

Worship Sharing 6/7/22

“Conflict happens, and will continue to happen, even in the most peaceful of worlds. And that’s good – a world where we all agreed with one another would be incredibly boring. Our differences help us to learn. Through conflict handled creatively we can change and grow; and I am not sure real change – either political or personal – can happen without it. We’ll each handle conflict differently and find healing and reconciliation by different paths. I want nonetheless to offer three keys, three skills or qualities which I’ve found helpful from my own experience.

- The first skill is *naming*: being clear and honest about the problem as I see it, stating what I see and how I feel about it. What is important about these statements is that I own them: ‘I see’, ‘I feel’ (not ‘surely it is obvious that ...’, ‘any right thinking person should...’). This ability to name what seems to be going on, is crucial to getting the conflict out into the open, where we can begin to understand and try to deal with it.

Such a skill is dangerous. It can feel – indeed, it can be – confrontational. It feels like stirring up trouble where there wasn’t any problem. It needs to be done carefully, caringly, with love, in language we hope others can hear. We need to seek tactfully the best time to do it. But it needs to be done.

- The second skill is the skill of *listening*: listening not just to the words, but to the feelings and needs behind the words. It takes a great deal of time and energy to listen well. It’s a kind of weaving: reflecting back, asking for clarification, asking for time in turn to be listened to, being truly open to what we’re hearing (even if it hurts), being open to the possibility that we might ourselves be changed by what we hear.
- The third skill is the skill of *letting go*: I don’t mean that in the sense of giving up, lying down and inviting people to walk all over us, but acknowledging the possibility that there may be other solutions to this conflict than the ones we’ve thought of yet; letting the imagination in – making room for the Spirit. We need to let go of our own will – not so as to surrender to another’s, but so as to look together for God’s solution. It’s a question of finding ways to let go of our commitment to opposition and separation, of letting ourselves be opened to our connectedness as human beings.

If we are to do any of these things well – naming, listening, letting go – we need to have learned to trust that of God in ourselves and that of God in those trapped on all sides of the conflict with us. And to do that well, I find I need to be centred, rooted, practised in waiting on God. That rootedness is both a gift and a discipline, something we can cultivate and build on by acknowledging it every day.”

Mary Lou Leavitt, 1986

Queries

How does this passage speak to your experience at Friends Meeting?

Have you experienced change or spiritual deepening through work to resolve conflict?

What for you is the difference between surrender and “letting go”?