

07/27/2019

To Friends everywhere,

And Jesus said, "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, Go and do likewise." Luke 10:36-7

Greetings from Iowa Yearly Meeting Conservative as we gather for our 142nd annual sessions held at Scattergood School and Farm, near West Branch, Iowa. We have been blessed with unseasonably cool and gentle weather during this year's annual sessions.

As in past years, we have gathered for worship, tended to the business of Yearly Meeting, attended Bible studies and interest groups, browsed and perhaps spent more than we intended at the Yearly Meeting book table, and received of the Spirit from those offering evening Collection. Whether sitting on the deck beneath the giant maple in front of the entrance to the school's Main, taking long walks together on the campus grounds, or talking as we wash pots and pans, we have enjoyed the deep fellowship and *Opportunities*, as earlier Friends would say, "to know each other in that which is eternal."

Once again, we have felt in unity with Friends around the world (as we learned in epistles from other yearly meetings) and with Friends across the ages (as we have learned by reading materials and hearing about the lives of early Friends) in experiencing both the power of the Holy One's Love and the challenges bestowed on us as *Friends of Jesus*, to live more fully into that Love.

We ask, "What can we, as a small yearly meeting, as monthly meetings, or as individual Friends, do to even begin to make a difference in this hurting world?" In committee meetings, during business sessions, and through interest groups and Collection presenters, we began hearing and feeling the Spirit of God teach us via accompaniment with each other.

This year the theme of annual sessions has been *Accompaniment and Giving Voice*.

He hath shewed thee what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? Micah 6:8 (KJV)

Evening Collection presenters shared how God and Spirit have accompanied them in various parts of their lives. Two former clerks of IYM(C) shared personal examples showing why they came to love the Religious Society of Friends and meeting for worship with attention to business. Each shared how their preceding clerk helped prepare them by sharing that the key to good clerking is to trust the Body.

The work of the clerk is to help keep the Body centered so all have the best opportunity to recognize and hear *that still, small Voice of God*. (1 Kings 19:11-13 KJV) As we worship with attention to business and consider the business of the meeting, the Spirit accompanies us and we also accompany each other. The former clerks provided opportunity for others to share their profound experiences during meeting for business. It was good to remember how wonderful meeting for business can be when we remain intentional, and the clerks and body work together to discern God's will. They concluded with a reminder that no matter how good we get at holding meetings for worship with attention to business, it will be for naught if we do not approach all we do in the Spirit of Love.

When asked by an expert in the Law, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan. (*Luke 10:25-37*) In the parable, it was the Samaritan who aided the injured man, not the two religious leaders who passed him by. In another Collection, we were helped to examine the challenges of learning an anti-racist approach to bridging racial divides so prevalent in our society. We recognized that we are often comfortable with the current race-relations status quo. We were reminded of a quote by James Baldwin, "Not everything that is faced can be changed. But nothing can be changed until it is faced." We learned that we need to develop an understanding and acceptance of our role in oppression. Working on ourselves, we might ask, "How am I colluding with oppression?" and "How are the words I choose and my personal choices furthering the oppression of other racial, economic, or ideologic groups?" We were encouraged to seek, follow our calling, and participate in and/or create community actions for justice and equality. We began learning about both accompanying and giving space for others to share voice.

Another Collection presenter pointed out that we are called not only to accompany and give voice to other people, but also the animals that share in our lives and planet. She shared about her life-long experience of finding spiritual connection in accompaniment, first with horses in her youth, next by learning an integrated training in healing massage for injured horses, and most recently how to accompany and give voice to those who are dying. She tenderly shared her very personal experience of being present and holding sacred space in accompanying her mother as she declined and passed. Though difficult at times, it was a tender, loving and enlightening experience, instructing her in a new appreciation of the Spirit-filled, life-death journey that we all walk.

The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside still waters. He restoreth my soul. Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil for Thou art with me." Psalms 23: 1-4 (KJV)

Yet another Collection presenter helped us focus on being aware of Spirit in our lives both in joyous and difficult times. She courageously shared through song and stories how the Spirit has been present in her life and how that has led her to help others by studying and becoming a licensed acupuncturist.

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God... Psalms 100: 1-3 (KJV)

Spirit has moved among us and in us during the committee meetings and business sessions of IYMC. Of course, the reports of Scattergood Friends School and Farm Head of School, Farm manager, Yearly Meeting and Scattergood Trustees, and School Committee remain very important parts of Annual Sessions. We are gratified to learn the freshman and sophomore classes have been bigger than in the past several years. It continues to be our experience that by accompanying and giving voice in the manner of Friends practices, and in seeking to be present for staff, faculty, and students in Love, the work of the School, staff and students are our outreach to the wider world and will continue to be for years to come, beyond what we will ever know.

And finally, perhaps most precious to all of us, we found great joy in being accompanied in each of our times of worship by all members of our community from youngest to oldest. The accompaniment of our children gives us joy beyond joy; and giving them voice and the opportunity to recognize and listen to the voice of the Spirit in their hearts and recognize it in others as well, is our biggest responsibility.

In Loving Friendship and on behalf of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative),

Deborah Dakin, clerk

*Our Representatives Committee recommended as a first step in seeking to make Annual Sessions more accessible to a wider number of Friends that we shorten annual sessions by one day. Next year's sessions will be held, God willing, at Scattergood School & Farm near West Branch, Iowa from **Seventh Month 22 to 26, 2020.***