

Stratford-upon-Avon Quaker Meeting



Newsletter – July 2018

Diary: July 2018

Sunday 1 July	Preparative Meeting – 11.15 am after Meeting for Worship
Saturday 7 July	All Day Area Meeting – 10.30 – 3.30, Sibford Meeting House
Saturday 14 June	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Saturday 21 July	Kindlers-on-the-Road workshop, Stratford Meeting House
Tuesday 24 July	Study Group – 7.30 pm, Stratford Meeting House
Saturday 28 July	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Sunday 29 July	Themed Meeting for Worship, Stratford Meeting House

Hospitality - welcoming strangers

On Sunday 29 July Stratford Quakers will hold a themed Meeting for Worship on the chosen theme of “hospitality”.

The idea of hospitality – the welcoming and entertaining of strangers – is found throughout the Bible. In chapter 18 of Genesis, for example, we hear about Abraham welcoming three strangers and offering them rest and food; the strangers foretell the birth of Isaac and the beginning of the tribes of Israel. The gospels include a number of stories of Jesus being offered hospitality, often by those whom the conventional citizens of the day saw as outcasts.



And in chapter 25 of Matthew’s gospel, Jesus places hospitality at the centre of life:

“Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” (Matthew 25:34-35).

Hospitality was essential for early Christians: as they travelled, they needed places to stay, and the homes of other Christians were often the only places they could get a bed and a meal. Nowadays, there is a large “hospitality industry” which will offer you accommodation and food, but many are spiritual nomads: living in what Catholic writer Henri Nouwen called “a world of strangers”. In such a world, Nouwen argued, hospitality is vital. But for Nouwen, hospitality is the creation of a free space where strangers become friends. Offering hospitality, he wrote is not done to change people, “but to offer them space where change can take place”.

In her book *Christianity for the Rest of Us*, American writer Diana Butler Bass says “hospitality, a radically biblical and democratic practice, opens the way for all people to be the same under God, part of the same family, welcomed for who they are in all their uniqueness”. In many ways this echoes the Quaker view that there is “that of God” in all of us. And this means that it is not just “strangers” – people who visit us – to whom we offer hospitality: all should be welcomed for who they are and what they give, including those we see week after week. Hospitality has to be for everyone.

Advices & queries 18 says “How can we make the meeting a community in which each person is accepted and nurtured, and strangers are welcome? Seek to know one another in the things which are eternal, bear the burden of each other’s failings and pray for one another. As we enter with tender sympathy into the joys and sorrows of each other’s lives, ready to give help and receive it, our meeting can be a channel for God’s love and forgiveness.”

Hospitality is something done rather than talked about. Diana Butler Bass shares stories of hospitality: of how people accept Rick, who struggles with addiction, and how she watched as “three black-clad teenage girls with pierced noses and Goth makeup approach an elderly woman in a wheelchair. One by one, they lean down, kiss the woman on the cheek and ask her how she’s doing”.

At our themed Meeting for Worship we will start the Meeting as usual in silence. Then, after about twenty minutes, you are invited to make a contribution on the theme of “hospitality”. This could be a reading which you have brought to Meeting, a reading you select from the books on the table, or thoughts of your own. You don’t have to speak if you don’t want to, but all contributions will be welcome.

Lunch for the homeless



Lunches for the homeless and those being supported by The Link project in Stratford will be taking a summer break, but they are likely to continue in the autumn.

Peter Horrocks from the United Reform Church, which hosts the lunches, reported to the Annual General Meeting of Stratford Churches Together that the numbers coming to the lunches remain fairly constant, and support from churches in the town remained strong. He said that feedback from those who came to the meals was positive: it was not just the chance to get warm food but also the social contacts with others that they valued. Arnrud Wood continues to organise the contribution of Stratford Quakers.

Area Day – Saturday 7 July

The Area Meeting at Sibford on Saturday 7 July will be a gathering with a difference. The focus will be creating and doing things together. The day starts with coffee at 10.30 and finishes with tea at 3.30 – but you can join or leave at any time.

During the day there will be opportunities to walk the local area, have a go at crafts and arts, visit a local farm and listen to music. We also hope to have a video of this year’s Swarthmore lecture (which looked at Quakers and the arts) as well as opportunities for discussions on topics of your

choice. There will be a shared lunch at 1.00 – bring some food to share – and refreshments throughout the day. For more information and to offer or seek lifts, contact Roger Matthews on 01789 298503 or by e-mail at roger.matthews@phonecoop.coop.

Listening ...

Listening will be the topic of the Kindlers-on-the-Road workshop taking place in Stratford Quakers Meeting House on Saturday 21 July between 10.00 and 4.00.



“Take heed, dear Friends, to the prompting of love and truth in your hearts,” says the first of our *Advices & queries*. The idea of “taking heed”, listening, is central to Quaker experience of God and worship. But how do we go about listening? How do we listen when our minds are too often distracted? And how do we listen to others and try to hear the spirit in which they speak?

The Kindlers workshop will be exploring these ideas in a variety of creative ways. This will be the third Kindlers-on-the Road workshop which we have hosted in Stratford, and we have found on previous visits that these occasions present us with new ways of thinking and new ways of exploring ourselves and our faith. We each go away changed in some way.

The workshop will start with coffee and biscuits at 10.00 and finish around 4.00. Bring a contribution to a shared lunch. There will be a voluntary contribution towards costs. To book your place or for more information, contact Roger Matthews on 01789 298503 roger.matthews@phonecoop.coop.

Be Peace and Justice

During June many of Richard Rohr’s meditations have focused on various aspects of “justice” – how we should live if we are genuine followers of Jesus. On Sunday 17 June he wrote: “Jesus’ basic justice agenda was simple living, humility, and love of neighbor. We all have to live this way ourselves. From that position, God can do God’s work rather easily.” The following day, he explored this in more detail, in terms that will resonate with Quakers.

“ ... Christianity has strayed from Jesus’ vision of justice, even though his teaching was crystal clear. Francis (1182-1226) and Clare (1194-1253) of Assisi understood his message and modeled a similar agenda: a simple lifestyle outside the system of production and consumption (the real meaning of the vow of poverty) and conscious identification with the marginalized of society (the communion of saints pushed to its outer edge). In this position, we do not “do” acts of peace and justice as much as our lifestyle itself is peace and justice. Think about that.

“By “living on the edge of the inside” I mean building on the solid Tradition (“from the inside”) but doing it from a new and creative stance where you cannot be co-opted (“on the edge”) for purposes of security, possessions, or the illusions of power. Today, many of us try to find personal and individual freedom even as we remain inside a system of consumption that we are unable or unwilling to critique. *We cannot remove the plank on which we are standing.* Evil tends to hide even more in systems and institutions than in individuals.

“The way of radical Christianity is to stay outside of such systems—insofar as possible—so they cannot control our breadth of thinking, feeling, loving, and living out universal justice. We can only re-enter them from this new place of inner freedom. This has seldom been taught, and thus most of us are on bended knee to and co-dependent with almost all public institutions.

“We lost our unique and prophetic way when we turned Jesus into a chummy best friend and Brother Francis into “Saint Francis,” and it was no longer considered foolish to say that you followed Jesus or Francis. A prophet’s lifestyle is never fashionable or safe.



“When you agree to live simply, you do not consider the refugee, the homeless person, or the foreigner as a threat or competition. You have chosen their marginal state for yourself—freely and consciously becoming “visitors and pilgrims” in this world, as Francis put it (quoting 1 Peter 2:11). A simple lifestyle is an act of solidarity with the way most people have lived since the beginnings of humanity.

“As I’ve said many times, “the best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better.” This approach guards against the most common criticism of religion in general and social-justice work in particular, which, frankly, has tended to produce many negative, oppositional, and judgmental people—from reactionary conservatives to limousine liberals.

“We must move to the laboratory where radical change can occur—inside of our very mind, heart, and the cells of our body. Contemplative practice rewires our inner life, giving us a kind of “emotional sobriety.” It opens us to an inner sense of divine union so we can do the needed works of justice with peace and enduring passion.

“Our spirituality forms our inner lives and is then lived outwardly in the world, which is to live a life of love and justice for others. True contemplation must become action.”

Study Group

July’s Study Group meeting will be a week later than usual on Tuesday 24 July to avoid a clash with the meeting of the Stratford Inter-faith Forum.



In June’s Study Group meeting we continued our reading of the Sermon on the Mount, which we started in March. We explored thinking about prayer, including looking again at the *Lord’s Prayer*, as well as discussing attitudes to money and material possessions.

In July we will continue from the beginning of Matthew Chapter 7. Topics ahead of us include judging others, asking and seeking, the narrow and wide gates, and the parable of the wise and foolish house builders.

As we come to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the question arises: what shall we study next? Over the past year or so, we have looked at different parts of the Bible as well as other texts. And, of course, we can select a topic to discuss without having reading to go with it. If you have suggestions for Study Group meetings in the autumn, contact Roger at roger.matthews@phonecoop.coop or on 01789 298503.