

Beacons for hope:

Friends ethics and spirituality in the context of climate change

By Marvin Hubbard

Friends can relate in a number of ways to Global Change, especially to the Climate Change Crisis that the world is facing.

There are many scientists and environmentalists who have more knowledge and expertise in climate change and are more au fait with the technical requirements dealing with climate change than Friends.

Where Friends as a body can make a difference, I believe, is in our spiritual and ethical foundation.

Friends have a number of testimonies the meaning of which, if sincerely sought and practised, can help Friends make a meaningful contribution to the global crisis which is now happening.

The first testimony is Truth. Friends have been seekers, finders and publishers of truth from the beginning 'but let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. But above all things, my brethren (and sisters), swear not; neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath; but let your yea be yea; and your nay, be nay; lest yea fall into condemnation' (Yearly meeting advices, 1693).

Our testimony on Simplicity relates to testimonies on simplicity and sustainability but even more consider our testimony on a single standard of truth. Friends must see that our testimony on plain speaking of the truth must relate to the consequences of what is happening when people deny the truth in favour of their own self interests. That denial has severe ethical, social and environmental consequences. Friends must consider the ethical consequences of this denial for our own lives, the environment and society. We must speak truth first of all to ourselves, and then speak truth to power on the issues surrounding climate change.

'Let all nations hear the word by sound or writing. Spare no place, spare not tongue nor pen, but be obedient to the Lord God and go through the world and be valiant for the Truth upon earth; tread and trample all that is contrary under... Be patterns, examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone' (George Fox, 1656).

William Penn, a wealthy man who sacrificed much for his commitment to the Quaker faith, used the expression 'No Cross No Crown'. He knew that there was nothing ultimately worthy to be gained without sacrifice. Modern humanity does not particularly like the word 'sacrifice'. The sacrifice happens in real life, as Christchurch Friends will know, even if not of their own choosing.

To help create a movement to save our environment and create a right relationship with humanity and the Earth (Gaia), we must be willing to be examples of the changes we seek. We must change how we live and travel and we must carefully choose what actions we can take to speak truth to power. Friends who are considered successful in their occupations or careers are seen willingly or unwillingly as examples of lifestyle choices to younger people in their occupations and to others who

look to them as symbols of success. When we choose to live simply, others who know us, or look up to us, or are on the same career path, may also choose to live more simply.

On the other hand, if we choose to confuse our wants with needs in choosing our travel, homes and other treasures, friends and admirers may be tempted to live more extravagant lifestyles. Do guests really need, for instance, an elaborate house in which to stay when they visit us? If our houses or vehicles are seen as status symbols, what kind of message does that give about equality and simplicity and living within our environmental constraints?

What I am suggesting is difficult and calls for courage. As Tim Flannery author of *The weather makers*, and *Here on Earth* says:

‘Changing cultures may be achievable if we propagate the right attitudes to consumption as we propagated anti smoking attitudes. If we decry excessive consumption wherever we see it, whether in four-wheel drives on city roads or in oversized houses we may succeed. But this takes courage and individual action. All too often, when I see such things and want to say something, I remained silent for fear of social embarrassment....The problem is that conspicuous consumption is tied up with image of ourselves and one of our most ingrained social instincts – to keep up with the Joneses’.

We can cultivate an attitude of hope and gratefulness toward God, the universe, and the Earth for a lovely world and life itself. We can show our appreciation for the world and life by making the necessary economic and material sacrifices that will enable us to give the gift of a good sustainable life to our children, and grandchildren, and to the regions of the world's such as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Africa where climate change and other related catastrophes are beginning to happen.

When we struggle for social, economic and environmental justice, we are in tune with the spirit of Jesus.

When Jesus talks about God's kingdom, or God's beloved community, I believe he means here and now on earth. Certainly, the evidence from Luke chapter 4, verses 17-19 points in that direction when he described the Jubilee Year foretold by Isaiah:

‘...and a scroll of the Prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour’.

All our testimonies are interconnected with each other, only when the peace testimony is made real in the world and the nations of the world are not spending huge amounts of wealth and energy on war and the weapons, can we hope to make the world sustainable!

Friends have an enviable history of speaking truth to power and in taking part in nonviolent witness. If we are models of the simplicity and equality that we advocate, perhaps we can move from just lobbying corporations and governments for sustainability and justice to helping to build a peaceful nonviolent campaign for justice and sustainability, beginning perhaps with opposing lignite mining in New Zealand.

Friends with support from their Worship Groups may stay in that Divine Spirit which can empower our lives and actions for us to become beacons of hope for sustainability and justice in a world of social economic and environmental crisis.^[1]_{SEP}

