

When we go through times when we are particularly aware of our differences

It is good to remember that we are not on opposing teams

We are on the same team

We serve the same God

We believe in the same Jesus

We are Quakers together

Sometimes, when we are particularly aware of our differences

It is good to stop and ask—how did we get on opposite sides of the table?

Do we not belong on the same side of the table?

Because, in fact, we have much that unites us

We gather as a people called to follow Jesus and live faithfully as followers of Jesus

We have experienced the presence of Christ in our midst

We know the transforming power of God that changes us

We have told stories of God's work and miracle in our lives

We have felt held by God at times when we didn't know way forward

We recognize that we are all ministers, released to live out our callings as we are Led

We encourage and support one another in the spiritual journey

We delight in reading and studying scripture, finding scripture instructive for our present lives

We are living in the Kingdom of God, united to others who also live out the Kingdom

While we have hope eternal, we see our focus on how to do Kingdom Living this side of heaven

We are companions and travel this "sod" together

We are Quakers

As Quakers we believe that we all have place at the gathered table

God speaks to every one of us and no one of us has greater access to God than another

But truth is that none of us hear the full and complete message perfectly—we all hear in part

Meaning that we each hold pieces of the truth about God's message

It is when we come together in community that we can assemble the whole truth

Which is why it is so important to be in spiritual community with gathered Listeners

But that only works if we stay together—committed to honoring every voice

Committing that we will each be willing to bring our piece

It is easy to assume that the disciples were of one heart and mind as they followed Jesus

Colin Saxton says that among those Jesus called to walk alongside him as disciples

were a zealot and a tax-collector, bitter enemies in that culture.

But they are together:

a wild-eyed political zealot hoping to reclaim Israel's land from the hated Romans

and a traitorous tax-collector, a Hebrew who had sold out to Rome in order to get rich

I'm sure Jesus may have had to sleep between those two some nights

Only by God's grace and peace could these two men come out walking arm-in-arm as brothers

able to put aside their own agendas and biases to find a unity that transcended their diversity

It is by God's grace and because we stand together as one in Christ that we stay together

I was struck this week by John Pattison's blog—member at Silverton Friends and author of *Slow Church*

We do have arguments in the Church—this side of heaven, we will never *all* agree on *everything*

Many of our disagreements are about small things, but some of them are about very big things

I used to think that the Church disagreed too much.
But lately I've been thinking that we disagree too little.
Or, more accurately, I'm starting to believe that having hard conversations
needs to be part of the day-in-day-out life of a Christian community.

God has called us together in a gathered community and we all need each other
We are not homogeneous any more than the disciples
We do have strong feelings and opinions, as well as Leadings from God
But as I said earlier—we need each other to Listen with us and gather the full picture

Community is not opposed to conflict—and conflict is not inherently bad
On the contrary,
community is precisely that place where an arena for creative conflict is protected
because of our greater commitment to love and walk together in compassion

Conflict is our teacher—it presents the opportunity to find a creative solution
It forces me to look beyond my obvious answer
It forces me to consider another possibility
We need practice in creative conflict resolution within the community
Where it is protected by the compassionate fabric of human caring

Having difficult conversations allows us to explore the questions before us more fully
It allows us to be honest and open, yet willing to hear another's view and understanding
We may not change our minds and come to agreement
But we are stronger for staying together and carrying the fullness of who God is among us
We are called to live together in reconciled diversity
Standing together in Christ with reconciled diversity

Some 10 years ago 2 women served on a YM task force and were on opposite sides of an issue
But after meeting together they became good friends—while still strongly disagreeing
The results of their work was to be presented to the floor of the YM
A third friend invited one of the two women to sit with her—but she replied...
I can't—I have to sit with my friend from our task force
because one of our hearts will be broken today

A friend said to me that "we need to keep looking down"—I was confused
But she explained that we stand with Jesus in our differences—as did the disciples
From this place of standing with Jesus, we are invited to see others as Jesus sees them
To see the world through the eyes of Jesus

There was great conflict within the early church—differences that ran strong and deep, separating them
They were tempted to cut one other off and divide—seeing the other as not worthy of Christ
We read in scripture multiple accounts of being called back into community, trusting God
Close by reading Romans 14:1-18a, 22a, 15:5-6 from the Message Bible

Let us all stand together in Christ with reconciled diversity and love