

Stratford-upon-Avon Quaker Meeting

Diary: April 2018



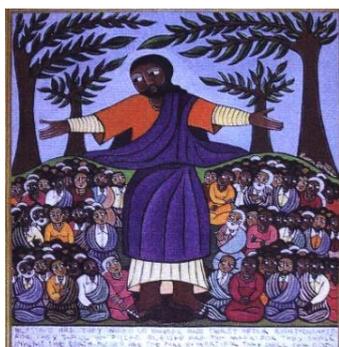
Newsletter – April 2018

Sunday 1 April	Preparative Meeting – 11.15 am after Meeting for Worship
Saturday 7 April	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Sunday 8 April	Area Meeting – 2.00 pm, Evesham Meeting House
Tuesday 17 April	Study Group – 7.30 pm, Stratford Meeting House
Saturday 21 April	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Sunday 29 April	Themed Meeting for Worship, - 10.30 am, Stratford Meeting House

Salt of the earth – light of the world

The Stratford Quaker Study Group will continue its discussion of the Sermon on the Mount when it next meets on Tuesday 17 April. After two sessions looking at the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12) we move to another well-known section: “You are the salt of the earth ... You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-16).

Matthew says that Jesus delivers the Sermon on the Mount to his disciples, not the general population (Matthew 5:2). And after the challenging and unconventional ideas of the Beatitudes, Jesus asks what people are going to do with these teachings.



What does Jesus mean by describing his disciples as the salt of the earth? One thing he’s not saying, according to Franciscan Richard Rohr is that those who live this way are going to heaven. Rather “he is saying that they will be a certain kind of gift for the earth”. Jesus’s teachings are not prescriptions to follow but rather descriptions of a free life. “Jesus’ moral teaching,” says Rohr, “is very often a description of the final product rather than a detailed process for getting there ... He is saying, as it were, this is what holiness will look like”.

Salt was very important in Jesus’s world. It didn’t only add flavour: it was a vital preservative. Well preserved food could be the difference between nutrition and malnutrition, between life and death. So those following Jesus had an important role in the world. They provided spiritual food, they gave flavour to the meal of life.

The image of the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16) puts across a similar message. Light cannot be hidden, says Jesus. What’s more, it should not be hidden: people do not light a lamp and put it under a bowl. “Our job is to be a shining truth,” says Rohr, “to live on the mountaintop, to live the truth as best we can.”

Matthew ends this section of the Sermon on the Mount: “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). “Jesus says ‘*your* Father’ almost as a calm and secure assumption,” says Rohr. “He is seemingly trying to invite us into the same relationship with God that he has. He’s not just *my* Father, Jesus is saying, but he’s also yours.”

The images are humble and modest, but also hopeful. Jesus is telling his disciples that he has given them a great truth: now he wants them to hold up the light for others. The light will do its work, and God’s purposes will be achieved. “What a relaxed and patient trust Jesus has in God,” says Rohr. “His concern is proclamation ... he trusts that good-willed people and a reliable God will take it from there.”

What does all this mean for us today? As we saw when discussing the Beatitudes, Jesus’s teaching is not conventional wisdom: in many ways, it is the reverse. And now Jesus is saying that those who follow him need to show this light to the world. In what way – and with what consequences?

The Study Group meeting in April will be on Tuesday 17 April at Stratford Quaker Meeting House, starting at 7.30 pm. Everyone is welcome.

Spring

Sunday 29 April will be the first of our themed Meetings for Worship in 2018 (there will be others on the fifth Sunday of the month in July, September and December).

At themed Meetings for Worship, we start with our usual silent worship. Then, after about twenty minutes, everyone is invited to speak: perhaps with a reading or by offering a thought about the theme. And as usual, we will hold each piece of ministry in the stillness and allow it to deepen our worship.



Spring is becoming obvious as this newsletter is prepared. The early flowers, like primroses and daffodils, are out and trees and hedges are coming into blossom. The trees are still bare of leaves, but by the end of April, our themed Meeting will take place in a world that is newly green. The sun may or may not be shining on Sunday 29 April – that’s in the hands of the weather! But the days will be longer and warmer, and the light will have a quality of its own: not thin as in winter nor heavy as at the height of summer but clear and colourful.

Spring, of course, has other meanings. The world is recovering from winter. The colours of flowers and new leaves show the change and symbolise the coming of new life. Spring is the season of transformation, of “turning a new leaf”. For our spiritual life, transformation can come at any time: there is no season for this. But Spring can be a metaphor or image for change – something to reflect on during our themed Meeting for Worship. Bring your thoughts and readings to share with others.

Martin Luther King

Wednesday 4 April will be the 50th anniversary of the murder of Martin Luther King Jr.

Born in 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia, Martin Luther King Jr followed his father to become an American Baptist minister. In the late 1950s he became the most visible spokesperson and leader in the civil rights movement, best known for his role in the advancement of civil rights using the tactics of nonviolence and civil disobedience based on his Christian beliefs and inspired by the nonviolent activism of Mahatma Gandhi. American Quakers were among his earliest advisors and supporters.

King led the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott and in 1957 became the first president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). With the SCLC, he led an unsuccessful 1962 struggle against segregation in Albany, Georgia, and helped organize the nonviolent 1963 protests in Birmingham, Alabama. He also helped organize the 1963 March on Washington, where he delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

In October 1964, King received the Nobel Peace Prize for combating racial inequality through nonviolent resistance. In 1965, he helped to organize the Selma to Montgomery marches, and the following year he and the SCLC took the movement north to Chicago to work on segregated housing. But his work was interrupted by times of physical and mental exhaustion, and King also had to struggle with tensions within the civil rights movement, where some wanted a more aggressive, even violent approach, while others recoiled from King's willingness to confront the politically powerful elites of the south.



Martin Luther King speaking in Memphis, Tennessee, 3 April 1968

In addition, King was expanding the focus of his work to include opposition to poverty and to the Vietnam War, alienating many of his liberal allies with a 1967 speech titled "Beyond Vietnam". FBI agents investigated him for possible communist ties, recorded his extramarital liaisons and reported on them to government officials; on one occasion, they mailed King a threatening anonymous letter, which he interpreted as an attempt to make him commit suicide.

In 1968, King was planning a national occupation of Washington, D.C., to be called the Poor People's Campaign, when he was shot by James Earl Ray on April 4 in Memphis, Tennessee. Riots followed in many US cities, but just days after his death, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act.

The day before his death, King spoke for the last time at a rally in Memphis. And at the end of his speech he said: "Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land."

Our charity collection

Our most recent collection – for Brumanna Quaker School in the Lebanon – raised £137 for this valuable educational resource in the Middle East.

Our next collection will be for New Hope Counselling, a service that operates in Warwickshire. New Hope are a Christian-based counselling service that is non-denominational and has volunteer counsellors from several different religions and none. They provide very low-cost counselling to those most in need - supporting people with a wide range of issues including the bereaved, survivors of abuse and people with mental health issues.

Meals for the homeless

Quakers in Stratford have twice prepared weekend meals for the homeless during March as part of the new Weekend Meals initiative of Stratford Churches Together.



On Saturday 10 March, a team prepared chicken and mushroom soup and tomato and marscapone soup, supplemented by free sandwiches supplied by the Stratford branch of Pret-a-Manger. And on Sunday 18 March, the Quakers filled a gap in the schedule with carrot and lentil and minestrone soups and more free sandwiches. This Sunday lunch was especially welcome as outside it was snowing and in the wind-chill, the temperature was estimated to be -7° C!

In April, the Quakers will be hosting the weekend meal on Sunday 15 April. If you would like to help, or want to know more the initiative, contact Arnid Wood on 01789 414743.

Stratford Churches Together has decided to continue the meals until the end of April, when it will consider whether to continue to offer meals through the summer or to limit the initiative to the winter. If you have any views about this, please let Arnid know.

Quaker Week 2018

Quaker Week in 2018 will run from Saturday 29 September to Sunday 7 October.

This year the theme for Quaker Week will be *Room for more*. Quakers are being encouraged to examine our own diversity and so Quaker Week 2018 therefore has two key aims:

- to help local meetings in their commitment to genuine welcome; and
- to extend that welcome to people from all backgrounds.

Sharing food is a central idea. As Quakers we offer a table already rich with good things, but we recognise that it is incomplete. What's missing from the table? How can we let people know that there's a space for them? And that their presence is needed to make the meal complete? An invitation to a meal is, of course, an important image for Jesus, and one found in a number of places in the gospels.

We want everyone to come and share with us. There is always room for more at the table, and we value everyone who might sit at it. Our gathering around the table enriches us all.

So should we be thinking about an event to which we can invite members of the wider community? A shared meal could be one of the element of this year's Quaker Week in Stratford, but what other ideas might be appropriate? We can begin our planning at Preparative Meeting in April.