

## Meeting for Discernment July 23, 2013

The queries for morning and afternoon session were the same:

What does it mean to be faithful as individuals? As a gathered body?

What does faithfulness mean for a meeting?

The morning session began at 10:15 and went until noon, with Junior Yearly Meeting joining for the last 20 minutes of the morning session. The afternoon session was from 1:45 until 4:00. Morning session entries are 1-15, the rest are from the afternoon.

Those gathered were directed as follows: "Please come with the intention neither to speak nor not to speak. Come to listen, to enter and abide together in that which is eternal, to witness what rises up from the midst of our gathered meeting." Specifically, we were asked to "share stories from our own experience", to "speak from the heart with kindness, respect, and love", and to "listen with openness, considering the meaning behind the words".

After Lee Haring, the clerk for the morning session, read the queries and guidelines, the meeting began with a half hour of silent worship.

The messages are numbered in the order in which they were given to preserve the sense and the threads which attach one message to another.

There were many recurring themes:

Struggle in meetings is important.

Shared work is important.

The monthly meeting community and the wider human community are vitally important, as are the following:

Having faith to walk through uncertainty and fear,

Becoming aware of support,

Seeking God's will,

Prayer,

Love,

Trust, and

Perseverance.

1. Faith starts with the in-breaking experience of God's love, and the hope that comes from that experience. Faith comes from the hope and trust in God's love and in God's faithfulness. Faith requires putting aside one's ego and trusting God's leadings.
2. Faith is returning to the center again and again, coming back from the mind's excursions.

3. "My experiences of the divine are mainly through the divine in other beings." Faithfulness is learning patience and acceptance of the imperfections in these channels to the divine and learning patience and acceptance of one's own imperfections.
4. What does it mean to be faithful when struggling with "imagining the existence of God?" It requires imagination and spiritual heavy lifting and persistence.
5. One part of faithfulness is keeping a regular practice and discipline of worship, another part is listening to oneself, and dropping parts of the practice that are just a struggle.
6. We heard a story of listening when the voice of God said "it is time for you to work for others," and following the voice and changing careers. "You know when you are in the light, you know when you are not in it, and so for me friends, that is the beginning of faithfulness."
7. Faithfulness is "If you are bringing a gift to the altar, and your brother has sinned against you, you have to settle with him first, and if you can't, then you have to bring someone else with you, and if that doesn't work, call in the church." You have to look at what in you is upset by the other, and go to that person instead of tale-bearing.
8. Three quotes:
  - a. W.H. Auden's "We must love one another or die" describes his meeting.
  - b. Sir John Barbaroli's "The English don't actually like music, but they enjoy the sound that it makes" relates to allowing drug and alcohol abuse by the young people.
  - c. Winston Churchill's "The Americans can always be counted on to do the right thing once every other option has been exhausted" relates to being faithful to the testimonies.
9. Faithfulness is not very exciting; it is like getting up in the morning and eating your vegetables. We are told that faith can move mountains, and it can, and we do, only it is shovelful by shovelful, and when the mountain has moved, we can't see what our own part was. Faith is trusting that what is meant to happen will happen.
10. Faithfulness involves trying to figure out what to do, and also trusting other people. Practical advice on listening for the word of God: if you go into a quiet place, and the voice you hear sounds like our own, it is probably your own. Listening for the word of God is faithfulness and trust.
11. There are differences between having faith and being faithful, but both require doubt and uncertainty. The faiths of the people together in this room probably look very different. To move forward as a body may require letting go of some of our certainties.
12. "For myself, there is a part of me that's eternal, that cannot be destroyed, the diamond that can't be hurt, a safety net under me. If I forget that, I worry what the people I meet think of me."
13. We heard a story of loss of faith in prison, from despair and from witnessing the terrible suffering there, and of slowly regaining a faith, after getting out of prison, a different faith, in which that of God is first and everything else is secondary, and a faith with responsibility to meeting and community and God.
14. A great gift of Quakerism is the Faith and Practice of the Gathered Meeting. According to Quaker faith, each of us is capable of direct communion with God, and the community is capable

of communion with God, and these channels are always open. Faithfulness is following Quaker practice, which is difficult without the experience of the Gathered Meeting. Faithfulness is also the practice of love, which is an act of will, and also difficult. It requires staying at the table and remembering that others are also guided by the Holy Spirit.

15. Faithfulness is gratefulness for the love that we can find in each other, and with that gratitude comes grace. With gratefulness comes openness to the unconditional love that the Spirit offers us in the Every Now.
16. When conflicts arise, there needs to be a center to the meeting, not just one or two people who will step up. Everyone needs to be ready to reshape the center.
17. Faithfulness is saying yes to Spirit, saying “not my will but God’s will,” and faithfulness is having trust and openness. Extended worship was called “worship for faithfulness,” and it generated trust.
18. Faithfulness is a meeting’s nurturing of its corporate center, learning how to welcome wealthy people, not drive them away, so that we will have the resources to continue to do good work.
19. We heard a story of a meeting trying to balance the needs of the environment, to avoid air-conditioning, with the needs of people with respiratory problems. Faithfulness is sticking with this struggle, with love.
20. The most important mission of a meeting is to care for one another, to care for the spiritual lives of the members of our community, and to support them in the work to which they are called. It is a gift that a meeting recognizes the gifts in its community and creates opportunities to use them.
21. “...faith is a result, it is the fruit of moments of clarity, the moments when ‘them’ and ‘us’ cease. Faith is a product of that first motion, love, and with it mountains are moved.”
22. Do we benefit from the isms of the dominant culture? Are we aware of our own biases? Sexism, racism, ageism? If we have all old people in our meetings, ageism is probably at work.
23. A recurring theme at many of our Meetings for Discernment is the uncomfortableness and distance and puzzlement, and sometimes hurt and anger, in the relationship between Christ-centered friends and those who are not Christ-centered.
24. “There is but one life, we are but one world, and we are not wholly and truly one but when we are in the same spirit.”
25. Love in New York Yearly Meeting brought Friends United Meeting and Friends General Conference back together in 1955. Friends connected with both allow the differences to be known and understood and bridged by loving concern.
26. It is important to choose what one is being faithful to: eating ice-cream is one choice, but the most important is to be faithful to seeing that of God in everyone.
27. One way to be faithful is to pray. In meetings where prayer is an unfamiliar concept, faithfulness becomes more difficult. This friend asked for prayers for his meeting.
28. A message from someone who works with the dying: What we all really want is comfort, connection, and a softness in ourselves. “Quiet the mind, come back to center, and try to feel the compassion of love.”

29. I am grateful to be here with a group of people who see that of God everywhere, after growing up and spending years searching for salvation, seeking God, and reading mythologies where outsiders were considered evil folks who could be treated inhumanely.
30. When is the service over? When the mission is accomplished and no one is taking credit.
31. Faithfulness is overcoming fear to get out up from a warm tent into the pouring rain, to go to a 6 AM meeting. "Now the sun is out and the clouds are gone... my faith was renewed." "Personal struggles have helped deepen my faith." Struggling is important to the meeting, too. The absence of struggle is a loss to the meeting.
32. Speaking of a monthly meeting which regularly has lots of first time attenders, and business conducted "by a non-worshipping body," the speaker feels that the meeting needs to have shared work "so that the rhythms of love and care can be present and relied upon."
33. Part of being faithful is relinquishing control and trusting that others in one's meeting will take care of their assigned tasks. Another part is, as a meeting, keeping faithful to the core values and the testimonies without expectation of reward.
34. "When you are walking and the rug gets pulled out, then you are on holy ground. I can't see holy ground, I have to be faithful....We all need to go to holy ground, but we can't see it, and it is uncomfortable.... But the company of the people who walk with me makes it possible."
35. Community came together after Sandy to dig the sand out of someone's basement. It takes faith to go sit in worship with people. "I am sitting in their love and grace and I need it."
36. "We have got this far by Faith....Faith doesn't [just] happen, it has to be a 'we.'"
37. Spirit will guide us as we test whether the structures of the yearly meeting need to be changed in response to climate change in our changing world. We have to trust our evolving experience as we experiment with new structures.
38. We need the company of fellow travelers: even if we are traveling on different roads, we still have humanity in common, and humanity is what we love. God is flexible enough to deal with differences, and love can get us through the rough spots.