

*Living Together by Love: Choice and Practice*  
Talk by Ken and Katharine Jacobsen at  
Illinois Yearly Meeting  
6/21/08

Thank you for asking us to join you in this beautiful, refreshing place amid the cornfields. Our hope tonight is to open up and allow the energy in the scripture chosen for this Yearly Meeting's theme (2 Cor 5.17-19) to engage us all. We will then carry forward the idea that reconciliation (reunion) with God and each other, by, in and through the power of Christ, as Paul speaks of it in this letter to the Corinthian community, is connected deeply to the Quaker way, and the Quaker way, with Love as its sacred center, is deeply connected to reconciliation.

**I. Opening the Scripture** (Ken speaking):

Let's listen to the passage both in English and in the "common Greek" in which Paul wrote it. Perhaps you can catch a sense of the sound and movement of the Greek language, which is remarkably fluid in word order, a fluidity which catches and allows Paul to express the fluidity of the subject at hand—the dynamics of a humanity, a world being radically transformed in what he calls "Christos":

**2 Corinthians 5.17-19:**

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| 17. Therefore, if any of us is in Christ,<br>we are a new creation;<br>the old has passed away,<br>behold, the new has come.   | <i>h<sub>o</sub>ste ei tis en Christo'<br/>kain<sub>e</sub> ktisis;<br/>ta archaia parelthen,<br/>idou gegonen kaina.</i>  |
| 18. All this is from the divine Reality<br>that reconciled us to itself<br>through Christ and gave us<br>the ministry of reconciliation;   | <i>ta de panta ek tou theou<br/>tou katallaxantos hemas eauto'<br/>dia Christou kai dontos hemin<br/>diakonian tes katallages;</i>   |
| 19. that is, in Christ, this Reality<br>was reconciling the world to itself,<br>not counting against us<br>our trespasses,<br>but entrusting to us the message<br>of reconciliation. | <i>hos oti theos hen en Christo'<br/>kosmon katallasson eauto',<br/>me logizomenos autois<br/>ta paraptomata auton<br/>kai themenos en humin ton logon<br/>tes katallages.</i> |

Let's try to be tender with the awkward "newborn" language of experience here--Paul's/ours. Paul experienced/understood "Christ" both as a person (whom execution by Rome could not destroy) and as an energy/a power from God that radically, suddenly changed all our social relationships. What was the shape/flavor/gesture of this power?

Paul uses *katallasson*, for "reconciling", literally collapsing the distance, dissolving, reversing (*kata*) the otherness of the "other" (*allos*), so that we can know others as part of ourself, part of one Life. "Christ-energy" as Paul experienced it, comes to heal all forms of division, brokenness, enmity, "otherness" among us in the unity of Life—this "Christ" does not allow the "other", any other to remain a stranger to us—we are somehow deeply kin. The Quaker principle of "**befriending**" expresses this reconciling process in the positive, the recovery of our

radical kinship with all, recovering our memory of **belonging** to one another, whatever may have come between.

*En Christo' kosmon katallason eauto'*(2:19): This Christ-energy extends and flows to the whole world, without exception, its healing concern is with the whole world.

*Me logizomenos autois ta paraptoma auton* (2:19): This Christ-energy cares not from where we have come, what **trespass** (*paraptoma*--death-like, fallen state) we have been in within ourselves or with one another, Christ-energy releases, forgets the past, and asks us to simply begin again this day, as if on the first day, the journey of Love, of reconciliation with others, all others.

*Hoste ei tis en Christo' kainē ktisis* (2:17): In Christ, in this surprising, healing energy from God, we become a “new creature”, a new way of being awake/alive in the world. And not we alone, but the whole creation becomes new: “Behold, the old has passed away and the new has come.” The new (*kainos*), **Newness-Itself** is the Christ-energy here, God’s new, ever-renewing Name here, always coming to us, always making of us a new creature (*kainē ktisis*).

To be a new creature means to receive and share and take responsibility for the ever-new gift of Love. We are specifically given by God, as a gift, the **ministry of reconciliation, of Love**, (the *diakonia*, service to others, work for others) we are entrusted with it, that is, we are empowered to act in Love, in reconciliation, in the world. **Do we accept this gift?**

A Friend’s meeting is asked to live at this **edge of the new creation**, at this edge where we may meet and receive the reconciling/renewing force that Paul has called “Christ”, God’s anointed, anointing (*christos, chrīo-, chrīisma,*) energy of Love.

What does our own experience teach us about Love, what does our Friend’s way allow?

## **II. The Choice and Practice of Love in a Meeting** (Katharine speaking):

Reconciliation.... re-union with God and all living things.... requires moving, both as individuals and as corporate bodies, beyond the containment, the enclosure, of self-centeredness and/or system-centeredness...into a new place, into Love, Love as both noun and verb.

As a noun, Love is a place of new being, a place for each of us individually and as members of our meetings with a sacred center and three very specific requirements: justice, mercy and humility. Love requires these because they are essential components of Truth. **Love requires Truth and Truth allows Love. In the place of new creation as Paul refers to it**, we must choose and practice humility, mercy and justice.

Love as a verb is equally important: Love is motion; of reciprocity, of giving and receiving, of dancing. The motion of Love is found within the same parameters: **walk humbly** with God, **love** mercy, **do** justice. When we put these verbs together with the nouns as Micah directed, we are in the realm of reconciliation, reunion with God. I would even say we are in the realm of co-creation.

How do we move toward this realm of reunion with God?

If we **want** re-union with God, we must make ourselves open daily to the still, small voice... praying daily to meet these requirements of justice, mercy and humility and respond, i.e. join the dance. If our prayers are genuine -- we will be directed and cared for in ways that “pass all understanding” even though the guidance may not be what we hoped for specifically. If we authentically respond, there will be a sufficiency of time, resources, courage and strength.

This is Friends’ understanding and commitment. This is Friends’ experience....

It is also Friends’ experience that we need each other in fulfilling the understanding and commitment, in finding and responding to God’s true direction and abundant Love. We must choose and practice helping each other. We must make it a first priority. The importance of the corporate body, the meeting, cannot be overstated. Apart from the holy accompaniment that we Friends offer each other as individuals, in the coming together of silent worship, there is a powerful synergy of human energies. What we lovingly call “Quaker Process” is a way of receiving and transmitting, God’s Love in the meeting.

Quaker community has three essential components: the Source of Life, Light and Love, the Process to listen and discern the guidance coming from this sacred Source, and the Witness to others of/by/through our response to God’s will. Faithfulness, our goal, depends on all three components, source **at the center**, process and witness flowing from it. Reconciliation, relationship with God, and **Living Together by Love**, depend on all three.

*For God is Love, and those who abide in Love, abide in God and God abides in them* (I John 4:16). So how does a Quaker meeting “abide in Love”? The answer is simple but hard to do. It involves choice and daily practice on an individual level and constant practice on the corporate level.

Choice and practice of what?

For an answer on a very foundational level, let’s turn to Julian of Norwich, 15<sup>th</sup> c mystic, whose “shewings” from God, messages from God are distilled in a series of four A’s which direct us as individuals and our meetings:

**Await** God’s Truth-Love; **allow** it to enter you and your corporate worship space; **accept** the message, lesson, or concern; and **attend** to it. Our Quaker forefathers and mothers knew these points of daily choice and practice and they made choices and lived into practices through which they felt God’s Truth-Love could be received, responded to, and shared. These choices and practices were so well understood that even the children could carry them forward when the adults were absent.

Early Friends also knew that living in Truth-Love is not easy. It often challenges our basic instincts, anxieties and fears, as well as our cultural values. But they also knew that we can and must help each other discern, name and move beyond such blockages in the motion of Love as fear, anger, greed, self-righteousness.

In connection with moving beyond blockages, early Friends would have made two other points: 1) the Living Jesus, the Christ, is in our kinship with each other and in our search for Truth-Love, and 2) that if we seek relationship with this Living Presence, and await and allow, the

person and power of Jesus are always present, knowing our condition...calling us friends...  
*When two or three are gathered, I am there also* (Matthew 18:20).

Nor all Friends today name Christ as having to do with the Source. I am a Conservative Friend and I do. I experience the person and power of Jesus as an inner teacher, a wilderness guide. It is my experience that the Cristos that Paul speaks of in our scripture today is in our true relationships, to God and to each other. But I do not want this to separate me from those of you who do not have this experience.....so let's talk about **Living Together by Love through Choice and Practice** without referring to Jesus.

The apostle Paul raises the question of spiritual gifts in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians. He saw them as realities. It is my experience as a Conservative Friend that there are spiritual gifts (sometimes named as passions or deep callings), there is motion, dedication, energy connected with them, and they are gifts of the Creator God so that we can Live Together in the Choice and Practice of Love and fulfill our responsibility to be instruments of that Love individually and corporately.

With all spiritual gifts there is energy. And these energies can combine in a Friends meeting with powerful positive outcomes...or conflict with powerful negative outcomes. In regard to both the positive and the negative, and our goal to live together in a new place and motion ...Love....I want to lift up one form of spiritual gift which is seriously neglected among Friends today: the elder. Eldering, as you know, was the theme of the Yearly Meeting's winter gathering with Elaine Emily at Menno Haven this year. We are grateful for this event.

It is the function of the elders in a meeting (more than one always) to discern and encourage among the body the positive forces (Truth Love) and discern, understand, and help God turn around the negative forces. Elders are not just older Friends who have been faithful to Friends' practice, they are Friends who have a special way of listening and a wisdom, i.e. understanding with the heart. Elders have an energy, a deep calling which is quite specific.

A few weekends ago, seven Friends from several different meetings (three different yearly meetings), strangers to each other, gathered for a weekend together to experience the coming together of the energy which fills and often drives the vocal or prophetic minister and the energy which fills and focuses the Friend in the mode of elder. The query which we were exploring together, with a good deal of silence and sacred space, was "What is Love asking of us?"

The differences in energy between the vocal minister (conveying messages of God's Truth) and the elder (conveying and protecting God's Way) were marked. Those Friends who are inherently vocal ministers, messengers, seemed to enter directly into the query, focusing on the birth of a specific message. The others, with gifts of eldering, behaved like midwives, focusing on the collective conditions for ministry, on what aspects of space or time were encouraging or discouraging to the flow of Love. When they spoke, it was to clarify, affirm, pray. The Presence of Love was dimensional, powerful and real in this gathering. There was a real symbiosis of Message and Way of Love and it carried us all to a new place, a place of affirmation and peace.

Some concluding thoughts on the gift of eldering:

It's real. Many Friends have it among several gifts; some have it as a dominant gift. Most do not recognize what it is and how significant it can be in the ecology of a meeting.

Eldering is a sacred responsibility which includes prayerful listening for “right order” in a meeting and noting conditions which block the flow of Love. Sometimes it requires intervening in situations of anger or fear. More often the sacred responsibility is to identify, affirm, encourage the flow of Love in a meeting through prayer and brief messages of affirmation.

Conservative Friends name and train several elders in each meeting. Quaker meetings without eldery are much more likely to get hung up on such human characteristics as individual agendas, anger, fear, anxieties and spiritual pride. These stumbling blocks to Love occur in any human gathering but with an eldery function, there can be a constructive turning around.

The gift of eldery has been and can be abused. Elders have gifts of discernment but they need other elders with whom to discern. Elders need training in the how of eldery. Workshops on eldery are available.

How do you discern gifts of eldership in yourself or someone else? The clues are: 1) how a Friend listens. Is he/she...are you... the gifted kind of listener, who thinks as he listens, having ideas about answers or solutions to what is being expressed? Or, is he/she, are you, the gifted kind of listener who suspends thinking, let's questions (if there are questions) come from a deep place, hears more than the actual words, and feels the whole of the speaker ---or the meeting.

Two other keys to eldership are 1) a drive to nurture spiritually, 2) and a reliance on prayerful silence. How at home you are with silence and prayer.

If a meeting acknowledges that there is something to this gift of eldership and the role it can play in the ecology of a meeting, I recommend:

1. Identifying those who seem to have the gift.
2. Enable them to learn more about it for prayerful discussion with the meeting.

Ken and I want to conclude this presentation by telling two stories of reconciliation from our own experience. Both are accounts of Truth-Love, i.e. how Love requires Truth and Truth allows Love.

In closing, we want to stress the following: Reconciliation does not mean resolution of all the issues....it means never giving up on relationship and its location in God. It means to bring Truth tenderly into the relationship. It means refusing to allow the breaks to be permanent. It means never to allow otherness to be the last word.