

Worship Sharing 8-11-20

Sustainable Spiritual Practice: “Sinking into the Seed”

The topic of sustainable spiritual practice has been greeting me from a number of sources of late and seems more important than usual in these times. There are many Quaker writings that speak to this, the two I have most recently encountered are ***A Sustainable Life*** by Douglas Gwyn, and ***Life Lessons from a Bad Quaker*** by J. Brent Bill.

Brent Bill offers a story of personal experience that in part concludes:

“This listening through life—even in a worship service that’s carefully planned and prepared – is what Friendly silence is about. This kind of silence doesn’t always require me to get away to a quiet place, like alone on a seashore or a silent retreat at a monastery. Rather it is carrying spiritual stillness in my soul as I move through life. The beauty of Quaker silence is that it can be practiced wherever we are. It does not matter whether we’re rockin’ to some gospel numbers in a quaint island chapel more used to Bach fugues than Harry T. Burleigh spirituals or working on an assembly line in a computer factory. Deep spiritual stillness, listening down to our souls is not dependent on silent surroundings. It’s about stillness inside us.”

---J. Brent Bill 2016

Douglas Gwyn cites Issac Pennington from ***Some Directions to the Panting Soul***, 1661

“Be no more than God hath made thee. Give over thine own willing; give over thine own running; give over thine own desiring to know or to be any thing, and sink down into that seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee, and be in thee, and breathe in thee, and act in thee, and thou shall find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that, and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of life, which is his portion. And as thou takest up the cross to thyself, and sufferest to overspread and become a yoke over thee, thou shalt become renewed, and enjoy life, and everlasting inheritance in that. “

--- Issac Pennington 1661

“We heard the advice to sink down in in Fox’s counsel as well. It evokes very well the shift we feel when we stop striving, let go of ambitions and compulsions, or stop running toward this and away from that. Sinking down into God’s love, a new life begins to breathe in us and act in us. This is the life that God empowers, guides and sustains. Again, language like “the cross to thyself” and “a yoke over thee” may make some want to draw back. But it is only the true life within that we are submitting to. It is a cross in that we must abandon our sense of control and self-possession. It is a yoke in that we learn to will and to serve a love greater than our own. The counterintuitive truth is that here we find by “sweet experience” real joy and an authentic life of service we can sustain and sustains us. This life is the “everlasting inheritance”. It is not only sustainable through a lifetime. It is eternal: it transcends time.”

---Douglas Gwyn 2014

Queries - Britain Yearly Meeting

Do you try to set aside times of quiet for openness to the Holy Spirit? All of us need to find a way into the silence which allows us to deepen our awareness of the divine and to find the inward source of our strength. Seek to know an inward stillness, even amid the activities of daily life.

Do you encourage in yourself and in others a habit of dependence on God’s guidance for each day? Hold yourself and others in the Light, knowing that all are cherished by God.

Are you open to new light, from whatever source it may come? Do you approach new ideas with discernment? Be aware of the spirit of God at work in the ordinary activities and experiences of your daily life. Spiritual learning continues throughout life and often in unexpected ways. There is inspiration to be found all around us, in the natural world, in the sciences and arts, in our work and friendships, in our sorrows as well as in our joys.