



Newsletter – September 2018

Sunday 2 September	Preparative Meeting – 11.15 after Meeting for Worship
Saturday 8 September	Experiment with Light – 10.00, Stratford Meeting House
Sunday 9 September	Area Meeting – Evesham Meeting House, 2.00
Tuesday 18 September	Stratford Inter-Faith Forum, Stratford Meeting House, 7.30
Friday 21 September	UN International Day of Peace, St Edmund's Church, Shiston- on-Stour, 11.30 – 1.00
Saturday 22 September	Experiment with Light – 10.00, Stratford Meeting House
Tuesday 25 September	Study Group, Stratford Meeting House, 7.30
Sunday 30 September	Themed Meeting for Worship, 10.30

Family and friends

On Sunday 30 September Stratford Quakers will hold a themed Meeting for Worship on the chosen theme of “friends and family”. That Sunday will also be the first day of Quaker Week 2018, so it will be an excellent opportunity to invite friends and family to come to the Meeting to share their own experience and thoughts.



Family and friends are, of course, those we are closest to, the ones who know us intimately and whom we know as well. Although some family relationships can be dysfunctional, they are usually our richest examples of love. For Quakers, the word “Friend” is especially important: our official title, the Religious Society of Friends, puts friendship at the heart of our lives together.

Advices & Queries poses relevant questions. “Do you cherish your friendships, so that they grow in depth and understanding and mutual respect?” asks A&Q 21. And A&Q 26 asks: “Do you recognise the needs and gifts of each member of your family and household, not forgetting your own?”

Yet we also find differing views of family presented by Jesus. According to Matthew, when someone told Jesus that his mother and brothers wanted to speak with him, he replied: “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (12:48-50). And in his most famous prayer, Jesus calls God “Father” – using a family relationship to express his view of our relationship with God.

What do friends and family mean for you? At a themed Meeting for Worship we start the Meeting as usual in silence. Then, after about twenty minutes, everyone is invited to make a contribution on the theme. This could be a reading brought to the Meeting, a reading selected from the books on the table, or thoughts of your own. After each contribution we allow some time of silence to reflect on and absorb what we have heard. You don't have to speak if you don't want to, but all contributions will be welcome.

The Good Samaritan

Over the next three months, the monthly Study Group will be looking at some of Jesus's well-known parables. We start in September with *The Good Samaritan*.

The Good Samaritan is probably the best-known of Jesus's parables. It appears in Luke's gospel (10: 30-35). A man was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by thieves and left for dead at the side of the road. First a priest and then a Levite (another Jewish religious role) came and passed by the man. Finally, a Samaritan saw him, gave him first aid, and putting the injured man on his animal, carried him to a nearby inn. Here the Samaritan left the injured man, giving the innkeeper money to look after him until he recovered.

Although not stated in the story, it is implied that the man is Jewish, and so he does not receive help from his fellow Jews (the priest and the Levite) but from a Samaritan – a group generally disliked and despised by the Jews of the time because of religious differences. It's easy to see why "a good Samaritan" is now used to describe someone giving help unselfishly to another, usually someone with whom they have no connection.



However, the story of the Good Samaritan is embedded in another story (Luke 10: 25-29, 36-37). Here a lawyer asks Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life? Jesus approves the lawyer's own suggestion: love God and love your neighbour as yourself. "But who is my neighbour?" asks the lawyer. Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan in reply, asking "which of the three was the neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

Now let us imagine the story told a different way. A Samaritan was travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by thieves. First a priest and then a Levite came by and left him by the side of the road. Finally, an ordinary Jew came on the man, gave him first aid and carried him to the nearest inn, where he left him to recover, promising to pay the innkeeper the costs.

Why did Jesus not tell the story this way? The lawyer to whom he is telling the story would probably see himself as the ordinary Jew; the implication is that "his neighbour" is anyone – even a despised Samaritan – who needs help. The neighbour is "the one who showed him mercy", as the lawyer himself puts it. The message is very clear: as we go through life, our neighbour, the one we must love, is whoever needs our help.

Yet this is not how Jesus told the story. In his version, the general implication that we should help those who needs our help remains – but there is an extra twist. How will the lawyer see himself in the story? If he is the ordinary Jew, then he is the man who is attacked by thieves. He is not the one helping but the one helped. And the person helping him is ... a Samaritan.

When we are giving help, it is easy to feel superior, and there is a similar temptation to feel inferior when we receive help. So in the alternative version of the parable, the lawyer could feel good about helping a Samaritan: it showed that he could rise above his prejudices to be a good neighbour and a good Jew. But the way Jesus tells the story, the Jewish man receives help from someone he might otherwise disregard. He has to see the person helping him not as a member of an antagonistic group but as another human being, who is responding to him and his needs as another human being. Jesus shows that it is not merely through the giving of help but through the radical equality of humanity that we understand who is our neighbour.

There is so much to reflect on in this parable. Come to the Study Group on Tuesday 25 September to add your thoughts and insights.

Making Ethical Decisions in Good Faith

At its last meeting, the Stratford Inter-Faith Forum heard from Rehanah Sadiq about some of the ethical dilemmas she encountered as a Muslim hospital chaplain. The Forum is following up this theme by asking how people of faith use ancient texts to guide them in modern ethical issues. Christians have changed their minds over many matters during the centuries, such as slavery, capital punishment and democracy. What about today's questions?

Christopher Lamb will lead the discussion at September's meeting, which will take place at Stratford Quaker Meeting House on Tuesday 18 September. Come at 7 pm for some refreshments before the start of the meeting at 7.30 pm.

UN International Day of Peace

This year the UN International Day of Peace will be Friday 21 September, and local Quakers will be marking the day with a space for peace in St Edmund's church in Shipston-on-Stour.



People are being invited to come to the church any time between 11.30 and 1.00 to participate for any length of time in reflection and prayer for peace and reconciliation in the world. Children will be welcome and light refreshments available.

If you would like to go but don't have transport or if you could provide a lift to someone from Stratford, please contact Roger Matthews on 01789 298503.

Uprooted

Two-thirds of people forced from their home are still living in their own country. Seeking safety but unwilling or unable to leave, they are denied the official protection given to refugees – those who have crossed an international boundary. The reasons for their displacement are many: conflict, flooding, drought, fear. Torn from their homes, their families and their communities, internally displaced people are among the most vulnerable to poverty and exploitation in the world.

This year Christian Aid is focusing on the plight of the 40 million Internally Displaced People in the world. Internally Displaced People are a generally forgotten group, which is why Christian Aid has

chosen to highlight their situation. A travelling exhibition about the issue was launched in Warwick at the end of February, and it will be in Stratford, at Holy Trinity Church, from Tuesday 11 September to Thursday 13 September.



Uprooted is a photo exhibition which tells the stories of people displaced in Nigeria, Kenya and Iraq. September is a key date internationally for the issue of Internally Displaced People because the United Nations will be discussing two compacts – on Migration and on Refugees – which will cover many of the key issues.

Falmata Bulama fled the terror of Boko Haram. Now she and her children live in a makeshift community outside Maiduguri, Nigeria

Stratford Quakers have been helping to organise the visit of the exhibition to Stratford, and if you would like to help during the visit by spending an hour or two with the exhibition and answering questions (briefing provided!) – contact Roger Matthews on 01789 298503.

Lunch for the homeless



Lunches for the homeless and those being supported by The Link project in Stratford have taken a summer break, but they restart in September.

The United Reform Church in Rother Street will continue to host the lunches. Feedback from those who come to the meals has been positive: it was not just the chance to get warm food but also the social contacts with others that they value.

Arnridd Wood continues to organise the contribution of Stratford Quakers, and our first lunch in the autumn will be on Sunday 9 September. If you would like to help then, or think you could do so at a later date, contact Arnridd on 01789 414743.

Lessons from other religions

During August Richard Rohr's daily meditations have explored the ideas and lessons that we might find in a range of religious traditions. Starting with indigenous spirituality, he has also looked at Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism.

On Friday 10 August, he told a story from his own time as a young priest. "In 1969 when I was a young deacon in Acoma Pueblo [New Mexico], one of my jobs was to take the census. Because it was summer and hot, I would start early in the morning, driving my little orange truck to each residence. Invariably at sunrise, I would see a mother outside the door of her home, with her children standing beside her. She and the children would be reaching out with both hands uplifted to "scoop" up the new day and then "pour" it over their heads and bodies as if in blessing. I would sit in my truck until they were finished, thinking how silly it was of us Franciscans to think we brought religion to New Mexico 400 years ago!"