me to His Son by His Spirit. Then the Lord gently led me along, and let me see His love, which was endless and eternal, surpassing all the knowledge that men have in the natural state, or can get by history or books."

George Fox's joy in this spiritual communion bubbled over and led him to share this simple, uncomplicated -- but great -- blessing with others. He saw God's Kingdom promise. His early followers had called themselves Children of the Light. This came from Ephesians 5:8 which reads:

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—

It is of note that George Fox identified the Light with the **Logos**, the Word, the pre-existent Christ, from John 1:1-4 which reads:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

Yes, . . . "and the life was the light of all people" . . . not just light to see, but His light is within all people -- an illuminating presence. This is where we get the term "That of God in Everyone" -- everyone has this gift. We use various metaphors to see aspects of this gift -- Inner Light, Inward Light, Inward Teacher, Christ Within, the Seed, the Measure, or the Spirit of God. But before we get all confused, notice that this term "the Spirit of God" is different than the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to send to his disciples. That promise is in John 14:26-27, which reads:

²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

But for us, now, the distinction between these gifts is really semantic only; we have both the original Light and also the Holy Spirit to help us -- either way both come from the same source, so we know whom to thank.

George Fox experienced both of these gifts, and it gave him a great Hope and strong Resilience. We, too, have within us not only the same Inward Teacher that caused George Fox to leap for joy, but also support and guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Remember how George Fox knew his Scriptures and used them to determine that the Priests and Professors were unable to satisfy his thirst for wisdom? Scripture helped him keep his hope alive and not give up. It had been said of him that if all the bibles in the world were suddenly gone, it could be recreated from George Fox's mind. He continued to use scripture extensively in his speaking. The Inward Teacher did not replace scripture; Jesus still lives and speaks. Another benefit of Fox's use of scripture is it gave him a common language recognizable to those in thrall of the religious hierarchy of his time. This tool is still available to us, strengthening our hope and our ability to teach.

What other help do we have?

We can gather together. Anytime really, but especially on Sundays, we come to Church and quiet down. The music helps distract our monkey minds, the communal prayer reminds us we are part of a supportive community, and the message gives us a common idea to think on. Once we are prepared, the true center of the morning is the waiting worship. We empty our minds allowing space for what God's Spirit may have for us to hear, or to share. In the Light we not only come into unity with God, through Jesus, but we are also connected through Him back to both one another and to all the other expectant souls around the globe, and beyond. We each become one node in a huge mesh network . . . sharing the Hope that gives us the Resilience to carry on, or carry out.

But after this strengthening hour, we go back into the world that pulls us in so many directions -- presenting conflicting ideas, philosophies, and shiny new distractions. What help can we have outside of waiting worship?

Howard Brinton, in Pendle Hill Pamphlet #44, outlines the Quaker Doctrine of Inner Peace. He reminds us:

The Quaker way is to order the inner life that outer pressures can be adequately met and dealt with.

For the Quaker, outward and inward combine in an intimate organic relation, but the inward is primary.

When we speak of the Quaker way of meeting pressures we must expect that the answer will mainly concern our inward life and only secondarily the changes which we can produce in the outer world.

Yet, we become restless and try to put the cart before the horse, thinking that if we can just get the outer world all cleaned up and orderly, then we can then have time to achieve inner peace. Howard Brinton cautions us saying that if we have inward chaos, all our outward actions will be contaminated by this chaos. So, to be efficient and effective we need to remember to focus on our inward life as we go about our days. To be resilient we need to focus on our hope.

Then, like Joshua, like Jesus, like the early disciples, and like George Fox, we can confidently move forward, knowing that wherever we go we are supposed to be there, and God is right alongside us.