



SHARING EXERCISE | Friendly Practices



Feather of Peace

Overview

A series of activities, across ages, that illustrate the spirit and transforming power of Quaker worship.



60 min.



All Ages



Newcomer Friendly

Aims & Objectives

When you have completed this topic, you will have considered the spirit and transforming power of Quaker worship by listening to a story of Friends from over 200 years ago.

Materials & Set-up

A copy of the “Feather of Peace” story.

Children’s/All Ages activities materials: construction paper, yarn, colored pencils or markers, tape, index cards or paper with the eighteen statements pre-written on them.

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Lighting Candles in the Dark, published by the Friends General Conference Education Committee (1992).



version 1

Instructions

A number of activities are described here. Each builds off the “Feather of Peace” story below. Choose one or two activities that best fit your group, or explore them all across several sessions.

Feather of Peace

The time was 1777, just a year after the Declaration of Independence had been signed. The 13 American colonies were fighting to win their freedom from powerful England.

For the settlers in Saratoga County, in the valley of the Hudson River north of Albany, it was a scary time. Both armies were camped not far away, and both of them were sending scouting parties through the valley nearly every day. Scouting parties were small groups of soldiers and guides. Besides trying to find out what the other army was up to, each scouting party was looking for food for the armies. They took whatever they could find, including grain, cows, sheep and pigs.

Most scary for the settlers was the fact that Indians were often used in the scouting parties because they knew the countryside so well. Most of the area was not settled yet and was pretty wild. The Indians were angry at the settlers for spoiling their hunting and for pushing them back from land they had always used. There were many stories of their torturing and killing settlers – and sometimes scalping them. And they spoke a different language, so it was hard to talk with them.

It got so dangerous for the settlers that their government finally said it could not protect them and they should all leave and go back East where it was safer. In that year, a whole family in the valley, the Allens, had been killed at their dinner table.

Most families did leave, but several Quaker families decided to stay. They had always gotten along well with the Indians, and they hated to leave their new farms. They had built a log meetinghouse just the year before, at what would later be called Easton.

So the Quakers watched all their neighbors load up what they could carry. Some had wagons; some went on horseback. Some used sledges dragged along the ground. Many more just fled on foot. Most of their possessions had to be left behind.

By September, only the Quaker families were left – the families of Zebulon Hoxsie and his brother-in-law, Rufus Hall, who had started their Meeting four years before, and a few other families who had come to join them. The nearest Quaker Meeting was another new Meeting nearly fifty miles away, at East Hoosack, Massachusetts.

Feather of Peace (cont.)

In the East Hoosack meeting was a young man named Robert Nesbit, who had come to America from Scotland eleven years before. After some time in Boston and Nova Scotia, he had come to East Hoosack, where he became a Friend and later a traveling minister. He was outspoken against slavery and consistently refused to wear anything made by slaves. He could speak both English and French.

One morning that September, Robert Nesbit woke up at four a.m. and felt a strong urge to visit the Easton Meeting for their midweek worship. It would mean walking through the wilderness alone for two whole days, but he started right out, and he got there in time. He sat next to Zebulon Hoxsie on the facing bench, and the Meeting settled into silence.

After a long, deep silence, Robert Nesbit stood up and gave a strange message. He said, "You did well, Friends, to stay on valiantly in your homes when your neighbors have fled. The report of your courage and faith has reached us in East Hoosack, and God has charged me to come on foot through the wilderness all these miles to meet with you today, and to bear to you these two messages:

*The beloved of God shall dwell in safety,
and He shall cover you with his feathers all the day long.
You shall not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for
the arrow that flieth by day.*

While the grownups were pondering these strange words, a little boy in the front row saw a head appear at a window; then another and another. They were Indians! The boy raised his arm to point at them, but his mother put down his arm, continuing her silent worship.

By this time, other worshipers had become aware of the visitors, but the silent worship continued. Robert Nesbit looked up and saw them and felt called to go out to talk to them. He rose quietly and walked down the aisle and out the open door.

Outside, he found a small group of Indians with a frightened young prisoner. The Indians were in full war paint and carried weapons. One had a dried-up scalp hanging from his belt. "Any weapons inside?" asked the leader in French.

"No, no weapons inside," answered Robert Nesbit promptly, speaking in French also. "We are worshiping the Great Spirit. Will you join us?"

Wary and suspicious, the leader moved to the door to see for himself and took a few steps inside. For what seemed like hours, he stood there, straight and still as a statue, his piercing eyes looking carefully at each

Feather of Peace (cont.)

man, but of course the Friends were totally unarmed – no guns, no swords, no knives. They were Indians! The boy raised his arm to point at them, but his mother put down his arm, continuing her silent worship.

During this time, most heads remained bowed in worship. But Zebulon Hoxsie, on the facing bench, was smiling a loving welcome. Finally, satisfied that there were no weapons, the Indian leader gave Zebulon Hoxsie a long, angry, scowling look, then slowly dropped his eyes. Love had won. Motioning to the others to follow him, he put his weapons against the wall, walked quietly to the center of the room and sat down on the floor. The others did likewise. The silence continued and deepened as the sunlight streamed through the open windows and Indians and Friends worshiped together in the little log room.

When the hour ended, Zebulon Hoxsie walked to the Indian leader and shook hands warmly with him. Though he could not speak French, he had no trouble using signs to invite the visitors to his home.

An earlier raiding party had taken most of his supplies, but he had been able to hide a round of cheese, and his wife had baked bread the day before. So he placed bread and cheese on the table and motioned to his guests to eat. They did so with obvious pleasure and thanked him with nods and smiles. The records say that they let their prisoner eat too, but do not make it clear whether they released him.

When they had finished, the leader said in broken English that they had come to kill. But when they found people worshiping the Great Spirit, with no guns or knives, the Great Spirit had told them not to kill these people.

Then he took out a white feather. Solemnly, he walked back to the Meetinghouse and fastened the feather above the door. “Safe, all,” he said, with a wide sweep of his hand to include all those present. “Indians and you – friends.”

And then the little band took their leave and were soon lost to sight.

Today, a white frame meetinghouse stands near where the little log one stood in 1777. The gravestones in the little cemetery under the tree show that Friends have been worshiping in Easton Meeting for more than two hundred years since that bright September day. And there is still a white feather above the door.

Activities

All-Age Worship Sharing

Respond to these queries. (Edit queries as seems appropriate for younger children or for your group.)

- I wonder how the colonists felt when they heard the government's request to move away from their homes.
- I wonder how Robert Nesbit felt when he was called by God to visit the neighboring Quaker community and bring a message.
- I wonder how the boy felt when he saw Indians outside the Meetinghouse window.
- I wonder what the Indians felt and thought while they sat on the floor in worship with the Quakers.
- I wonder what happened that changed the Indians' minds about killing the people?

Worship Sharing for Adults

- How can we open ourselves to God's presence so that we can hear and be led?
- How does our worship together change and heal us?

“Feather of Peace: a story of peace in 19 pictures”

For Children or All Ages: Create a group picture book or a mural. *Make a card with each of the statements below. Ask each child to choose one card to make a drawing about and stick the card to a large piece of paper—or, for a mural, onto a long sheet of before the children start. The set of 19 drawings can be displayed or put together in a book.*

Suggested Cards:

1. This true story happened in 1777, during the American Revolution, when colonists in America were fighting against England.
2. Soldiers on both sides used Indian people as scouts because they knew the land so well.
3. Many Indians were very angry with the colonists for pushing them off land they had always lived on. Some colonists were killed.
4. Settlers in Saratoga County, in what is now New York State, were in great danger from the fighting, so their government asked them to move to a safer area.

5. Many moved with their families and all that they owned, going by horseback, on wagons, or pulling sledges with their belongings. Some just walked, taking nothing with them.
6. Several Quaker families in Easton did not want to move. They got along well with the Indians and they had a new Meetinghouse.
7. Robert Nesbit, a Quaker minister who lived a two-days' walk from the Quakers at Easton Meeting, awoke one night and felt called by the Spirit to go and preach there.
8. Robert arrived in time for worship. Everyone in the Meeting settled into the silence.
9. After a long, deep silence, Robert rose from his bench and offered two messages, taken from verses in the Bible. One was "The beloved of God shall dwell in safety, and He shall cover you with his feathers all the day long." (Psalm 91:4)
10. Robert's second message was "You shall not be afraid for the terror by night nor for the arrow that flieth by day." (Psalm 91:5)
11. Children and adults were in worship together. One boy looked up and saw Indians at the window. He raised his hand to point them out.
12. His mother gently lowered his hand, and all the rest of the Meeting continued in worship, even though others had noticed the Indians at the window.
13. Robert Nesbit felt called to go out and talk to the Indians. Although he could not speak their language, both he and the Indian leader spoke French.
14. Robert assured the Indians that no one inside the Meetinghouse had any weapons. He asked the Indians to come inside and join the Friends in worship.
15. The Indian leader stepped inside to see if what Robert said about weapons was true. Then he and all the other Indians left their weapons at the door and came in to worship. They sat on the floor in the center of the Meetinghouse.

16. After worship, Zebulon Hoxsie invited the Indians to his home to eat, and they accepted.

17. After they ate, the Indian leader told Zebulon they had come to the Meetinghouse to kill the colonists, but when they saw them worshipping the Great Spirit, that same Spirit told them not to kill anyone.

18. The Indian leader fastened a white feather above the Meetinghouse door and said that the people there would be safe now. The Indians considered the Quakers to be their friends.

19. The log Meetinghouse of 1777 is gone now, but there is another Meetinghouse in its place, and Friends still worship there today.

He Shall Cover You with His Feathers

For Children or All Ages

Talk about this quote, “The beloved of God shall dwell in safety, and He shall cover you with his feathers all the day long.”

Do you know an animal that keeps its babies safe by covering them with its feathers? How do the babies feel? How does the parent animal feel? When do we feel God’s presence, taking care of us?

Children make cloaks of “feathers” fastened together with yarn.

Find a large feather shape and duplicate it several times for each child. Talk about what God does to make us feel safe. After this discussion, the children each choose something different to write on each of their feathers, cut the feathers out, punch a hole in the stem end of each, and tie a short piece of yarn to the feather. Then they each tie their feathers to a piece of yarn long enough to go around their shoulders as a cloak.