

Following Jon Kershner's message, "***On Mercy, Commitment, and Being Right: John Woolman's Way of Prophetic Non-Attachment,***" the community called North Seattle Friends Church responded from their own stories and journeys. The following responses are being shared as a sense of how we at North Seattle Friends Church people are trying to live out our call to faithfulness.

Jon's message is fantastic and his emphasis on process is right on to me. When I got the email from Lorraine about the Northwest Yearly Meeting Elders' decision, I was very distressed and really felt like I wanted to take a side. I was feeling stubborn that if I took a side and if that side was not honored, I was done with the church. I talked to Lorraine this week and looked at the website nwymunity.com. Their statement of appeal really touched me. I felt that the real Quaker way came out—true Quaker process came out in the way that the nwymunity.com stated their appeal and gave me a feeling of deeper understanding of what this is really about. It is not about an issue, it's about a process that Quakers model for the world. It's very unique and special. I'm feeling once again very grateful and proud to be in this community no matter what happens. Jon's message was right on. God touches us and moves us slowly in his direction.

I tend to think in images. As Jon was speaking I'm thinking of being a beacon of light walking down the street with my little flashlight. I got to thinking that people who think differently, think that they are also being a beacon of light for their side. With Jon's help I am learning to say we need to just love and let God shower his love on us and we'll work it out together.

Sometimes I like to boil things down to ideas I can "hold in the palm of my hand" for daily decisions. And one of the ways I'm finding that is helpful to live more fully into what I think Jesus said—and what John Woolman lived—is to realize that there is something really poisonous about pushing things because we think I am right. What matters is to be faithful. To be faithful to that inward sense whether it's right or wrong, whether I get it or not. But if I'm faithful in humility and hold all others in love, the movement of the Spirit can act, fix, transform, cover whatever needs to be done. So my hold-in-my-hand piece is giving up my security and power of thinking/knowing I am right.

Thank you to the prophets of our time, because our yearly meeting has people like John Woolman. For the guts, the courage, and the faithfulness that is happening in our time and in our century... thank you.

I'm grateful that God has not given up on me. I'm grateful that God didn't give up on the 12 apostles and down through history that he did not give up on Quakers in John Woolman's time. I'm so thankful and grateful that he is speaking to us and speaking to me. Thank you Lord, for your mercy and your grace that is extended to us right now.

I have a long running history with a particular church. Friends Memorial was the name of the church where I grew up. I spent much of my elementary childhood running around every nook and cranny of that place. If I have a "best moment" feeling towards it, it is reflected in a moment when an elderly woman of the church let me rest my head on her lap. Many Sundays she would stroke my cheek and keep the hair out of my face. I felt peaceful and safe. I still carry with me the notion that falling asleep in a place of God is better than not attending worship at all.

Why is it important (in the Bible, in the Christian culture, in the life of my family) to attend church? Why is it worth staying in town on a nice weekend to sit with others?

I have learned lessons that would not have come my way without the years of knowing this bunch of people over time.

I would not have watched people wrestle with their hopes, struggles, changing realities. I would have missed seeing the glorious answer to the cries of their heart. If I had missed all that, my faith would be diminished. I wouldn't be as sure that God was faithful. I would have seen a snapshot, but missed the bigger story.

I watched as one woman stood before her faith community and literally cried every Sunday for years, as she poured out her pain & longing for the reconciliation of her family. Her vulnerability impressed me. Her perseverance was odd to me. Her radiant beauty of transformation could not be denied as she & her family healed. She became to me, a walking, smiling witness to the faithfulness of God!

I didn't always attend Friends Memorial as I became an adult. I returned decades later. I returned during a time of political change. President Bush had recently declared there was an "Axis of Evil". As a nation we were in conversation about war, terrorism and torture. We were embarking on our "Shock and Awe" strategy.

I really needed a community of faith that could handle the diversity of political opinion. I found it in Friends Memorial Church. It was OK to have varying thoughts, opinions, and fears as our nation was changing. Our congregation/meeting had the range of ex-military to ex-conscience objectors. People in our meeting had personal friendships with people in federal governmental affairs. We became adept at praying for those "on the other side" of us. Praying for our enemies, literally and figuratively. For those we were a part of causing suffering, damage & death... and for those who caused us suffering, damage and death. I would have missed out on knowing this type of caring was possible with this much diversity amongst a small body of believers. (Christ is everywhere, not just with us.)

Eventually Friends Memorial was lead to change its name. This process involved issues of identity and tradition. There were differing opinions and sacred cows as we worked through this name change idea. Again, it was a marker of how a community of faith can be sturdy enough to handle diversity. To hold diversity in love. To watch how love doesn't run over another's values or opinions. Somehow love does bind us together. Respect moves us along and lets us grow. Our new name is North Seattle Friends.

In the last bunch of years, communities of faith have been grappling with another area of diversity. Not political, or historical but this time sexual. North Seattle Friends, and many other meetings across the country, have been holding the conversation about human sexuality in all of its forms. Our meeting has the full range of diversity held amongst us. Yet we are not torn apart. Diversity can be held in a community of faith. This issue, as well as the issues before... and many I'm sure that will come after... do not need to cause separation. We are not meant to be the same; we are meant to be faithful. I am fortunate to have seen such faithfulness played out in many issues, over time. I have seen what can happen in vulnerability, in perseverance, in radiant beauty... all held in the committed trust of those who seek God's face.
