

Our Quaker lobby group in Washington DC, FCNL, the Religious Society of Friends in the U.S. collective testimony and witness to the world and voice for peace and justice, has this vision statement:

“We seek a world

free of war and the threat of war.

We seek a society

with equity and justice for all.

We seek a community

where every person's potential may be fulfilled.

We seek an earth restored.”

Our first hymn is in the green book #32, “Morning Has Broken”

George Gorman, who was a 20th century General Secretary of London Yearly Meeting wrote in *The Amazing Fact of Quaker Worship*: “How does a Quaker Meeting work? Its foundation is the conviction that God is not a distant remote being, but a living presence to be discovered in the deep centre of every human being.... The Quaker experience is that, in the silence, as we are open to one another in love, we help each other by sharing our strengths and weaknesses. The Quaker conviction is that as we go deeper into ourselves we shall eventually reach a still, quiet centre. At this point two things happen simultaneously. Each of us is aware of our unique value as an individual human being, and each of us is aware of our utter interdependence on one another.”

Our second reading is from Psalm 17:2-8 “May my vindication come from you; may your eyes see what is right. Though you probe my heart and examine me at night, though you test me, you will find nothing; I have resolved that my mouth will not sin. As for the deeds of others—by the word of your lips I have kept myself from the ways of the violent. My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not slipped. I call on you, O God, for you will

answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. Show the wonder of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes. Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.”

Our final reading comes from the Quaker writer, Thomas Kelly in 1942: “There is a way of living in prayer at the same time that one is busy with the outward affairs of daily living. This practice of continuous prayer in the presence of God involves developing the habit of carrying on the mental life at two levels. At one level we are immersed in the world of time, of daily affairs. At the same time but at a deeper level of our minds, we are in active relation with the Eternal Life.”

Our second hymn is in Green #46 “Let All Things Now Living”

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—On this first morning, on this first day, let us ever be open to becoming, to living together, to being fully ourselves. We give thanks for waking refreshed, each day, in each meeting, in this world of hope and prayer. Keep us mindful of the give and take of blessing and being blessed, of being both the example, and of being formed by our experiences of one another. Let there always be a connected stillness in our times of busyness, let this world not disturb the world beyond, and let us know both, in rich and intimate fullness. In shadow and sunshine, let us know both safety and confidence, let us shine and shelter one another. Define our world anew, to plant, and grow, and be. Amen.

Third hymn is in the green book #187 “A Garden of My Own”

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear friends—In a move to simplicity, early Quakers began to number days and months in order to remove the pagan names of gods as well as the endless list of distracting and complex saints and festivals. Writing dates in three numbers is a Quaker contribution to our everyday world, even if the verbal usage of “fourth month” is rare. As for days of the week, for Friends who live in tradition, this is first day, and the children are attending first day school. But I’d also like to consider the day in the way our opening hymn does, as not just the first day of this week, but like the first morning of the very first day—ever a dawning, ever a beginning. There is a trite phrase that begins, “Today is the first day...” and I believe it should stop there. It is always the first day, a unique time of these experiences of now. The rest of our lives tries to load this day with too many consequences. Let it simply be the first day. Like the first morning, the first bird, the first grass.

Psalm 90 has the verse, “So teach us to number our days, that we may incline our hearts unto wisdom”. In this sense, I don’t think it is so much counting our days as making our days count, making them always beginnings, always first days. That allows us to meet each other where we are now, not in some assumed or expected or implied position. Let us find ourselves in our own gardens, exploring and learning, improvising and discovering, working in and with world, with both nature and with our natures.

When we take first things first, we get to fundamentals and the elemental, as with the “we seeks” of the Friends Committee on National Legislation. What matters most and how to matter most are really the things we seek. By going towards community in this purposefulness, we allow collective wisdom to guide and sustain us, we allow context to matter, and a way of nurturing and discovering that, as George Gorman found, makes us both more independent and defined, as well as more linked together and in mutuality. For a religion of simplicity, there are a lot of “both-ands” in Quakerism. We are in the world, but not of the world.

We engage in holy listening and we let our lives speak. We enter silence to hear the most profound messages. We look to one another for oneness, we go deep to our individual centre and find the common heart and message for our universe. We disrupt with a message of peace. We use the power of our spiritual knowledge and truth to speak truth to power, to keep simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship at the forefront, ahead of fear, the great fear that drives so much of our society.

There are many verses and encounters with the sacred in the Bible that begin with the phrase, "Do not be afraid". Fear is a force that is so close to exploitative and worldly power. It is the force behind a great deal of advertising, and is used as motivation in so many circumstances, that one should not be surprised at the ever-rising levels of anxiety in our contemporary world. One of the factors in the early persecution of the Religious Society of Friends, of Quakers, was the disconcerting way that Quakers were not afraid, especially of authority, of power that tried to intimidate. Rise each morning, in each first day, without fear. On the storm-tossed sea, on both the ocean of darkness and the ocean of light, sail in the boat of love, cling to the mast, anchor in the harbor.

Our hymns today love this gracious earth, Gaia, our home. A recent New Yorker magazine shows a cartoon where a man is behind a lectern debating earth, a large globe, who has her own lectern. The man says, "I guarantee in twelve hours we'll see a completely different side of my opponent" and "Don't be fooled by her 4.5 billion years of experience!" Yes, the first day, the first morning, is a revelation, always a revelation, but it is also a morning among mornings. A new experience amidst all the memories and experiences. Can we greet it with fresh eyes, and also add it to our store? Can we make it a re-creation, God's re-creation, with a freshness, but a freshness with inherited wisdom?

Then there is our psalm reading: “May my vindication come from you; may your eyes see what is right. Though you probe my heart and examine me at night, though you test me, you will find nothing; I have resolved that my mouth will not sin. As for the deeds of others—by the word of your lips I have kept myself from the ways of the violent. My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not slipped. I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. Show the wonder of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes. Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.”

In that wonder of great love, we are both the obvious apple of the eye, as well as the safe and protected fledgling in the shadow of the wings of the sacred. We are supporting and advising and testing and observing one another, serving even as vindication for each other. Quakers have used the word test in the meaning or context of trying something out, of asking each other how well something flies, how plausible it is, where it sits in the path of rightness. It is a collective action done with a clearness committee or a group that is serious about finding a correct next step. On a hike, when one comes to a stream and needs to use some stepping stones to cross, one tests each stone to see if it wobbles or is flat enough or sturdy enough to be safe. We observe each other doing so, sometimes advising, sometimes replicating a path or varying it, all to get to the other side, to continue the journey.

Lift up your eyes to the world and welcome it every day. Invest in your space and time--garden it, cultivate it, share it out, be ever grateful for it. In letting love be our guide, we need companions to love, to show us love, to be a beloved community, to meet each other where we are, to be a meeting. Running beneath and constant in every moment, have that of God, have the elemental purposes of love and peace, shape your greeting of the new day that is always coming, the first day, the first morning, this day.

Closing hymn is Green #2 “All Creatures of Our God and King”

I opened with a word from FCNL, and another statement of the Friends Committee on National Legislation is “Love Thy Neighbor, No Exceptions.”