

Stan spoke of original Christianity giving us a great deal of food for thought to explore the concept of Christian faith in the now. In the dawn of Christianity there were only Christians, not Roman Catholics, not Lutherans, not Baptists, or any of the innumerable varieties and flavors that exist today. Tonight, we are drawn together by one of these forms, Quaker faith.

Now, a discussion focusing on the faith of the Religious Society of Friends would seem to be narrowing the discussion. But, I suggest to you that it does the opposite; it broadens the discussion beyond our religious society to all people of faith and perhaps, not only Christians.

What do I mean by this? Think about it for just one moment. What are the basic tenets of a denomination that traditionally rejects tenets? Underlying all Quaker thought is the premise that our faith is a direct contact between ourselves, individually, and God. It is a vibrant, living faith that thrives on daily experience of

our miraculous relationship with the Divine. This is something every person can experience whether Roman Catholic, Muslim, or whatever faith. It is an experience everyone can have.

Our faith has taken many divergent paths throughout history. The Religious Society of Friends has grown diverse and complex. The thread of discord has weaved its way throughout our shared history. Tonight, however, with all our diversity we come together; joined with the expressed purpose of celebrating the fact that regardless of eponymous form: Hicksite, Gurneyite, Wilburite-- we are Quaker. We share a history and we share a faith. Complex, though it may be—it is ours. It is meant to be shared.

The central message in all of Quakerdom is expressed in the words of George Fox through his personal revelation: “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,”. The core principle of our faith is the experience of the Light, Christ, the Inward Presence speaking. That voice expands our vision of God,

our vision of each other and our vision of our world. At the center of our faith is an encounter. How we achieve that experience, the methods and process that we go through to arrive are secondary to the fact that what we have is an experience with the One who speaks to our personal condition. Yes, our faith has its beginnings in Christianity. But, like the Early Friends understood, Christianity is meant to be lived, experienced, and embodied with the One who walks with us.

How many of us convinced Friends can remember our first encounter with a Quaker? Our introduction found a person who accepted us just as we were. There were no preconditions to be met, only that we be who we are. The atmosphere between us was one of welcome, love, and support. As we continued together with this Friend, we found a relationship that urged us to explore the means to hear the Inward Guide for ourselves. The expectation was we could and would hear. The pace in which we discovered

that voice was our own. As a result, our life changed. Isn't this what Jesus meant when he said, "Make disciples of all humanity."?

At the heart of Quaker faith is the endeavor to fulfill the core of Jesus' teachings: Love God with all that you have and love the other as yourself. (*The translation according to Annie Glen*) Too many of us have suffered from a faith that could not actualize this message. Thus, we come to the Religious Society of Friends broken, hurt, and bruised. Love drew us and love compels us to see the other as Christ see us.

Through the journey of Quaker faith we find the length and the breath of the love the Divine has for us. We enter into a conscious decision to be touched way down in our inner most being by the Spirit, healing all the despair, frustration, and damage we hold. Our vision of God expands to realize a loving, caring Presence desiring to be in close relationship with us. It is revealed through the process of inner hearing that there is nothing that can separate

us from that love. As a result, the truth that forms in us is that we are not creatures worthy of the disdain of the Almighty, but are vital, essential vessels that possess its Presence.

Our response is to share, to reciprocate this gift. Each person with whom our path intersects becomes an opportunity to hold a meeting for worship. It is our call to share that Presence with everyone. It is a big world out there with many people desiring a first hand encounter with the Creator. We see where God needs to be invited and we make it our cause to invite one person at a time to engage in that direct connection.

Our faith calls us, in the words of George Fox, to “be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever *we* come; that *our* carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then *we* will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone; whereby in them *we*

may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless *us.*” –

So, Friends, Quaker faith asks in your secret place deep within do you hear him calling? Do you hear the Divine urging you to follow? Do you see others in need of a revelation of the love you are experiencing? Can you hold them within your heart? And do you respond to their needs in love?

This is Quaker faith, personal and complex—a response to the Light that is within us. A faith to be shared.