

Worship and Action Update, 4/11/03

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting:

Language is a special facility but also can be an invitation to mischief. It permits the mind to sparkle with gathered wisdom and new insight. But it may also enable our tongues to taunt, tarnish, and twist.

New York Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice* (page 23) speaks to our commitment to truthfulness and integrity, yet with loving concern, in our communication:

“We are called to a genuineness of life and speech that leaves no room for deceit or artificiality. Early Friends took very seriously the advice of Jesus: ‘All you need say is “Yes” if you mean yes, “No” if you mean no; anything more than this comes from the evil one’ (Matthew 5:37)... Devotion to what is true and eternal requires openness, honesty, and careful speech in social, business, and family relationships.... We must speak the truth with cordiality, kindness, and love.... Friends have been concerned to communicate with integrity, to make our words and action fit the truth of our lives. We endeavor to speak the truth as we know it, honestly and forthrightly, speaking plainly from our own lives. Sometimes this practice has been difficult; sometimes the results surprise and delight us.”

How discern the Light from the darkness? How cling to the one and discard the other? Jesus is reported in Matthew (11:18) as counseling us to discern truth through experience when met by those who manipulate words:

“For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her actions.”

When voices of arrogance and belligerence seem to be remaking truth into a foreign tongue, guidance may be found in the experiences and lessons of Friends over centuries to listen for the voice of the Light within -- “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition.” (*The Journal of George Fox*, page 11) -- to test that revelation for its truth-bearing value and, if found trustworthy, to live by it. “The God of light is not a God who tells, but a God who shows.” (John Punshon, from *Testimony and Tradition, Swarthmore Lecture 1990*, page 69)

Friends continually offer examples of minding the Light that help illuminate our paths to truth.

Last Sunday, April 6th, Ken Maher of Rochester Meeting visited Alfred Meeting with a concern for the peace testimony. The group began by singing "A Song of Peace" and heard how Alfred Meeting's peace potlucks had inspired Rochester Meeting to join with Mennonites in offering similar gatherings. Ken shared his insight that the invasion of Iraq did not signify a failure of Friends' efforts, evoking Howard Zinn's comparison of

peaceworkers with firefighters who do not stop their fire_prevention programs just because fires continue to happen. He suggested building on Alfred's weekly vigils and monthly potlucks to gather people to continue the work of peace and urged Friends to start preparing now to bring the peace testimony to bear on future election campaigns. Friends shared their own feelings about the war, and about ongoing peace efforts and opportunities for future work, such as responding to military recruiters in the schools, acting to decouple the linking of New York State drivers licenses with Selective Service registration, speaking out about future United States conduct in the Middle East and relationship with the United Nations, and gathering ecumenical support for reaching out to the large Muslim community in Hornell. Friends discovered in their sharing that their continued work on "small" things remains an important expression of the peace testimony.

On Wednesday, April 9th, 23 Friends and visitors gathered at Purchase Meeting for the second session of the study series on nonviolent civil disobedience. John Perry of Bulls Head Meeting spoke of civil disobedience as responding to the demand of the Inner Spirit, but only after testing the call and preserving love as the first motion. Sally Campbell of Morningside Meeting reminded us that acting out of joy is one of the keys and hallmarks to engaging in civil disobedience. David McReynold of the War Resisters League suggested that, because we prefer a world of order and predictability, we do not want to break the law lightly. He urged that civil disobedience be employed only after all else has failed, that we be gentle with each other and with those we face in acting for our consciences, and that courage is found by putting one foot in front of the other until the goal is reached. Each reflected on his or her experience with civil disobedience.

Finally, we offer the report of Becca Nelson of her experiences with the Peace Club at Oakwood Friends School:

"We've gone to protests, including a small protest and teach-in at Vassar College of about 40-50 people and the large March on Washington of January 18th. Even though Oakwood Friends would not sponsor a trip to the New York City march this March, days after the war began, faculty and students gathered in New York and marched all day, not as Peace Club, but as citizens of the world.

"Independently, Peace Club has done many things as well. In the autumn, when war was first becoming a real possibility, we sponsored a school-wide event to fold one thousand paper cranes to make a wish for peace. (There is an old Japanese legend that says if you fold one thousand paper cranes, you get a wish.) We ended up with over two thousand paper cranes, and more awareness as to what was happening in the world among the community. We decided to deliver one thousand cranes to Senators Clinton and Schumer, each, but had to postpone the trip because of scheduling and sponsorship issues with the school. We are now in the process of planning an action or demonstration involving our cranes.

“The most recent success involving Peace Club was our school-wide teach in on March 28th. We sought to inform the community about both our opinions of peace and the wide spectrum of ideas and opinions about this war. Many outside speakers came to our campus to lead discussions and lessons about subjects ranging from civil liberties to draft counseling. Each student member of Peace Club co-clerked one group. We all met afterward and discussed what we had learned and felt during the afternoon. There is a strong feeling on campus that the teach-in more than met its goals.”

In closing, Becca expresses the sense shared by all: “This war is hard to live through. We often feel pessimistic and depressed as a group, but these successes we have experienced keep us fighting for peace.”

Peaceable Greetings,

*Linda Chidsey, Vicki Cooley, Fred Dettmer
NYYM Worship & Action working group*

“The Permanent Board of Wilmington (Ohio) Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends feels that it would be unfaithful during the current conflict if it did not testify to three hundred years of experience by our religious society that war is inconsistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We do beg the Powers and Principalities of this world to take heed that ‘when you do it to the least of these you do it unto me.’

“We do pray God will protect the soldiers who are innocent of planning of war and will protect them from the soul-searing effects of the blood-lust of war.

“We do pray God will spare the inhabitants of the land the terrors of war and will remind them that our Lord has promised it is the meek who shall inherit the earth.

“As a people of God, we do commit ourselves to be ready to engage any opportunity for reconciliation that it may please God to open before us.”

Minute of Wilmington (Ohio) Yearly Meeting
Approved at Permanent Board Sessions on March 23, 2003

“Another world is not only possible,
she is on her way.
On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”

Arundhati Roy

Porto Alegre, Brazil
January 27, 2003