

Emily Provance, SEYM, April 2021: Questions & comments

QUESTIONS from Emily Provance, Southeastern Yearly Meeting [Quaker] Keynote speaker & Retreat facilitator, April, 2021. Emily's "Travel Minute" for her ministry is at the end of these questions that she offered.

The overriding theme for SEYM was "What now?" It focused on three major topics, each separately over two weeks with Morning Worship, an afternoon "retreat/workshop" or a business meeting in some form; and ending with something uplifting and fun in the evenings.

The topics were Covid 19; George Floyd/racial issues; and the environment. Emily's two retreats were "Interruption" and "Integration" ending with the Walton Lecture, "Transfiguration". As such, these themes were quite artfully woven together.

Interruption: [small group discussion in Zoom break-out rooms]

1. On a scale of 1-5, How would you rate your soul's present health?
2. What has been your most challenging reality [in the past 13 months]?
3. Your biggest boost to spiritual sanity has been ...
4. Your happiest thought today has been ...
5. Name one thing that makes you really happy.
6. Name one thing that can make another happy.
7. What are you taking with you today from this experience? Hope? Possibility? Where you/we are heading now?

Integration: [small group discussion in Zoom break-out rooms]

1. Thirteen months ago I was a person who ...
Now I am a person who ...
2. Thirteen months ago, I believed that people ...
Now I believe that people ...
3. Thirteen months ago, I thought the world ...
Now I believe the world ...
4. Thirteen months ago, I believed God ...
Now I believe God ...

Transfiguration: The Walton Lecture ... loosely quoted as follows [only the briefest of notes that I took, out of order at times, with some of my own additions]. I highly recommend that you obtain the pamphlet when it comes out, and/or watch the video when it becomes available.

These last thirteen months the mirror broke, it shattered into a myriad of perspectives and understandings of what is going on and how to respond. ... and we will never be able to piece it together to what we thought of as 'normal' again.

Emily spoke at length about Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, tying it into our lives over the past 13 months. "Lord, I am out of my depth, hear my cry." When overwhelmed, the first step is faithfulness.

Where are we now?

Who is on your team? ... your tribe, your clan, your circle... etc.

Do they have food, water, and rest?

She emphasized that you are not always called to do something. This is not the first step. The fundamentals must come first: basic needs; security & safety; friendship and love. You may be offering love to another and not even know it. Start with yourself, your own basic needs, then with your team. Grief is a manifestation of love. The farther away from an event and the stories around it, the easier it is to make meaning of what happened.

What makes you feel safe? Our monsters are world sized now. We need billions of tiny interactions to meet these challenges. We need a secure sense of identity to feel safe; community membership, one or many; the more extreme the group, the more distant, the more unlike our own, the more frightening. BUT, an extremist is not automatically evil. It is us and them; two groups in opposite positions become more extreme.

When the story of "who you are" [or "who they are"] does not match your [their] action, it creates cognitive dissonance, which leads to an opportunity to reconcile. [I am also a "them"... I also believe stories that I read about, or hear on the news, or from a friend. I trust my sources, you trust yours and they may be slanting the same story in a very different way.]

Why love in the face of the fractured mirror that will ever be thus, that a cannot be glued back together?

I can stand before you and commit an act of love. [An iconic memory for me: the flower in the rifle shaft, at the ready, back in the 60s. Or bringing water, or smiling, seeing someone who feels invisible, listening to someone who feels unheard. Repeated

experiences create an accumulation that can shift the perspective. [Whether acts of love, or hate, or lies, or threats of harm, or offering comfort...].

Love is an on-going need: the need to give and receive love. WE LOVE OUR ENEMIES BECAUSE IT WORKS. Little acts of love over time have made a difference. Loving our enemies is loving ourselves.



Emily Provance

Emily Provance is a member of Fifteenth Street Monthly Meeting in New York Yearly Meeting.

“I spent seventeen years looking for a faith tradition. I knew that my people would say “God speaks to everybody,” and the day I found Quakers was the day I found home.

“We are a covenant people called to establish the kingdom of God on Earth. (To be clear—I doubt Quakers are the only ones called to do this.) To be a covenant people means that we have each given ourselves to God and that God, in turn, has given us to a group of people. We have a mutual responsibility to identify each Friend’s spiritual gifts and to provide the necessary recognition, support, and accountability to enable each of us to explode into the fulness of who God has made us to be – and then, also, to do this beyond the boundaries of our own denomination. To do that is to begin the work of establishing the kingdom of God.

“It’s a big job, but as Thomas Merton has prayed, ‘the desire to please you does in fact please you.’

“My own unique work is with Quaker institutions, be they local meetings or regional/yearly meetings or umbrella organizations: to see where the systems and structures that we have built are supporting God’s purposes and where those systems and structures are getting in the way. I work to see these things, to explain them, and to experiment with changing them, across this covenant people called the Religious Society of Friends.”