

Primitive Quakerism Revived — Class #1 (March 31)
The Seed Christ Is Over All: Knowing God “Experimentally”

In view of many Friends, the unique heart of Quaker faith and practice is the experience that God is directly available to our faith community at all times. As Friends we believe God is available to teach us and lead us as a community (not just as individuals) in our worship, our decisions as a meeting, our “testimonies” (both in terms of how we live and our witness to the world around us), and as the leadings, gifts, and ministries that God calls us to carry out.

Here is the way Frances Howgill described the early Friends experience of the Light working amongst them:

The Kingdom of Heaven did **gather us and catch us all, as in a net**, and his heavenly power at one time drew many hundreds to land. We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in; and the Lord appeared daily to us, to our astonishment, amazement and great admiration, insomuch that we often said one unto another with great joy of heart: “What, is the Kingdom of God come to be with men? And will he take up his tabernacle among the sons of men, as he did of old? Shall we... have this honour of glory communicated amongst us, which were but men of small parts and of little abilities, in respect of many others, as amongst men?”

And from that day forward, our hearts were knit unto the Lord and one unto another in true and fervent love, in the covenant of Life with God; and that was a strong obligation or bond upon all our spirits, which **united us one unto another**.

Here is how George Fox described this in his *Journal*:

I declared Truth amongst them, and directed them to the light of Christ in them; testifying unto them that God was come to teach His people Himself, whether they would hear or forbear. I directed the people to their inward Teacher, Christ Jesus, who would turn them from darkness to the light....

Therefore I exhorted the people to come off all these things, and directed them to the spirit and grace of God in themselves, and to the light of Jesus in their own hearts, that they might come to know Christ, their free Teacher, to bring them salvation, and to open the Scriptures to them....

And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, Oh then, I heard a voice which said, “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,” and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.... **And this I knew experimentally.**

Early Friends most often spoke of this Inward Teacher as Christ, drawing in part on the first chapter of John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and **the life was the light of all people.** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it... The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

In John 4, Jesus tells a Samaritan woman at a well, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

In John 8:12, Jesus says “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

Queries:

1. Have you experienced God speaking directly to you either alone or in community?
2. How do you see God’s onward work among Friends as being the same or different from in the 17th century?
3. How might Friends today experience God’s inward work in us today with the **power that was so evident among First Friends?** God is presumably no different! What is preventing us from experiencing this again?

Primitive Quakerism Revived — **Class #2** (April 7)
The Breaking Forth of That Power: Spirit-filled & Spirit-led Worship

I myself... who not by strength of arguments, or by a particular disquisition of each doctrine, and convincement of my understanding thereby, came to receive and bear witness of the truth, but by being secretly reached by this life; for when I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, **I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart**, and as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up, and so I became thus knit and united unto them, hungering more and more after the increase of this power and life, whereby I might feel myself perfectly redeemed.

—Robert Barclay, *Apology for True Christian Divinity*, 1676

The first that enters into the place of your meeting... **turn in thy mind to the light, and wait upon God singly, as if none were present but the Lord; and here thou art strong.** Then the next that comes in, let them in simplicity of heart sit down and turn in to the same light, and wait in the spirit; and so all the rest coming in, in the fear of the Lord, sit down in pure stillness and silence of all flesh, and wait in the light.... Those who are brought to a pure still waiting upon God in the spirit, are come nearer to the Lord than words are; for God is a spirit, and in the spirit is he worshiped.... In such a meeting there will be an unwillingness to part asunder, being ready to say in yourselves, it is good to be here; and this is the end of all words and writings—to bring people to the eternal living Word.

—Alexander Parker, 1660

And this is the manner of their worship. They are to wait upon the Lord, to meet in the silence of the flesh, and to **watch for the stirring of his life, and the breakings forth of his power amongst them.** And in the breakings forth of that power they may pray, speak, exhort, rebuke, sing, or mourn, and so on, according as the spirit teaches, requires, and gives utterance.

—Isaac Pennington, 1681

We do believe and affirm that some are more particularly called to the work of the ministry and therefore are fitted of the Lord for that purpose, whose work is more constantly and particularly to instruct, admonish, oversee, and watch over their brethren.

—Robert Barclay's, *Apology for True Christian Divinity*, Proposition X (“Concerning the Ministry”)

The Gospel is the “power of God to salvation”; it is the life and light of Christ at work, in characteristic ways, to bring us into freedom from spiritual bondage. Gospel ministry is service whose goal is to encourage, support, push, or invite people **to seek and respond to the guidance, teaching, and activity of that Light and Life at work in all, right now.** It is not merely speaking words in meetings for worship, but, under a sense of obedience to the motions of the Spirit, using words, deeds, or silent striving to help others (and ourselves) forward to the more abundant life that Jesus sought for his disciples, his friends.

—Brian Drayton, “What Does the Ministry Do?” *On Living with a Concern for Gospel Ministry*

To faithfully make this witness to authentic spiritual authority and to fruitfully exercise our callings to ministry, preparing God’s people for service and building up the body of Christ, we must strive to abide in the life and power of God from which any authority for ministry must come.... **Wouldn’t it be refreshing to be amazed,** as the multitudes were [in response to Jesus’ preaching], **by finding persons in [our meetings] speaking “with authority,” with authentic spiritual authority?...**

We would find, I think, the attendance and commitment of [true spiritual seekers] in our meetings vastly increased if this power, truth and love was reflected in all the varieties of ministry in our fellowship. We might find all sorts of exciting, enriching, compelling transformations taking place in the fellowship of unprogrammed Friends if ministry and leadership rooted in true spiritual authority were actually welcomed, encouraged and exercised with creativity.

—Thom Jeavons, “*On Exercise of Authority in Ministry*”

Queries:

1. Do you feel Friends recognize true spiritual authority where it is manifest among us today?
2. **Do you feel ministry rooted in this kind of spiritual authority is welcomed & encouraged in our meetings today?** If not, how might this change? How might we help each other in this?
3. If “gospel ministry” is a critical piece of the breaking forth of the life & power evident among early Friends, how might we help Friends today understand what this means & discern whether they have a call to this?

Primitive Quakerism Revived — **Class #3** (April 13)

Gospel Order: The Structure of Our Meetings

So, as I was first moved of the Lord God, to go up and down the nation to preach the Gospel, then after[wards] the Lord moved me to go up and down to exhort and unite, that all people might come into the possession of the Gospel, and the Order of it, which is the Power of God...by which **all things are upheld and ordered to the Glory of God.**

—George Fox, *Epistle #313*

Friends, keep your meetings in the power of God, and in his wisdom (by which all things were made) and in the love of God, that by that ye may order all to his glory. And when Friends have finished their business, sit down and continue awhile quietly and **wait upon the Lord to feel him.** And go not beyond the Power, but keep in the Power by which God Almighty may be felt among you.

—George Fox, *Epistle #162*, 1658

That the power of the God-head may be known in the body, in that perfect freedom which every member hath in Christ Jesus; that none may exercise lordship or dominion over another, nor the person of any be set apart, but as they continue in the power of truth...that truth itself in the body may reign, not persons nor forms: and that all such may be honored as **stand in the life of the truth wherein is the power not over, but in the body.**

—George Fox, *Letter from General Meeting at Skipton for Friends in the North*, 1659

Therefore take heed of the world's fashions, lest ye be moulded up into their spirit, and that will bring you to slight truth, and lift up the wrong eye, and wrong mind, and wrong spirit, and hurt and blind the pure eye, and pure mind, and quench the holy spirit. `

—George Fox, *Works*, 7:300

In meetings for conducting the business of the Society, decision can be made only when those present reach a state of unity.... It may take weeks or even years to attain such unity.... Unity is eventually possible because **every member has access to the same Light of Truth. This Light is not divided, it is One.**

—Howard Brinton, "Seeds of peace in Quaker worship & decision-making", *Sources of the Quaker Peace Testimony*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet #27, 1941

Gospel order is the order established by God that exists in every part of creation, transcending the chaos that seems so often prevalent. It is the right relationship of every part of creation, however small, to every other part and to the Creator. Gospel order is the harmony and order which God established at the moment of creation, and which **enables the individual aspects of creation to achieve that quality of being which God intended from the start**, about which God could say that “it was very good.”

—Lloyd Lee Wilson, *Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order*, p.3

The word “order” reverberates with Friends’ multifaceted experience of God’s in-breaking order in their lives. In this context of the corporate and social dimensions of gospel order, the term “order” refers to the characteristics of daily living which flow from God’s life and power and which allow the community to maintain and deepen its relationship with Christ.

—Sandra Cronk, *Gospel Order: A Quaker Vision of Faithful Church Community*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #271, 1991

The practice of discernment among early Friends grew out of this same sense of surrender to a power—**a power that changes us and works through us**. We were to relinquish our own agendas, yield our own resources, and wait for this transforming power. Everything hinged on an openness to divine surprise, and a willingness to prune what isn’t of God. Setting our plans and anxieties aside, who knew how God might work among us?

—Matt Rosen, *Order of the Day: On Quaker Decision-making*, *The Friend*, 2023

Queries:

- What might be signs that Friends in your local meeting—or yearly meeting—are (or are not) living in gospel order, i.e. in that “quality of being which God intended from the start”—with each other & with the world?
- Cronk sees living patterns that maintain a deep relationship with God/Christ as a covenantal relationship. Do you feel Friends in your mtg/YM see themselves as in a **covenantal relationship with each other and with God?**
- What might create among Friends a greater willingness and capacity to view our life with each other in this way—and to actually live into such a covenantal relationship with each other and with God?

Primitive Quakerism Revived — **Class #4** (April 21)
**Holding Each Other in Love & Truth:
Mutual Accountability & the Healing of Rifts**

Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand, if there has been any slip or fall; and waiting till the Lord gives sense and repentance, if sense and repentance in any be wanting. Oh! **wait to feel this spirit, and to be guided to walk in this spirit, that ye may enjoy the Lord in sweetness, and walk sweetly, meekly, tenderly, peaceably, and lovingly one with another.** And then, ye will be a praise to the Lord; and any thing that is, or hath been, or may be, amiss, ye will come over in the true dominion, even in the Lamb's dominion; and that which is contrary shall be trampled upon, as life rises and rules in you.

—Isaac Pennington, *To Friends in Amersham*, 1667

The Inward Light of Christ reveals to us our unfaithfulness and sin. This awareness is the beginning of a deeper sensitivity to God's call and a recognition of our own inward blocks and barriers to faithful response. When Friends followed the process of mutual admonition with each other, they felt they were following the prophetic mode of Christ's work in human lives....

In the Marlborough story **only the power of forgiving love was able to restore the relationship** and thus allow a possibility of changed behavior. Forgiveness arises out of reliance on God's gift of reconciling love to us.

—Sandra Cronk "The Process of Mutual Accountability", *Gospel Order: The Quaker Vision of Faithful Church Community*, 1995

As one acknowledges the sovereignty of God and experiences it in one's own life, living in obedience as part of God's people is an inseparable part of that experience....

In our individualistic culture we tend to forget that God does not speak to me alone. She is not my private oracle. **God is not about the business of calling out little autonomous individuals, but is about the business of nourishing bonds and building bodies.** This is basic to the biblical understanding of accountability. The focus of accountability seen in this light is to build the committed community.

—Perry Yoder, "Comments on Accountability", *Quaker Religious Thought*, 1985

The rift is over. What underlies peace in the meeting community is trust in God. **With that trust there is no need to defend our walls and positions because there is nothing there but God's power and love.** It starts with recognizing our need of God and God's trustworthiness. If we live in that trust, it spreads out and fills the gaps between us.

A Friend once gave ministry in meeting about the wrongness of walls erected within the faith community and the need to tear them down. A stranger came up to her after meeting and said, "You are wrong about that. The victory is already won." We don't have to solve or fix the walls as Christ has already walked through them.

—Quaker Spring, Minute of Exercise on Healing of Rifts within the Faith Community, 2011

Queries:

- What is your experience with offering or receiving "eldering" or other forms of help with faithfulness from others? What made it a positive experience or less so?
- Are there rifts in your local or YM? How are they being handled? Is it in "gospel order"?
- (And from last week...) What might create among Friends a **greater willingness and capacity to view our life with each other as a covenantal relationship with each other and with God?**

Primitive Quakerism Revived — **Class #5** (April 28)
**This Is Our Testimony to the World:
Transforming the world into the “Gospel Order of Creation”**

We do earnestly desire and wait, that, by the Word of God’s power, and its effectual operation in the hearts of men, the kingdoms of this world may become the kingdoms of the Lord, and of his Christ; that he may rule and reign in men by his Spirit and truth; that thereby all people, out of every profession, may be brought into love and unity with God, and one with another; and that they may all come to witness the prophet’s words, who said, “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

—Declaration to King Charles II, 1660

“Oh you Rulers & Judges, do you think to overcome us by keeping [our teachers and ring leaders] in prison?. Nay, **Christ is our teacher, and he cannot be removed into a corner...** The Lord does not speak to us in an unknown tongue, but in our own language do we hear him perfectly, whose voice is better than life... We cannot own the teaching that is of this world, but that which cometh immediately from God, and that is pure and refresheth the soul... and it causeth us to meet together, to worship the Lord as we ought to do.”

—Esther Biddle *The Trumpet of the Lord Sounded Forth unto These Three Nations*, 1662

A tree may grow high and hard and strong, yet fruitless and out of the power, got above the poor, above the innocent, and out of the feeling of the sufferer and man of sorrows where he is. The end of this growth is not in the pure rest, for the higher any one grows here, the more doth that wither and die in them, which is soft and tender & melting, which makes one [a true lamb] and is the true fold for lambs, where the lions must lie down in the end if they come to rest. That eye...which looks to be great among men comes not into the rest, but hath strife in the mind, strife in words and secret smitings, which defile the rest, and lead into the division and separation — but the little child leads into the rest, and **that which is lowly gives the entrance.**

—James Nayler, Not to strive but to overcome by suffering, from *9th Epistle*, 1658

The root of this peace testimony is deep. It draws its nourishment from the power of God to bring transformation and healing into our inverted and wounded lives, from our deepening experience of Christ's love, and from our willingness to yield our lives to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Only as this testimony remains rooted deep in its nourishing soil is it able to produce fruit. In a world which desires the fruit but does not understand the root of the peace testimony, **we who would live this witness must take care not to succumb to the notion that the fruit can exist independent of the root.**

—Sandra Cronk, *Peace Be With You: A Study The Spiritual Basis of the Friends Peace Testimony*, 1984

We need each other, as a body needs all its parts. And Christ, the head, needs our feet and hands and eyes — and these need the head, and the life that circulates and nourishes all parts in one enlivening stream. It is from this mutual need and experience of the common life that a witnessing body is fed and grows in strength, not by declaration or by assertion of unity. These articulate hope, or announce our condition, but cannot create or substitute for **the shared living, the actual spiritual organism.**

—Brian Drayton. *On Becoming a Witnessing Body: A Letter to Friends*, 2012

Queries:

- Do you unite with Paul Buckley's belief that Quakers are "a chosen people called to fulfill a divine purpose" (as God has called other peoples for other purposes)?
- What might it take for us to become, as Brian Drayton says, a witnessing body, "acting as one body united by a common life and gathered by the holy Spirit"?
- How might we, as Nayler says, come to "feel that which is lowly & meek to arise above self and still all strife in our minds"?
- How may we be touched, as Sandra Cronk says, by Christ's healing power and brought into the peaceable kingdom — **to enable us to bear one another's burdens and help the peaceable kingdom to emerge in our midst — and around us in the world?**