

# Be Humble. Be Faithful. Be Bold.

Written by Barry Crossno

*Intro Note: The words that follow are reflective of the plenary address given by the author on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016 at the FGC Gathering in St Joseph, MN. The words of the speech were modified slightly to give additional conceptual clarity and to aid readability.*

---

For what reason I know not, the Divine Spirit comes to me in worship, in dreams, and sometimes through visions and words that I know come from a place beyond me. As sometimes challenging as it is beautiful, I know God has called me, at least partially, onto the mystic's path.

Just before Christmas, many years ago, I was driving to work in Taos, New Mexico. It was a very ordinary moment, when suddenly I was overtaken by a vision. Up to then, it was only the second time in my life that had happened. It was so powerful that I had to pull the car to the side of road and park. In this vision, I saw all sorts of violence happening all over the world simultaneously. It was being perpetrated by and happening to young and old, people of all races, in every landscape on the globe. The scenes of hatred, maiming and death were rapidly scrolling across my consciousness as if I was watching a horrifying movie that couldn't be turned off. I began to feel deeply ill and at that moment, I heard a voice cry out "Enough... Enough." And with that the vision was over. However, I knew that the violence which I had seen was not over. The soul of our shared being, that which connects us all, that Divinity which dwells within in us was crying out for the violence to end. And now, now, in the wake of Orlando, of Charleston, of Paris, of Istanbul, and too many other places to name our souls cry out even louder for it to end.

"But what God, what am I to do," I would ask. "What are we to do? How can we bring about a world where the fullness of our humanity, where the wonder of our existence can be nurtured and celebrated?" For some time, I prayed and meditated looking for an answer. Then one day while working, I suddenly felt the in-breaking of God. I heard clearly the words, "Quakerism is a doorway through which many will walk." With those words came a deep knowing that extended beyond the words themselves. I knew then the road I must follow and in my heart I surrendered to that truth. If Quaker faith and practices are a doorway through which many will

walk then the doors must be wide, the doors must be visible, and the doors must be open... open to all those who seek healing, community and transcendence. This was what I was called to do and I would do it until I was released.

Now you might be asking yourself, what does the vision have to do with the message that came later?

The world that we co-create is constructed from our beliefs. Violence, the will to dominate, and the fear that often creates them come not only from our experiences, they come from what we believe about our experiences and what we teach others to believe about our experiences.

My experience is that sharing and living Quaker Faith & Practice can be a very real and powerful tool for interrupting the violence and culture of dominance that diminishes and ends so many lives.

Now I know what many of you may be thinking. As Quakers, we often don't get it right. We've seen here this very week how, within our own faith community, even with good intentions, how we can allow ourselves to be a reflection of the dominant culture.

It's true that we have work to do to become the Beloved Community, the community that our hearts desire to experience. What's key is that we *know* we have work to do and we seek to do the work. Contrast this to the dominant culture and to groups within our global society that actively espouse hatred and violence—that sometimes misuses religion as a tool to spread fear and violence in an effort to dominate, oppress and gain power.

Interrupt this misuse of religion. Share with the world what we know to be true—that when we truly listen to the Divine and to each other—we progress, we heal, we grow. We become reflections of the Divine love that the mystics and sages from many religions throughout many ages have all said is our true nature.

My plea to you is to empower and support-- emotionally, spiritually, financially—facilitators and teachers of Quaker faith & practice. Support outreach and those who are called to do outreach. Pray on whether you are called to teach or do outreach. Join our brothers and sisters of many faiths who seek peace-- who like us respect the plurality of the world's religions and the need for God's voice to be heard in different ways-- by making a clear offering of the way of peace, by sharing our spiritual practices.

Know that we need not be perfect to invite people to walk this journey with us. We are together in this, as a community, as FGC, even in all of our imperfections—even with all the changes that FGC as a community and as an institution is going through. I believe one of the most authentic things we can do is humbly admit that we are all on a journey that's messy, that's imperfect, and then surrender into that knowledge and be faithful to our call. Remember too that in forgiving ourselves and forgiving each other for our imperfections-- while also seeking progress and love-- there is liberation and release.

Interrupt the cycle of violence by sharing what is powerful in our spiritual tradition. Stand up to the dominant culture that has often misused religion, by standing with our peace seeking brothers and sisters from many faiths and no faith tradition at all from all over the world. Say clearly to anyone who will listen there is the seed of God in everyone. We live strongly in the knowledge of the full equality of men, women and all races. We seek a world free of war. We seek a world with equity and justice for all. We seek a world where every person's potential is nurtured and fulfilled. Last, but not least we seek an earth restored.

Be bold. While we may worship in silence, let there be no doubt that in this time of violence and darkness we are called to let our lives speak and our voices to be heard.