

Exodus 3:2-6 - God spoke to Moses out of a burning bush, declaring that Moses stood on holy ground  
While never out of a burning bush—and never in an audible voice...

There are times when I recognize that I am on holy ground  
That God is present in a profound sense and that I'm in the midst of the Holy Presence  
I generally don't know when or where it will come  
This past week it came in the middle of the night  
On occasion it has been in the middle of gathered worship

As Quakers we take seriously this thing of gathering in the Presence of God, inviting God to speak to us  
Believing that God is here and that God is speaking—so we gather to Listen

There are times when the Speaking is so profound that we sense we are on Holy Ground  
That the experience of God is perceptible and felt  
It can come through human words—or through the deep silence  
Sometimes it is in multiple voices—sometimes personal, other times communal  
The sense that the “burning bush” has appeared in our midst and we are on Holy Ground is real

As Thomas Kelly suggests—such gathered meetings are times of group mysticism

Mysticism is centered in experience—the experience of the Presence of God

Jesus said, *“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” Matt 18:20*

In a gathered meeting there is a sense that a new Life and Power has entered our midst  
There is also a sense in which we are all held as a community in that Life and Power  
It is larger than me—or even two of us

It is gift from God—this sense that God has gathered us up into the Presence

Francis Howgill describes it this way, *“The Kingdom of Heaven did gather us and catch us all, as in a net... We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in...”*

Is there something we can do or are supposed to do in order to create opening for the Holy Ground?

In one sense... there is nothing we can do to cause God's imminence to be felt

It is God's free gift to us, given in love

On the other hand, coming to Meeting for worship, ready and anticipating God's Presence helps

For some to arrive with a sense of having been kindled prior to gathering with others

Then the flame spreads across the group, pulling others into the Presence of God

Those who gather and are already experiencing God's real Presence

Help those who enter worship, but are tangled, harried, or distraught, be able to center

So that all can enter into the Presence of God and hear God's message to all of us

Those who come pre-gathered and help us all settle and center—do their work invisibly

It isn't a look of rapt attention that we see and emulate

Nor is it the work of an assigned few—pastor, clerk, elder

It is an internal work of prayer and we are all called to it

It is “we” work in which we are called to lift up the group before God—holding us all

Holding us all up in the Presence of God—above that which distracts

Praying that Light will dispel the shadows

Being pre-gathered means a preceding preparation for worship—beginning at home and often in bed

To do the intentional work of being ready to gather with the community in worship

It is an invitation to live lives that are constantly centered in worship even while working/sleeping

Pay attention to those ways in which you feel yourself prepared to gather in worship

Notice and name the work you are doing to get ready to join in the community gathered

As we enter into the time set aside to gather together—knowing others will be here at this hour

We gather and hold each other up in prayer  
We expect God to speak to us—knowing that God is present and speaking  
We Listen deeply  
We become comfortable with silence and don't feel compelled to fill it with words  
We pay attention to the thoughts and nudges that come  
We are willing to risk that God can and will speak to me through these thoughts and nudges  
If a message comes, we are willing to share it publicly  
We are content to share what came without needing to finish or go beyond what was given  
    Trusting that if more is to be said—others will be given it  
    Or it may be that there are multiple endings and it will be finished in people's hearts  
As a person speaks, we listen—then we Listen with God for the deeper message

But what if a meeting has not been a gathered meeting? Are those meetings failures? Have we failed?

No  
Rather the question is... Have we been faithful?  
    If yes, it is enough  
    If we are faithful, we may go home content

As a gathered community, we learn that to be faithful is enough

That our life together will ebb and flow—there will be mountains and valleys  
    God is present in it all  
We do not forsake gathering together in worship because there isn't a "wow factor"  
Rather we are committed to the faithful gathering of God's people

*"The Kingdom of Heaven did gather us and catch us all, as in a net...  
We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in..."*