

Have reverence for Christ in your hearts, and honor him as Lord. Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect.

1 Peter 3:15-16a GNB

Last week we talked about holding space for people and how important it is
That rather than rush in to “fix” people or give them the answers we think they need
We stay present to them in their unfolding process and extend grace and compassion
That in holding space for others, we midwife their transformation
And ultimately, this holding space brings healing to the church
If we give up our judgment of others—which is not ours to do anyway
We sit with people and wait for God to show them the way
We notice what God is already doing and join the God movement

I think we do this well at North Seattle Friends Church

We hold space for people by...
By seeing that of God in others—noticing it
Being present to the life points in another’s life—giving Divine inattention to the broken
A lack of judgment towards others
Being patient with the process
Knowing God loves me even when I don’t Listen—I extend that same grace to others
The holding prayer—simply holding others in God’s hands without using words

But I got to thinking about how long are we to hold space and is there ever anything to do?

Sometimes we don’t hold enough space and we do something too soon—before people are ready
But is it also possible to wait too long?—to hold space until it becomes empty and void?
I wondered—Can space be held so long that it loses the invitation to the next piece?

George Fox wrote these words while in prison in 1656...

*"And this is the word of the Lord God to you all, and a charge to you all in the presence of the living God, be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, **answering that of God in every one**; whereby in them ye may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you. Then to the Lord God you will be a sweet savour and a blessing." George Fox, Journal from prison in 1656, page 263*

His words were that we are to answer that of God in everyone
What does it mean to answer people?

As Quakers, we value quietness and waiting for God to speak—whether in worship or personally
We understand that it is appropriate to hold space for people so that God can work
We have learned the truth that God is present and at work in the lives of everyone
Often, we simply hold the space so that they are free to receive what God is doing
There is huge value in that

But George Fox was not a quiet man—he spoke readily and preached whenever he felt called to do so
Even interrupting worship to bring a corrective to the sermon given by the priest
We have record of him speaking for 3 hours to a crowd

For Fox, a major task of a minister is that of “answering”

Elton Trueblood talks about it this way in *The People Called Quakers* (pages 36-37)

By answering, Fox meant that it is possible to nurture what God is doing

To bring to fulfillment the vague yearnings toward the Divine

Those vague yearnings are present in all people, but often unrecognized

As ministers, we are called to help make actual what is otherwise only potential

This is the work of all of us, since as Quakers we recognize that all are ministers

We are all called to ministry and to the priesthood of all believers

We are urged to **answer** “that of God in them all” even in our adversaries

Fox talked about the multiple ways of doing this as...

- Spreading the Truth abroad
- Awakening the witness
- Confounding deceit
- Gathering up out of transgression into life

He went on to say, *spare no place, spare not tongue nor pen;*

But be obedient to the Lord God and... be valiant for Truth upon earth

Given that Fox is writing these words from prison, it’s no surprise that he speaks of prisoners

That we must minister to the spirit that is transgressed and in prison

That they too have vague yearnings toward the Divine

We are called to nurture and answer that of God in them as well

We are to *bring all into the worship of God. Plough up the fallow ground.*

Once the ground is ploughed in a person’s life—God does the planting and watering

The consequence is this...

Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one; whereby in them ye may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you. Then to the Lord God you will be a sweet savour and a blessing.

Early Quakers were known as “Friends of Truth” and “Publishers of Truth”

Eric Muhr is the editor and publisher at Barclay Press - www.barclaypress.com

He asks if Quakers today are still Publishers of Truth –

<http://www.barclaypress.com/newsletter/2017/3/6/publishers-of-truth>

Elbert Russell writes in The History of Quakerism (1979) that “in the seven decades after 1653 there were 440 Quaker writers, who published 2,678 separate publications, varying from a single page tract to folios of nearly a thousand pages.”

And in Quakerism of the Future (1974), John Yungblut claims that the urgency of early Friends to write and publish makes sense: “If one has been visited by a direct sense of inward presence, he is driven to tell everyone who will listen to him.”

But more recent publishing efforts among Quakers, valuable though they may be, are missing two elements, according to Johan Maurer: “The first is the excitement and urgency of a movement that once believed it was bringing something new and crucial into the world, that lives and destinies depended on getting these new experiences and insights expressed persuasively.... The second missing element is the expectation of an external audience. [Today] we issue timid mating calls to try to attract people as much like ourselves as possible, and nobody else.”

Has our hesitancy to “answer” meant that we have lost our power as “publishers of truth”?