

While there are many diverse kinds of Quakers today—we all have the same heritage, same beginning  
Quakerism is a movement that began in England in the mid-1600s  
It was a time of huge political, social and religious unrest  
The religious argument centered around religious authority  
Catholics and the Church of England—center of worship was in the sacraments  
Puritans focused on Scripture alone and the center of worship is the sermon  
George Fox was a young man who was not satisfied with any religious expression  
None spoke to his condition  
He sought answers everywhere—both inside and outside the church  
Finally, he came to the end of his search and there had an encounter with Jesus  
*When all my hope in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, Oh then, I heard a voice which said, 'there is one, even Christ Jesus that can speak to thy condition,' and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.<sup>1</sup>*  
He knew that the only thing that mattered was this direct encounter with the Living God  
While George Fox didn't intend to start a new denomination, he knew this truth must be shared  
He began telling it everywhere—even correcting sermons in established churches  
Ultimately he had an encounter on Pendle Hill in 1652  
*...there atop of the hill I was moved to sound the day of the Lord; and the Lord let me see a-top of the hill in what places he had a great people to be gathered.<sup>2</sup>*  
This initiated an explosion that led to the formation of The Religious Society of Friends  
In the early days we were called Friends of Jesus  
They settled on the name Friends, taking it from Scripture in John 15:12-17  
The nickname Quaker was a pejorative term given to Friends  
Early Friends understood that God wants to speak to people so they gathered in silence to Listen  
They didn't need a priest, clergy, buildings, liturgy, or external sacraments  
Ministry rose up among them from the Listening in silence  
God spoke in powerful ways and they were faithful to share what they heard in silence

Today, as we saw, Quakers are all over the world  
We worship in very diverse ways—some cultural, some preference—all God centered  
Some gather in silence, as they did in the days of early Quakers, without pastor  
Others, like us, have a pastor, singing, and a message  
But we differ from most other churches...  
In that we see the center of worship as our time of Listening together  
We do that in two ways...  
God stories where we invite people to share the God movement  
Open worship where we Listen for God's direct message to us  
If so Led, we share that message out of the silence  
The prepared messages I bring—come out of my Leadings and experience  
But they are always held up for immediate redirection by God

The thing that set apart early Quakers from other religious groups, is still true today  
As a people, we all gather to Listen for the direct message from God  
This is true whether we are programmed or unprogrammed

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<sup>1</sup> Journal of George Fox, edited by John L Nickalls, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1995, page 11

<sup>2</sup> Journal of George Fox, edited by John L Nickalls, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1995, page 104

True whether a pastor has a message or not  
True whether we sing or not  
    We gather to Listen to God!  
Nothing is more important to us than hearing what God is saying in our midst  
    Therefore we make space for this Listening

The thing that drew me to this church was recognition that God is here and people know God  
God desires nothing more than to communicate directly with people  
    The amazing thing is that this communication is about all of life  
        God loves to show us spiritual truths, yes...  
        But God also loves to show us how to do very practical things—they matter too  
            Whether it be how to organize finances or do a home repair  
            We can simply ask God to show us way forward about anything in life  
            It is as simple as following the nudges as they come  
                And as wow as seeing the angels surround us  
The power of God's presence in this present moment of the eternal Now speaking to us is huge  
    George Fox's most common phrase: "The Power of the Lord is over all!"  
It is both personal and individual  
    And directed at the community as we are gathered  
As we Listen—we hear—and we follow the Leadings boldly!

In the words of early Quaker, Francis Howgill—which remain true for us today...

*"The Kingdom of Heaven did gather us and catch us all, as in a net, and God's heavenly power at one time drew many hundreds. We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in; and the Lord appeared daily to us.... And our hearts were knit unto the Lord and one another in true and fervent love, in the covenant of Life with God; and that was a strong obligation or bond upon all our spirits, which united us one unto another. We met together in the unity of the Spirit and of the bond of peace, treading down under our feet all reasoning about religion. And holy resolutions were kindled in our hearts as a fire—which the Life kindled in us—to serve the Lord while we had our being. And mightily did the Word of God grow among us and the desires of many were after the Name of the Lord. O happy day! O blessed day! And thus the Lord, in short, did form us to be a people for his praise in our generation."*