

A number of years ago as we prayed for two people going out to do ministry together
We were aware of the issues of tension between them
While they loved each other they had different ways of being in the world
As a result, there was tension between them that often rose sharply in ministry
In prayer, we were reminded that good tension is needed
When sewing, the tension on two threads is important
If one is too tight, it breaks
If one is too loose, it knots and bunches
Correct tension enables the machine to sew well

Put simply—voltage is electrical tension
We use electricity all the time, never thinking about the tension involved in creating it

Tension is a necessary function in our physical world

I've been drawn this week to the need to "do tension well"
It means staying together and being willing to live with the tension
Refusing to do the fight or flight thing
Laying down our tendency to avoid difficult topics by simply going silent
Choosing to stay in honest relationship with others

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

But it takes practice—and practice the world and the church doesn't give attention to
We're better when we stay together and hold our diversity
Way forward is much more complex and nuanced
But we must learn to stay present to the tension—seeing it as positive
Learning to find creative tension that moves us to a better place

The political world has given up on working together and prefers to divide and conquer
It is easy to slip into that mold ourselves
Quakers have divided many times over issues and we've lost
Current conflicts are so deeply felt that both sides call us to divide again

We feel that we're giving up our values and losing if we don't persist in pushing my leading
But in dividing we lose the tension—we lose our tether to the other side
Rather than become better, we drift further away

I think the world desperately needs to know that our differences don't need to destroy us

Parker Palmer talks about 5 habits of the heart that help make democracy possible

1. An understanding that we are all in this together
Despite our individualism and feeling of national superiority—we are one race
The human race doing life together on planet earth
We are interconnected
2. An appreciation of the value of “otherness”
The stranger has much to teach us
3. An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways
Tension well held, allows us to expand our thinking to new understandings
We have the capacity to use tension that comes with our limitations
To generate insight, energy, and new life
4. A sense of personal voice and agency
We are not spectators on the world's drama—we are actors
We must find our voices and learn how to speak them
5. A capacity to create community
It takes a village to raise a Rosa Parks—it took a village to translate her act to change
We need the courage of standing with a community to step out and follow Leadings

If we can model this as a church—we will be a gift to the world

I'm praying not only for them but also for those who will believe in me Because of them and their witness about me. The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind-- Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, so they might be one heart and mind with us. Then the world might believe that you, in fact, sent me. The same glory you gave me, I gave them, so they'll be as unified and together as we are-- I in them and you in me. Then they'll be mature in this oneness, and give the godless world evidence That you've sent me and loved them in the same way you've loved me.

John 17:20-23 MSG