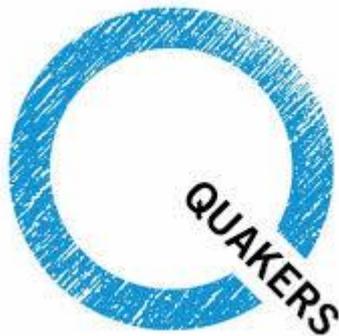


Stratford-upon-Avon Quaker Meeting

Diary: May 2018



Newsletter – May 2018

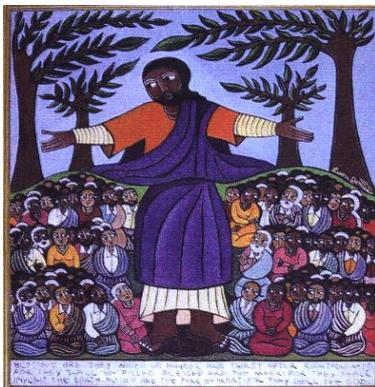
Sunday 6 May	Preparative Meeting – 11.15 am after Meeting for Worship
Saturday 12 May	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Sunday 13 May	Area Meeting – 2.00 pm, Ettington Meeting House
Tuesday 15 May	Study Group – 7.30 pm, Stratford Meeting House
Tuesday 22 May	Stratford Interfaith Forum – 7.30 pm, Stratford Meeting House
Saturday 26 May	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House

The path of transformation

The monthly Study Group will meet again on Tuesday 15 May to continue our exploration of the Sermon on the Mount. So far we have discussed the Beatitudes and the call to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” – that’s just the first 16 verses of Matthew Chapter 5!

The long middle part of the Sermon on the Mount consists of fourteen sections in which Jesus first describes the attitude of traditional piety or conventional wisdom to an issue. Then Jesus sets out the problem with this way of thinking – how it falls short or causes further problems. Finally, Jesus proposes a new approach, a transforming initiative. These are described in the table circulated separately for use at the Study Group.

But before this starts, Jesus describes briefly his overall approach to the teaching of the Jewish Law. “Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law,” he says (Matthew 5:17). “I have come not to abolish but to complete”. And he concludes: “Your virtue must go deeper than the scribes or Pharisees or you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20).



Franciscan writer Richard Rohr argues that Jesus is seeking a balance between traditional views, which can be narrow, unthinking and exclusive, and a deeper, personally transforming and inclusive attitude to problems. Traditional views can provide a sense of boundaries, and these can give people a strong sense of identity and community. But such views can also lead to injustice and a formulaic approach to issues: simply checking the rules. On the other hand, inclusive attitudes can be welcoming and fair to all, but a lack of boundaries can lead to a loss of identity and a sense of betrayal. “Wisdom is knowing how to hold inclusion and exclusion in ideal tension,” says Rohr.

So as he moves into his concrete analysis of the Mosaic Law (Matthew 5:21-7:11), Jesus tries to set out how this tension can be managed. Much of what Jesus says here has often been written off as

high-minded idealism – or as lines to follow in your private life. But in setting out a “third way” – a transforming initiative – Jesus offers ideas that can be realised in day-to-day life.

The Study Group will have much to choose from when it meets in May. One or more of the fourteen sections discussing different issues will provide much to ponder. And we can also consider the general questions about the value of rules and boundaries and about thinking in deep and transformative ways about specific problems.

Dorothea Abbott

Our Friend Dorothea Abbott has died. She was 97.

Dorothea was born in Birmingham in 1920 to a father who was an electrical engineer and a mother who worked as a librarian. She inherited her love for books from her mother and began working in a library while still at school.

In 1942, being a conscientious objector, Dorothea chose to join the land army. Despite the hard work, she stayed in the land army until August 1946, longer than her library friends who joined other auxiliary services. Dorothea’s first posting was to Pillerton Hershey, and although spare time was rare, she would visit Stratford-upon-Avon to see plays at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

After the war, Dorothea returned to working as a librarian in Birmingham. She retired to Stratford-upon-Avon in the early 1980s, when she wrote a couple of books: *Librarian in the Land Army* and *Up, the Maiden Aunts*.

Dorothea joined Quakers as a young woman, and she was a member of the Meeting in Stratford when it used to meet in Geraldine Cadbury’s sitting room – before its conversion to the Meeting House. Barbara Roberts says: “She was friends with the Quaker healer Jim Pym, and was very interested in the Quaker Healing ministry, always supporting those in need of upholding and prayer, including myself for several years.” At this time, Dorothea has a Jack Russell terrier which she used to bring to meetings and it would sit on her lap during worship.

In recent years, Dorothea has attended Meetings less frequently, but every month she would discuss the Stratford Quaker newsletter with her friend and neighbour, Nancie Godwin, who would pass on Dorothea’s comments about specific articles.

According to Dorothea, the most valuable lesson she learned during her time in the land army was to understand people with whom she had previously not mixed before and to look at food with more respect, which is reflected in a verse written for a special land army Christmas card in 1944.

*“Be gentle when you touch bread,
Let it not lie uncared for, unwanted,
Too often bread is taken for granted.
There is such beauty in bread,
Beauty of sun and soil,
Beauty of patient toil,
Wind and rain have caressed it,
Christ often blessed it.
Be gentle when you touch bread.”*



Love endures

Franciscan writer Richard Rohr occasionally features others in his daily meditation. This post is from religious writer Cynthia Bourgeault, and is taken from a piece she wrote for her daughter's wedding.

"It's easy to look at marriage as the culmination of love—the end point of the journey that begins with "falling in love." . . . [But] marriage is not the culmination of love, but only the beginning. Love remains and deepens, but its form changes. Or, more accurately, it renews itself in a different way. Less and less does it draw its waters from the old springs of romance, and you should not worry if over time these dimensions fade or are seen less frequently. More and more, love draws its replenishment from love itself: from the practice of conscious love, expressed in your mutual servanthood to one another. . . .



"It will transform your lives and through its power in your own lives will reach out to touch the world. . . . But how to stay in touch with that power? At those times when stress mounts and romance seems far away, how do you practice that conscious love that will renew itself and renew your relationship? . . .

"Here is the one [practice] that works for me . . . : *Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things* (1 Corinthians 13:7).

"Love bears all things. This does not mean a dreary sort of putting-up-with or victimization. There are two meanings of the word *bear*, and they both apply. The first means "to hold up, to sustain"—like a bearing wall, which carries the weight of the house. . . . *To bear* [also] means "to give birth, to be fruitful." So love is that which in any situation is the most life-giving and fruitful.

"Love believes all things. [This] does not mean to be gullible, to refuse to face up to the truth. Rather, it means that in every possible circumstance of life, there is . . . a way of perceiving that leads to cynicism and divisiveness, a closing off of possibility; and there is a way that leads to higher faith and love, to a higher and more fruitful outcome. To "believe all things" means always to orient yourselves toward the highest possible outcome in any situation and strive for its actualization.

"Love hopes all things. . . . In the practice of conscious love you begin to discover . . . a hope that is related not to outcome but to a wellspring . . . a source of strength that wells up from deep within you independent of all outcomes. . . . It is a hope that can never be taken away from you because it is love itself working in you, conferring the strength to stay present to that "highest possible outcome" that can be believed and aspired to.

"Finally, *Love endures all things.* . . . Everything that is tough and brittle shatters; everything that is cynical rots. The only way to endure is to forgive, over and over, to give back that openness and possibility for new beginning which is the very essence of love itself. And in such a way love comes full circle and can fully "sustain and make fruitful," and the cycle begins again, at a deeper place. And conscious love deepens and becomes more and more rooted."

Sanctuary Everywhere

Annid Wood recently attended a Quaker weekend conference "Sanctuary Everywhere Skillshare" on behalf of Stratford Quakers. She writes:

Stratford is one of over 60 Sanctuary Meetings. As a Sanctuary Meeting we are committed to

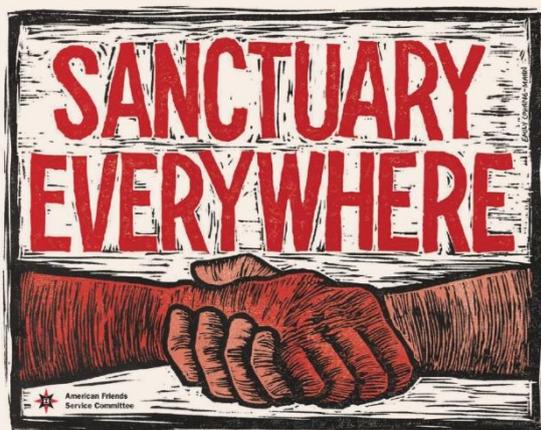
- Joining local initiatives to build a culture of welcome
- Building alliances with groups opposing racism
- Working with others to change laws on destitution, detention, deportations and removals

The conference dealt at length with racism, hidden racism and institutional racism. As always at these affairs, the best bit was chatting to other people about what they do in their Meetings to build that “culture of welcome”. Almost nothing was said about the last point, working to change unjust laws.

Some Sanctuary Facts ...

- Over 65 million people around the globe have been forced to flee their homes in recent years – that's the equivalent of the entire British population having to leave their homes
- There were 30,603 asylum applications to the UK in 2016. But Britain is not Europe's top recipient of asylum applications. Only around 3% of asylum applications to the EU are to Britain
- The UK Government has the power to detain people who are here seeking refuge. In the year ending September 2016, 29,762 people were imprisoned without charge in immigration detention centres - among them, many people seeking asylum. Some 43% were eventually released back into the community, rendering their detention pointless
- Almost all people in the asylum system are not allowed to work and are forced to rely on state support – this can be as little as £5 a day to live on. Some get no financial support at all and are forced into homelessness. This includes heavily pregnant women
- The top five countries of origin of people applying for asylum in Britain are: Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Syria (Refugee Council)

I came away with a feeling of helplessness at the size of the problem, yet a sense that as Quakers we need to do something. Should we be getting involved in direct action to resist deportation? Should we be trying to find out what is happening in Yarl's Wood (not so very far away from us) and other detention centres? Could we link up with city-based groups to offer short breaks to sanctuary seekers? Or what?



In Stratford, Welcome Here does a wonderful job welcoming Syrian refugees to our town – and Stratford Quakers are strong supporters of Welcome Here. But is that enough? In my view, the refugee problem is the second biggest global challenge of our time (after climate change). Any thoughts or ideas?

Arnrud also recommends reading the book *Lampedusa* by Pietro Bartolo and Lidia Tilotta – a doctor's harrowing account of the boats of migrants coming into Lampedusa, an entry point to Europe for those fleeing from the coast of North Africa. It'll be in our library soon.