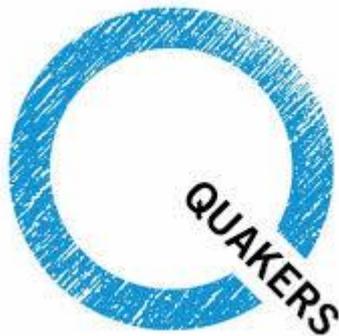


## Stratford-upon-Avon Quaker Meeting

## Diary: August 2018



Sunday 5 August	Discussion of theme for Themed Meeting for Worship on 30 September
Saturday 11 August	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Saturday 25 August	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Sunday 2 September	Preparative Meeting – 11.15 am after Meeting for Worship
Sunday 30 September	Themed Meeting for Worship (see above)

## Newsletter – August 2018

### Listening ...

On Saturday 21 July, Kindlers-on-the-Road visited Stratford Quaker Meeting House again to run a workshop on “Listening”. Two Friends from Warwick Meeting joined us for an interesting day.

As with previous Kindler-on-the-Road workshops, there were a variety of exercises to help us explore different aspects of listening. In the morning, we concentrated on listening to others: how do we pay attention, how do we ensure that people know and appreciate that we are listening, what does being listened to feel like? After a shared lunch we explored the issue of listening to God, to the Spirit, to the “promptings of love and truth” in our hearts (*Advices & queries 1*).



One interesting idea to emerge from these explorations was that listening to God is not simply an extension of listening to other people. When you listen to other people you are in their presence (physically or through an instrument like a phone); you hear their voice and follow their words. You listen to what they are saying, trying to understand both the words used and their deeper meaning.

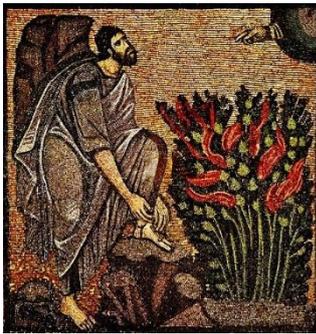
But listening to God is different. You don't have the physical clues; you don't have words. As one participant suggested, sometimes it is like feeling a presence, that a strength or reassurance is given to you. It is more about listening for than listening to. And how can we know that we hear – let alone understand what we hear?

Religions try to help people develop this type of listening. There are traditions in both Christianity and in other religions that help people exercise their hearing and understanding. A modern metaphor might be that we are trying to tune in to God's wavelength. And Quaker silence is one of those traditions. Whether in Meeting for Worship or in silent waiting on our own, we seek to quiet our own incessant mental chatter so that we can hear the still, small voice. It's not easy: indeed, we face anew the challenge of coming into silence every time we try to do so. But when we experience the depths of silence, we know we can listen and hear.

# Acting for freedom

Over the last month, Richard Rohr's daily meditations have had a strong focus on what might be called "political" issues. Some would think that such things should not be part of religion. But Rohr is clear that Christianity cannot be a contemplative exercise: connection with God leads to action to bring about "God's kingdom". So here are two of these daily meditations. The first was entitled *Roots of Liberation*.

"One of the great themes of the Bible, beginning with the Hebrew Scriptures and continued by Jesus and Paul, is "the preferential option for the poor." I call it "the bias toward the bottom." The Hebrew people's exodus out of slavery, and YHWH's complete identification with them, is the pattern of our universal spiritual journey to liberation.



"Moses, himself a man at 'the bottom' (a murderer on the run, caring for his father-in-law's sheep), first encounters God in an ordinary bush that 'burns' without being consumed (Exodus 3:2). Moses' experience is both external and interior, earth-based and transcendent: 'Take off your shoes, this is holy ground,' he hears (3:5). Awestruck and fully present, Moses is able to perceive God's surprising call: 'I have heard the groaning of my people in Egypt. You, Moses, are to go confront the Pharaoh and tell him to let my people go' (3:9-10).

"Here we have the perfect integration of action and contemplation. First, the contemplative experience comes—the burning bush. Immediately it has social, economic, and political implications. There is no authentic God experience that does not situate you in the world in a different way. You see things differently, and you have the security to be free from your usual loyalties: privilege, position, group, and economy. Yet this transformation has costly consequences. Moses had to leave Pharaoh's palace to ask new questions and become the liberator of his people.

"The Exodus story is the root of all liberation theology, which Jesus then teaches and fully exemplifies (see Luke 4:18-19). It is obvious that he is primarily a healer of the poor and powerless. Liberation theology focuses on freeing people from religious, political, social, and economic oppression (what Pope John Paul II called 'structural sin' and 'institutional evil'). It goes beyond just trying to free individuals from their own naughty behaviors, which many people identify as the only meaning of sin. In our individualistic society, structural sin is accepted as good and necessary on the corporate or national level. Large companies, churches, and governments get away with and are even applauded for killing (war), greed, vanity, pride, and ambition. The capital sins are rewarded at the corporate level but shamed at the individual level. This is our conflicted Christian morality!

"Instead of legitimating the status quo, liberation theology tries to read history and the Bible not from the side of the powerful, but from the side of the pain. Its beginning point is not sin management, but 'Where is the suffering?'

"The world tends to define poverty and riches simply in terms of economics. But poverty has many faces—weakness, dependence, and many forms of humiliation. Essentially, poverty is a lack of means to accomplish what one desires or needs, be it lack of money, relationships, influence, power, intellectual ability, physical strength, freedom, or dignity.

“God hears the cry of the poor. And we, created in God’s image and likeness, must do the same to be like God.”

And in this second meditation, *Another Power*, Rohr writes about a political initiative by church leaders in the United States in which he is personally involved.

“As a follower of both Jesus and Francis of Assisi, my primary moral viewpoint is not based in the well-being of those who are on top but at the bottom. [American Quaker] Parker Palmer describes the impact when this is not our priority: ‘When we forget that politics is about weaving a fabric of compassion and justice on which everyone can depend, the first to suffer are the most vulnerable among us—our children, our elderly, our mentally ill, our poor, and our homeless. As they suffer, so does the integrity of our democracy.’



*Mexico–United States barrier at the border of Tijuana and San Diego (detail), Tomas Castelazo, 2006. The crosses represent migrants who died in the crossing attempt—some identified, some not. Surveillance tower in the background.*

Rohr continues: “In light of this, I will be sharing parts of a document I helped compose with a group of twenty-three Christian leaders and elders of various denominations. We presented *Reclaiming Jesus: A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis* to the White House on May 24 in a pilgrimage of over 1,000 believers. As a Franciscan Catholic, I proudly wore the habit of St. Francis.

“For the vulnerable who have been rendered more vulnerable by the current United States’ administration, we lament and pray and promise to stand with you. We acknowledge and affirm:

- We are living through perilous and polarizing times as a nation, with a dangerous crisis of moral and political leadership at the highest levels of our government and in our churches. We believe the soul of the nation and the integrity of faith are now at stake.
- [As Christians,] it is time to be followers of Jesus before anything else—nationality, political party, race, ethnicity, gender, geography—our identity in Christ precedes every other identity. . . . ‘By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another’ (John 13:35).

“Parker Palmer broadens this shared responsibility to those of other faiths: ‘All three traditions [Christianity, Judaism, and Islam] are misunderstood because some of their alleged adherents engage in hateful and violent behavior that distorts and defies the values they claim to represent. At their core, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and all of the major world religions are committed to

compassion and hospitality. . . . In this fact lies the hope that we might reclaim their power to help reweave our tattered civic fabric.'

"The Hebrew prophets, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammed first appear to be 'nothing', outside the system, and really of no consequence. But like leaven and yeast, their much deeper power rises, again and again, in every age, while kings, tyrants, and empires change and pass away."

## Study Group

A well-attended monthly Study Group meeting in July saw the end of our reading and discussion of the Sermon on the Mount. There will be no Study Group meeting in August, and the next Study Group meeting will be on Tuesday 25 September. We have had a number of interesting suggestions for topics to discuss in the autumn, and there will be more details in next month's newsletter.

## End Hunger

End Hunger UK is a charity campaigning to ensure that everyone has access to good food and no one goes to bed hungry. Quakers in Britain are one of the many organisations supporting the campaign.



End Hunger UK has produced a "Menu to end hunger in the UK" – a list of nine proposals that would help reduce the risks of hunger and food insecurity in the country. One of these is a call for changes to the universal credit system which is being rolled out across the country. End Hunger UK has produced a report, based on research carried out across the country, into the impact of universal credit, and this sets out specific proposals for changes to the universal credit system.

Universal credit is already operating in Stratford, and those of us who are involved with Welcome Here, the group set up to welcome Syrian refugees to the town, know that universal credit is a poorly designed system that can – and does – result in arbitrary and severe cuts to a family's income. Many of the changes proposed in the End Hunger UK report would have other beneficial effects in addition to the way in which they would reduce the problem of having no money to buy food.

End Hunger UK has launched a petition calling for these changes, and it is asking supporters such as churches and food banks to collect signatures this autumn so that the petition can be presented to the Prime Minister in the lead-up to the autumn budget in November. Stratford Quakers have raised this with other churches in the town through the forum of Stratford Churches Together, and we will be seeing how we and others in Stratford might support this initiative in September and October.

For more information on End Hunger UK, see <http://endhungeruk.org/>.

## Themed Meeting for Worship

On Sunday 29 July, the fifth Sunday in July, Stratford Quakers held a themed Meeting for Worship, exploring the ideas of hospitality and welcome. Our next themed Meeting for Worship will be on Sunday 30 September. What theme should we explore then? We will discuss this after Meeting for Worship on 5 August.