

*Order of Service
October 6, 2019
World Quaker Day
Sustainability: Planting Seeds of Renewal for the World We Love*

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Greeting:

Good morning, Friends. Today is World Quaker Day. This is a program of *Friends World Committee for Consultation*, and this year's theme is *Sustainability: Planting seeds of renewal for the world we love.*

FWCC invites us, as the sun rises this morning across the beloved earth, to remember that Friends are worshiping across every time zone, connected across cultures, across different traditions, different theological understandings, and the diversity of Quaker expressions. Today, Quakers worldwide are united in love for this world, and in the way we live out our different understandings of our faith and our practice of answering That of God, in everyone, all over the world. So as we worship today, let us imagine ourselves to be in the company of Friends, accompanying one another in our communal spiritual imperative to love, to do all we are called to do, to sustain Life on Earth. The Friends World Committee for Consultation website asks that our hymns of praise resound across the world this day. So let us rise and lend our voices to the Friends chorus, and sing **our first hymn, For the Beauty of the Earth, Green 10.**

Reading: Excerpt from the 6th World Conference of Friends Epistle. That Conference, held at Kabarak University in Kenya in April of 2012 brought almost 850 Quakers together, from all the varying streams of Friends, 112 Yearly Meetings, and groups in 51 countries. The epistle began:

*To friends everywhere:...The call that brought us together was to be salt and light as we live out the Kingdom of God. We received this call with a real sense of urgency in these times of natural disasters, violence, global change, and unequal access to basic needs. We have been reminded that we are sometimes too preoccupied with being heavenly to be useful on Earth. We see this as a challenge to not detach ourselves from the wider society in hope that this will bring us closer to God. Rather, we need to be present and engaged in our communities, while remaining attentive to the Still, Small Voice, in order to allow the Spirit to work through us. The Religious Society of Friends -- the Friends Church -- is about nothing if it is not about transformation' in the words of one of our speakers. As Friends we feel called to try to return to the conviction and simple faith of our Quaker ancestors and their transformed lives, so that we may once again become a prophetic people, speaking to God's purposes in these times.... Can we reach out in love to one another as Jesus commanded? We may not understand liberal/evangelical/programmed/unprogrammed Friends but we are Friends. The diversity of Friends at this conference has provided us with an opportunity to live out our testimonies to equality and truth. Our ability to do so has been put to the test. We found ourselves reluctant to go beyond polite acceptance and avoidance of difference. We are not united in all of our attitudes and beliefs, yet we choose to come together to listen, to share, and to hear things we may find uncomfortable and upsetting. As we choose to seek connection in the midst of our differences, we witness the power of God to bless and heal. We may not always understand each other fully, but we are united in our yearning for transformation. We are united in God. We live in a broken world. We were moved to realize that so many of us here carry a sense of grief, loss, failure or hurt. We were forced to recognize the brokenness in us and our Religious Society. A speaker challenged us to consider that brokenness may also be an opportunity. We are uncomfortable with feeling brokenness and seeing it around us, yet from it we gain strength, empathy and compassion. ... We know that the Kingdom is come and coming. We pray that we may experience the Kingdom of God within ourselves here and now, so that we may live it more fully in transforming this world...The Epistle was circulated with the **The Kabarak Call for Peace and Ecojustice, which was the culmination of the FWCC World Consultation on Global Change held in 2010 and 2011. Here is that Kabarak Call for Peace and Ecojustice, in its entirety:** In past times God's Creation restored itself. Now humanity dominates, our growing population consuming more resources than nature can replace. We must change, we must*

*become careful stewards of all life. Earthcare unites traditional Quaker testimonies: peace, equality, simplicity, love, integrity, and justice. Jesus said, "As you have done unto the least... you have done unto me". We are called to work for the peaceable Kingdom of God on the whole earth, in right sharing with all peoples. However few our numbers, we are called to be the salt that flavours and preserves, to be a light in the darkness of greed and destruction. We have heard of the disappearing snows of Kilimanjaro and glaciers of Bolivia, from which come life-giving waters. We have heard appeals from peoples of the Arctic, Asia and Pacific. We have heard of forests cut down, seasons disrupted, wildlife dying, of land hunger in Africa, of new diseases, droughts, floods, fires, famine and desperate migrations – this climatic chaos is now worsening. There are wars and rumors of war, job loss, inequality and violence. We fear our neighbors. We waste our children's heritage. All of these are driven by our dominant economic systems – by greed not need, by worship of the market, by Mammon and Caesar. Is this how Jesus showed us to live? We are called to see what love can do: to love our neighbor as ourselves, to aid the widow and orphan, to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, to appeal to consciences and bind the wounds. We are called to teach our children right relationship, to live in harmony with each other and all living beings in the earth, waters and sky of our Creator, who asks, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the world?" (Job 38:4) We are called to do justice to all and walk humbly with our God, to cooperate lovingly with all who share our hopes for the future of the earth. We are called to be patterns and examples in a 21st century campaign for peace and ecojustice, as difficult and decisive as the 18th and 19th century drive to abolish slavery. We dedicate ourselves to let the living waters flow through us – where we live, regionally, and in wider world fellowship. We dedicate ourselves to building the peace that passeth all understanding, to the repair of the world, opening our lives to the Light to guide us in each small step. **Bwana asifiwe. A pu Dios Awqui. Gracias Jesús. Jubilé. Salaam aleikum. Migwetch. Tikkun olam. Alleluia!***

Prayer

Holy God, Sustainer and Source of Sustenance, there is no place on earth where you are not. In all the broken places, sites of shame, and sorrow, and terrible violence, still, you are there. In the quiet recesses of our hearts and souls, where we fear our own unworthiness, where reside our own shames, and sorrows, and violence, still you are there. Holy Seed, Still Small Voice, power of love. We need

you. We need you. Where there is brokenness, break upon us. Where there is fear, and despair, call us to see what love can do. There is no where you are not, so there is no where that love is not. Holy Love, Thou Sower of Seeds, be planted in our hearts this day, be with us, for we need you. Amen.

Benediction

May we plant seeds of renewal for the world we love.

May we know the world is worthy of love, and people are capable of transformation.

With every act of love and faith, may we bring the Kingdom come.

May we be called to see what love can do.

*May the love of life fill our hearts. May the love of earth bring joy to heaven. May the love of self deepen our souls. May the love of neighbors heal our world. As nations, as peoples, as families this day, may the love of life heal our world. ~
John Phillip Newell*

Message

I have a friend who struggles with depression and hopelessness as report after report tells us of harrowing degradation to the Earth's life support systems. On the day that the report came out that scientists have documented the loss of almost 3 billion birds in North America since 1970, he said, bitterly, "maybe it's time for humans to go extinct before we do anymore damage. We are not sustainable. We are a cancer on the earth." Meanwhile, when I told my husband George, a Friendly attender to this Quaker meeting, but not a Quaker himself, that the theme for World Quaker Day is ***Sustainability: Planting Seeds of Renewal for the World We Love***, his immediate first response was an approving "that's very optimistic."

Sustainability is one of those words that has become so ubiquitous, tossed around by multinational corporations, fossil fuel companies, banks and brokerage firms, that its meaning has become something of an empty branding opportunity that can mean just about anything, even its exact opposite. We hear about sustainable growth, sustainable investments, sustainable supply-chains, and sustainable yields. The term -- or, rather, its German equivalent, originated in the 17th century, and was originally applied to forestry. In 1987 the World Commission on Environment and Development introduced the phrase "sustainable development" and defined it as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. A good working definition surely, but 30 years later sustainable development remains something of an oxymoron, a paradox in terms, not quite yet an operating principle, or a species-wide planetary mission statement. Yet.

The most simple definition of sustainability that I could find is "having the ability to exist constantly, in perpetuity, the quality of having sustained existence." Which, of course, made me think of God, of the mysterious I AM, the Life that Is, Was, and Ever Shall Be. The Holy Quality of Sustained Existence. That Which Sustains.

But in the 21st century, sustainability implicitly and generally refers to the capacity of Earth's biosphere and human civilization to coexist, harmoniously and in mutually reinforcing and beneficial ways, perpetually. It's both a goal and a method, the means and the ends. It's the way, the truth, and the life. Like the other Way, Truth, and Life, the word Sustainability has been co-opted by power holders and those who crave power, and used to sell stuff, to perpetuate the very systems that deeply compromise and threaten the capacity of Earth's biosphere and human civilization to coexist, harmoniously, in perpetuity. So, into this maelstrom of greed and advertising and co-option and greenwashing and ecological crisis, the

Friends World Committee for Consultation gave us our World Quaker Day theme. This word, *Sustainability*, and then a colon: and then the phrase *Planting Seeds of Renewal for the World We Love*. The way this theme is formulated invites us to consider the definition of the word sustainability, and implies that how we do so has direct ramifications for our faith and practice. It seems like they're offering a Quaker take, a Quaker definition of the ubiquitous word. And so, they define it as a verb. Quakers of all persuasions have always understood God's Kingdom to be participatory, and have emphasized praxis, the importance of aligning faith, testimony, and witness in the world. So, sustainability is something you do, an invitation to act. To take action. What kind of action? Planting Seeds.

We've spoken of Seeds here before. You might say "Seeds" is a loaded Quaker word. In June, at the start of the high growing season in our part of the world, I began our worship together with reflections from two early Friends, who spoke of their direct experience of God as the Seed within. Isaac Penington, son of the Lord Mayor of London, imprisoned six times for his radical Quaker beliefs and support of Friends, wrote, sometime after 1660: *Only wait to know that wherein God appears in thy heart, even the holy seed, the immortal seed of life; that that may be discerned, distinguished, and have scope in thee; that it may spring up in thy heart, and live in thee, and gather thee into itself, and leaven thee all over with its nature; that thou mayst be ...new..., and mayst walk before God, not in the oldness of thy own literal knowledge or apprehensions of things, but in the newness of his Spirit.* Right around the same time, early Quaker feminist Elizabeth Bathurst wrote in *Truth's Vindication* that "*The Seed, or Grace of God, is small in its first Appearance, even as the Morning Light; but as it is given Heed to, and obeyed, it will increase in Brightness, till it shine in the Soul, like the Sun in the Firmament at its Noon-day Height.*"

All Seeds of Renewal have their origins in the Holy. Planting Seeds, we know, is an act of faith. Not ours to know or guarantee the harvest. Ours to cradle the holy seed, to give it heed, to prepare the way, make ready, and to believe that future Life is worthy of such preparation, such hope and faith, planning and planting, such acts on its behalf. In this way, Planting Seeds of Renewal is also an act of love. It begins and ends in love. Love for the future ones, those whose lives we love enough to think of offering our efforts at renewal, for their sustenance. Love for the future itself, and the harvest we may not live to see for ourselves. Love for God, for the Life that wants to continue, for what wants to be sustained, for what endures and lives in us and through us. Love for the seed that is carried and nurtured, and nourished. Love for ourselves, for this Life, Love for each other.

There's always been a strain of Christianity that has tended toward nihilism, toward a devaluing of this life and this earth, a privileging and fetishizing of end times theologies, faith as an escape hatch from the earth, from humanity and our fallenness, our 'total depravity,' as John Calvin put it. The voices of nihilistic fatalism are loud these days, some almost seem to be cheering the degradation of Earth's life, and the evidence they cite for humanity's failings is undeniable. The first Friends were very clear-eyed about the way that standing in the Light, or allowing the Holy Seed to have scope in thee, would illumine all that was not in alignment with God. Friends did not deny the human propensity for evil. but from the very beginning until now, across real difference, even through schisms, Quaker faith and practice has affirmed and still affirms that the world is worth loving, worth being in, that the future we cannot see but can imagine is worth having faith in, that the Kingdom is come and coming, that transformation is possible, that God speaks to us in our condition here on earth, that everyone has a capacity to hear that still, small voice, for there is That of God in everyone, and so everyone can be guided in the Spirit, everyone can plant seeds of renewal, in love, for this world that is worth loving, worth renewing, worth sustaining. It is said that George Fox's final words were "I am glad I was here." Quakers have had and have faith that the world is good, and people can be, too.

My friend's despair is understandable, and it's tempting to default to that fatalistic nihilism. But the opposite of nihilism is love. And my husband George is right, that the Quaker theology embedded in our definition of sustainability is inherently optimistic. All over the world today, we believe we are called to see what love can do.

The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof
Its streets, its slums, as well as stars above.
And salvation is here, where we laugh, where we cry.
Where we seek and love, where we live and die.

When true liberty is found
By fear and by hate we will no more be bound
In love and in life we will find a new birth
And in peace and freedom redeem the earth.

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