

Burning: A Reflection on One Morning's Message

"I live in that life and power which takes away the occasion of war."

"I live in that life and power which creates the Kingdom of God beneath my feet as I walk."

"There is no worldly power with such potential for transformation."

I hate seeing vocal ministry written down. It seems so dry without the context of worship, the resonance of the human voice, filled with God's power, filling the container of the worshipping space. Not so much breaking the silence, but emerging from it. Written out, they are just words.

When I spoke them, I was burning. The first person to speak in meeting that morning had given a speed-of-light declaration about Friends and wealth, a lecture on Quaker history combined with a call to accumulate monetary resources for the defense of progressive values. It felt to me like a denial of Jesus' teaching and a denunciation of God's power. We must rely on *mammon* to achieve transformation?

So I burned. And rose, after a few moments' pause, to repeat Fox's words, to speak that there is no power greater than a faithful life. I took my seat again and sat, shaking, for the remainder of the worship. I felt clear that I had spoken faithfully, but had to remind myself to release ego attachment to the message. If I was faithful, then the message was not mine.

This is the ministry I have been given so far in my life: to sit with Friends in waiting worship, to speak as led my best understanding of what Quakerism is called to do and be, to bear the power of that. Then, to keep an eye on my sneaky ego, to stay as low as I can in the Truth that is God's alone.

It is not easy work. I am so imperfect, and the challenges are great. I fail more often than not, and Friends resist the messages even (especially?) at the times I manage to be mostly faithful. I have found some incredible mentors, but they are geographically scattered. I am often overwhelmed by despair at the gap between my vision (God's vision, I hope) and the reality of the meetings I worship in. Other Quakers, it seems, are as imperfect as I am.

I stay and labor—not without whining, complaining, and threatening to defect—because I have no choice. Because God has given me a clear leading to ministry within the Religious Society of Friends; because Quaker belief and practice are embedded in me at a molecular level; because I am deeply in love with a vision of what Quakerism has the potential to be, what it *is* as a sweet, pure, totally butt-kicking concept.

The concept is about the unfiltered relationship between humanity and the creator God. About deconstructing spiritual hierarchy and reconstructing God's kingdom of justice. It is human beings submitting to the guidance of an awesome, benevolent, and tenderly present God because they believe with all their hearts in a transformed world.

*When we speak, dear God,
May it be for your glory, and not for our own.*

*May it be for Truth, out of love.
May our practice of Truth create Truth.
Teach us who and what we are to be,
As teachers and ministers, as writers and prophets,
As lovers, above all.*

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