

The sky is falling



Ordinarily people tend to block out most of the worrying factors around them and just put their thoughts and energies to a few— family problems, job problems and maybe one or two wider questions, climate change, drought in Africa maybe.

Suddenly we have had an overwhelming problem, a disaster, overtaking us, all of us, all over the world.

Lock down, not quite cowering under the bed covers, but distancing physically for months unless we are essential services. Youngsters trying to learn at home, many workers working from home.

Financial disaster facing many.

Too many problems that we cannot block out

The previous problems of the world are still with us, the epidemic, is over us, and people are not sitting quietly but using the unsettled atmosphere to highlight their most pressing concerns.

Do you find all this confusing? Where am I supposed to look? What am I supposed to do?

Perhaps the most important or noticeable extra problem we see on the news results from racial tension in the United States.

- a proportion of people in power choosing to exercise their power in negative ways,
- marches, declarations from everywhere,
- militias showing off their weapons,

There are so many problems besides the pandemic to be addressed— climate change is still with us, poverty is still with us, slavery is rearing it's ugly head and so on. So why is the colour of people's skin such a trigger for certain groups?

I read a science fiction story many years ago where everything the protagonist dreamed became reality. One night he went to sleep with a concern for world peace on his mind and woke up to find everyone was coloured grey. Note: It didn't solve the problem.

Humans thrive on change and difference so why is one minor difference between groups of people seen as so threatening?

Genetically we are all the same species. We can interbreed very successfully. We should be accepting of each other and rejoice in the differences that make each of us so interesting. Instead we are afraid.

I had one of those little lightbulb moments in June (that's when I started trying to write this letter), about St Paul and his problem with women. Now I know that in the cultures around the time of St Paul women were well considered but only if they stuck to their cultural norms. So perhaps St Paul was just reflecting the way he was brought up in his treatment of women. Then I thought— but he had that miraculous experience on the road to Damascus where the spirit came upon him. And subsequently became a great promoter of the new religious group. Acts chapter 9 verses 1 – 30.

Unfortunately the account of that miracle says very little about what extra Saul/Paul may have learned from it.

Then I thought but what did Jesus teach about women? I can see I need to read the gospels again. But I can't remember Jesus dealing any differently with women than he did with men or children. At least the writers did not give him any words that showed any difference on the basis of gender, age, or cultural group. We can assume that in the cosmopolitan Roman Empire there were many people of colour about in Judaea but Jesus apparently didn't pick them out. The only people he was angry about were the merchants exchanging ordinary coins for temple money and taking up the whole of one temple court for this. When we discussed this after Meeting one Sunday, it was pointed out to me that the other people that bothered him were rich people that kept a tight grasp on their treasures.

So how did Jesus see people?

And my lightbulb moment was that he saw them as light or energy--or maybe like an aura, or as pure spirit. What would skin colour matter if you saw the person as pure spirit?

Does God see us as pure spirit?

We humans can only see a narrow range of the light spectrum so we see the solid form of a person and not the energy dancing around. Sadly. But we do not need to let that stop us from remembering that we all have something of God in us.

I was moved by the story of Clarence Jordan who with his wife Florence founded a farm, which was an interracial Christian farming community in Georgia, USA, in 1942. He was said to be affected, very early in his life, by hearing the children's hymn, "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight..." (by C. H. Woolston)

He couldn't understand why the church he was worshipping in could sing this yet restrict its membership to whites only.

The Jordans together with Millard and Linda Fuller started among other projects "Partnership Housing," a project to build and sell quality, affordable homes at cost with a no interest mortgage for low-income area families. [No mention of race or colour.] The Fullers' five years at Koinonia, the inter racial farm community, were followed by three years of building "partnership housing" in the Democratic Republic of Congo (then known as Zaire or Belgian Congo). This would eventually lead, in 1976, to the creation of Habitat for Humanity.

The Jordans and the Fullers were led to find solutions to problems of discrimination and poverty that worried them. So we too can look for ways clear our confusion. We have a pattern to follow.

When we meet together in reality or in spirit via Zoom, and open our hearts and minds we can be inspired to thought or action to meet these current crises.

As our dear Friend William Penn said (1682), "True godliness don't turn men out of the world, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavours to mend it: not hide their candle under a bushel, but set it upon a table in a candlestick..."

Yours in friendship

Carril Karr

The Wider Quaker Fellowship is an association of persons of diverse backgrounds who wish to have ties with the Religious Society of Friends without necessarily being in its membership, or who, through isolation, illness or some other circumstance are unable to attend Meeting for Worship. The purpose of the Fellowship is to reflect Quaker life and thought.

Any person who finds the fundamental Quaker testimonies and the Quaker way of life, with its emphasis on sincerity and simplicity, compatible with his or her philosophy of life is welcome to join the Fellowship.

If you wish to make a donation to the WQF—

To make a donation on line, the YM Kiwi bank account number is 38 9001 0669022 02

Be sure to put your name and that the donation is for Wider Quaker Fellowship in the reference spaces. For a tax donation certificate email: ymtreasurer@quaker.org.nz with the amount and date of the donation and your name and address.



We will be celebrating World Quaker Day on October 4, 2020. The theme will be: 'What does it mean to be a Quaker today? Living a Faithful Life in a Changing World'.

Every year across our churches, meetings, countries, and sections, we feel the power of God connecting us into a faithful family. We celebrate all expressions of Quaker worship!

Intergenerational Nature Weekend

The Quaker Settlement Whanganui

2 to 4 October 2020

Presented and facilitated by Cathy Macfie and Jos Rossell

The weekend will bring us closer to nature through activities that use our senses to heighten awareness.

... Through first hand experience we hope the weekend will be both fun and uplifting. It will cater for all ages but particularly 5 years upwards.

Send any registration queries to shanemiddlemiss1@gmail.com