

Last week as we talked about Quaker Testimonies of integrity, simplicity, peace, and equality

I challenged us with these queries as I concluded my message

How is it that our commitment to the Christ Within bears fruit in our outward lives?

How do we “testify” to the truth of our inward experience?

What rose in our open worship time was the reminder to “Fear Not!”

I suggested that this was the North Seattle Friends Church testimony for today

I’ve been thinking about that phrase and the accompanying messages found in Scripture

It first came to us with the Christmas story and 4 times the angel said, “Fear Not!”

To Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, and the Shepherds

In every case the words “fear not!” came before the message

We are immediately given reassurance that God is with us

Then the angel tells them why he came—to tell of the birth of Jesus, the Messiah

46 times in Scripture, God’s message includes and generally begins with, “Fear Not!”

The first time we see the phrase in Scripture is in Genesis 15

“Fear not” precedes God establishing a covenant with Abram

Also, with Elijah’s promise to the widow that her flour and oil would not run out

And with promises that God would fight their battles

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”

To say, “Fear Not!” is an announcement of God’s divine presence with us—God is with us!

In this, we know that we are not alone—a reassurance that we can carry with us at all times

As I read through all of the passages where we are reminded to “Fear Not!” I was drawn to Acts 27-28

Paul is a prisoner and transferred to Rome by ship, when they encounter a bad storm

Things look bleak, when Paul says no one will lose their life, even though the ship will be lost

*“For last night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before the emperor; and indeed, God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you.’ So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we will have to run aground on some island.” Acts 27:23-26 NRSV*

I was struck by that last phrase: *But we will have to run aground on some island*

Indeed, the ship did wreck on a reef, but all made it to safety on the Island of Malta

I was impressed that the message of reassurance was actually for the people with Paul

A few years ago, I learned that God is not surprised by the things that upset our lives—e.g. coronavirus

In the midst of all of this, we remember the message that we are not to be afraid

Truth is that there will be some trouble—we may have to run aground on some island

But God is with us and we need not live afraid—instead we live by trusting God

We do, however, look fully at what’s happening and take full precautions and care necessary

Remember the 10 virgins—those with oil were prepared and ready to go with the bridegroom

We want to be prepared and ready—yet we live in trust, following our leadings and nudges

I think that message is not just for us—it is our Quaker testimony to the world

“Fear Not!” is our declaration both to ourselves individually and as a faith community

But also, to the world that our trust is in God who is with us and helps find way forward

*How are we called to declare our testimony to “Fear Not!” as the outward expression of our inward truth?*