



*Max Carter*

After forty-five years of toiling in the vineyards of Quaker secondary and higher education, I retired from my position as director of Friends Center at Guilford College in 2015. Since then, I have turned my labors toward grandparenting and assisting those grandkids' beleaguered parents! It has been as joyful as my time in the classroom, and doesn't come with papers to grade! My wife, Jane, now also retired from Friends education, joins me in our time with family—and also on our annual service/learning trips to Palestine and Israel.

This series of devotionals arises out of a message I felt led to give at an interdenominational chapel the Sunday after the highly contested election of 2016. It was my way of drawing on the wisdom of the great Quaker statesman William Penn to offer some guidance in responding to the deep emotions many felt following the long presidential campaign. Each entry begins with a Penn quote.

I apologize in advance for reminding people of that election!

*BIBLE READING: John 15:12*

*Love is the hardest lesson in Christianity; but for that reason, it should be most our care to learn it.*

William Penn (1644-1718) was born into a well-to-do English family, becoming a Quaker as a young man, much to the chagrin of his family and proper English society. While imprisoned in the Tower of London as a nonconformist, he wrote one of his best-known works, *No Cross, No Crown*.

Later, Penn was given, as a payment of a debt, a grant of land by King Charles II, which encompassed an area that became Pennsylvania and Delaware. Penn was unwilling to accept the land before meeting with the rightful owners of the land—the Native Americans living in the Delaware Valley and their overlords the Iroquois—to agree on a proper purchase price and agreements about how they would live together.

Penn was met with skepticism about his plans to meet with Indians since European settlers lacked harmony with the original inhabitants in other colonies. Penn responded that it was time to “try what love will do.”

Penn’s plan succeeded, and for seventy-five years there was peace in Pennsylvania while wars raged elsewhere. The model of the “Quaker Peace” became embedded in Indian oral tradition. Into the 1800s in the Midwest, Indians treated Quakers differently than other Christians, owing to the respect with which Penn and his spiritual descendants were held.

Query: How am I modeling “what love will do” in my own life?

*SONG: Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, we are living in a polarized time, but help me to love others, regardless of how they vote, how they are stereotyped, and even how they view me.*

—Max Carter

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*BIBLE READING: Romans 12:2*

*They were changed people themselves before they went about to change others.*

This was Penn's description of the first Quaker "Publishers of Truth" who went throughout the world sharing their experience of Christ's Real Presence in their lives. Central to early Friends' witness was the conviction that transformation from a leaden spiritual condition into a more perfected life was possible. There are many examples of such transformed lives among those Friends, but I will share a more contemporary story.

In the annual service/learning trips to Palestine and Israel that my wife and I lead, we have formed a relationship with Israeli soldiers in Breaking the Silence, an organization of those who served in the occupied Palestinian territories and emerged as ardent advocates for a just peace with the Palestinians. As we talked with them about their transformation from warriors to peacemakers, each shared their own powerful stories of encountering "the other" and finding something inside of them shifting profoundly.

Whether looking through the crosshairs of guns into the eyes of school children crossing at checkpoints or blindfolding and beating an innocent man as part of a training mission, the experiences brought a realization of the "other's" humanity, and the effect on the soldier's own humanity and morality in misapplying his or her power. Each of us has power over others. Our duty before God is to use that power for the good of all.

Query: What transformation might I undergo by encountering "the other"?

*SONG: Walk a Mile in My Shoes*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, we are about as divided as a nation as I've ever seen; I'm fearful about the future. Transform me into an instrument of your peace.*

—Max Carter

*BIBLE READING: James 2:14-26*

*True godliness does not turn [people] out of the world but enables them to live better in it and excites their endeavors to mend it.*

One of my favorite examples of “true godliness” in terms Penn mentions in this quote is Anthony Benezet (1713-1784). Born into a privileged Protestant family in France, Benezet and his family lost their wealth—and nearly their lives—while escaping persecution in 1715. Eventually becoming a Quaker and settling in Philadelphia, Benezet became an educator, abolitionist, and advocate for Indians, refugees, and the poor. He opened the first public school for girls, established a school for blacks in his own home, started the first anti-slavery society, and wrote about the “nobility” of Africans and Native Americans.

But his “true godliness” was most surprisingly apparent in his work with refugees. Following British victories against the French in Canada in the 1750s, hundreds of victims of the war landed on the shores of the Delaware River in Philadelphia—French Roman Catholics descending on a deeply suspicious and resistant population.

Benezet, the victim of persecution by the Catholic Church in France, might have harbored resentments, but he met the potential enemies with assistance, including food, clothing, housing, and even employment. Until they continued their journey two years later to join other “Cajuns” in Louisiana, the refugees were cared for by Benezet and the committee he organized.

Query: How does my faith enable me to live better in the world, and how might I do my part in mending the world we share?

*SONG: Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, enable me to live better in this world of ours and grant me the wisdom, courage, and excitement to do my part in healing what has broken us.*

—Max Carter

*BIBLE READING: Luke 10:25-37*

*The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls are everywhere of one religion.*

A remarkable aspect at the time in Penn's colony was that anyone who professed a belief in God could take part in the political affairs of the Commonwealth. Catholics and Jews were welcome; persecuted Anabaptists found a safe haven. Penn's advocacy for the freedom of an individual's conscience profoundly affected the development of the concept of "voluntary religion" in America.

Friends before Penn modeled this openness to others' experience of God. Mary Fisher embarked on a mission in 1658 to share her religious experience with Sultan Mehmed IV of the Ottoman Empire, coming away both safely and with a deep appreciation for the hospitality shown her, especially in comparison with her ill-treatment at the hands of Christians elsewhere. George Fox shared in his journal that during his 1671 visit to the Carolinas, Indians guided him, tended to him when sick, and shared with him their own understanding of that Spirit which enlightened their consciences. Like Fisher, Fox contrasted this with the persecution Quakers experienced at the hands of the Puritans in New England.

Penn's colony was called a "Holy Experiment." That didn't mean he was "experimenting" with a theory. He meant for people to come and "experience" that liberty of conscience, love, and voluntary religion *worked*.

Query: Am I open to the Light that shines in others, even though they may profess a different faith than mine?

*SONG: There's a Wideness in God's Mercy*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, humble me and help me be open to the truth that lies in the experience of others' encounter with thee.*

—Max Carter

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*BIBLE READING: Matthew 6:33*

*The truest end of life is to know the life that never ends.*

In the fall of 2008 I was still doing my thing as campus ministry coordinator at Guilford College, and one of my “things” was early morning worship in the campus ministry center. The morning after the historic presidential election that year, I was in my accustomed place with several students and campus visitors Art and Peggy Gish, noted Christian communitarians and peacemakers. Still flush with the excitement of the election of the nation’s first black president, a student asked Art after worship how he felt about Barack Obama’s win.

“I feel the same way I did before the election, the day of the election, and will the days following the election. I am called to live in a different kingdom,” was Art’s reply.

I have reflected on that response a great deal since the dramatic election of 2016. An election marked by deep emotion left many with feelings of either great elation or great despair in the aftermath. I have had to keep reminding myself of Art’s words. Indeed, my allegiances are to a kingdom other than those of this earth, even while I seek to, in another of William Penn’s noted sayings, “love the world with weaned affections.”

Query: How may I live the gospel in a broken world, keeping my shoulder to the wheel while keeping my eyes on the “life that has no end”?

*SONG: Deep River*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, enable me to find a way to live in two kingdoms at the same time while maintaining ultimate allegiance to thy reign.*

—Max Carter

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 6:25-31*

*The mere trimmings of the vain world would clothe the naked.*

One of my prized t-shirts is one our plain-living daughter gave me as a birthday present. Under a picture of Ralph Waldo Emerson is the quote, “Simplicity, Simplicity, Simplicity.” Under a picture of his friend and simple living advocate Henry David Thoreau is the statement, “One ‘Simplicity’ would have sufficed, Ralph.”

In either Emerson’s expanded version or Thoreau’s simplified form, it is an encouragement to take seriously Jesus’ teaching about focusing on that which is eternal rather than on material things that pass away. This was not always observed by William Penn, let alone his own advice cited above! He was born to the upper class in England, and his class consciousness never fully left him. His manor home along the Delaware River, Pennsbury, was not the stuff of Thoreau’s Walden cottage—and it was built with enslaved labor.

Slavery was finally condemned by Quakers by the late 1700s because it was based on greed and the desire to amass wealth on the backs of forced labor, as well as its violation of the Golden Rule. Slavery violated not only testimonies of equality and nonviolence, it went against the principle of simplicity. John Woolman’s famous saying about observing our own lifestyles to “try whether the seeds of war lie in our possessions” was central to his witness against the misapplication of power in enslaving others to benefit our own accumulation of wealth.

Query: In what ways do I live my life as a witness to removing the occasions of oppression and violence?

*SONG: Simple Gifts*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, help me to seek first your reign in my life, letting material things find their proper place.*

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*BIBLE READING: Habakkuk 2:20*

*True silence is to the spirit what sleep is to the body.*

In the wake of the emotions felt in the 2016 election, some people sought the silence of Quaker meetings, needing a space free of the cacophony around the event; a time to “be still and know.”

Sarah, one of my former students in Guilford’s Quaker Leadership Scholars Program eventually became a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration. Her Quaker formation, however, continues to inform her Catholic spirituality. In an Advent meditation she wrote: “The foundation of Quakerism is that God communicates directly with each and every person. The Inner Light is within us all. The noise and clutter of the world get in the way. But silence clears a path.”

Sarah went on to cite the English Quaker Caroline Stephen (1834-1909) in saying that in order to hear the Divine voice clearly, we need to be still. Elsewhere, Stephen has observed that “nothing but silence can heal the wounds made by disputations in the region of the unseen” (*Quaker Strongholds*).

“Disputations” have been all too common in our body politic and also in the body of Christ with differences that seem to be irreconcilable. Silence may help. It may afford that necessary pause so we can engage our better selves before we open our mouths. At its best, it gives us opportunity to still our own “flesh” and open us to hearing God’s word for us in the moment.

Query: How do I create the space and time needed to be open to God’s Spirit and find ways to be a healer of wounds?

*SONG: Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, help me to “still the flesh” and be attentive to your voice.*

—Max Carter