

# Fun Things Quakers do part 4: Service and Justice

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August 7 2011

# 1 Readings and reflection questions

- Psalm 82
- Deuteronomy 24:8-22
- Acts 11:19-30

- What needs do we see in our community and the world around us?
- What do we do when we see needs?
- How do we live a life built on justice?

## 2 The message

For the final message in the series on the “Cool things Quakers do”, I want to talk about working in the field of social justice...or in plainer language, helping those who are less fortunate than ourselves. Some of us trip up on the word Justice, because it has changed in meaning over the years. When we see Justice in scripture – it means the same thing as “righteousness” – so what is good and right is what is just.

If we read all that scripture says about helping each other out, we would be reading all day and all night. If you remember in Deuteronomy, the words “Remember you were slaves in Egypt” – this is the core of the Old Testament law. They kept the Sabbath because they were breaking the patterns of slavery. They looked out for one another, because they were breaking the patterns of slavery. From the Sabbath, to the tithe, to the farmers leaving something in the fields for the destitute instead of carefully gathering up the leavings, the society was organized to look out for the needs of the poor, and to prevent any from being reduced to slavery.

When we read the prophets, we read how Israel was condemned for violating the law – specifically the rule not to forget when they were slaves. Israel did not honor the Sabbath. They did not observe the day of Jubilee. Israel placed ownership over people who were created in God’s image – even when they obeyed the letter of the law, they strayed from the spirit.

When Jesus came, He also called us to break with the old patterns and to live according to a new pattern. We must rethink not only how we live, but the way of life that we learn from the secular society. One of the marks of a Christian is: “See how they love one another.” Let us look back to our history.

When the Church was new, Antioch, the first community of primarily Gentile Christians heard a prophecy that Judea would suffer a famine and they organized a collection to help the people of Judea. This relief fund spread outside of Antioch though – Paul specifically mentions the Galatian and the Corinthian church as raising money for relief in Jerusalem. In I Corinthians 16, he advises them to collect money on the first day of the week for relief – so the only mention of Sunday collections in scripture is for famine relief!

Unfortunately, sometimes we forget this very basic idea of Christianity. Sometimes like Israel, we want to go back to Egypt. We become conditioned to selfishness and lack of respect for human dignity. Sometimes it is worse than that, sometimes we see that the need is so great, and we give up without trying. Sometimes people have used the church to meet their own pride and greed instead of for the sake of meeting with Jesus – this actually takes us to our history of Friends. William Penn called Quakerism *Primitive Christianity revived* – and a devotion to justice and meeting the needs of others is a part of Christianity that needed revived.

The days of George Fox were quite violent – it was a time of civil war. First there was the war between the royalist who supported king Charles I and those who followed Oliver Cromwell. Charles I lost his head, Cromwell ruled as lord protector until he died – after which there was war again. Charles II was crowned king, though some opposed him.

Through all of this, the church was used as a political tool. Politics were expected to be preached from the pulpit – and if the right politics were not preached, the preacher would likely die violent death. Quakers began in a rather dark time of English history – the church, whether it supported the monarchy, or another form of government lost sight of Jesus – the church became a place to recruit Christians to kill other Christians in God's name.

Friends stepped out of this madness – they formed little meetings of Christians meeting with Christians for mutual aid and encouragement. As they did not support the politics of the day, the meetings were illegal. When they built meetinghouses, sometimes they were torn down! Mostly, I do not read of meetinghouse in the early day – usually when I read of meetings, they were at a home – Friends were, at this point, very much like today's house church movement (which I happen to greatly love).

One difficulty Friends faced is that they were arrested because they did not support either side (though, as both of the biggest sides were in power at one point, supporting either side would have been the same). Sometimes every adult member of a meeting was arrested. Friends had to deal with the huge question of how they would take care of one another in the face of such a human created disaster. Perhaps a house church can help each other – one family can help another, but what happens when every family is suffering? In order to face these challenges, Friends organized. It does not require any business, and no more organization than date and time, for a few people to meet in homes and invite Jesus to

be with them – but it does require planning and organization to do relief work.

This practice of looking out for each other – and for others continued. John Westley once advised that Methodists should take care of each other the same way that Quakers do saying: “No one sees a ragged Quaker”. Not only did Friends look out for each other, but they looked out for others as well. You likely know that Cadbury was a British Friend who decided build a chocolate factory and devote himself to improving the lives of the working class – starting by showing the world that you can treat your workers like human beings and still make a profit. You also are aware of Friend’s building and running hospitals and schools. Back in Kansas, when Quakers settled there – they built the meeting house and a school house. The Friends academy was there long before the public school system. Most of the world’s Quakers are in Africa – and every year I have been involved with Friends, I see Friends sending medicine, equipment, and supplies to Africa. Last year, I saw Friends send thousands of gift packages for new mothers who live in poverty – not much, but a little to show that Christians care about one another.

I was lucky enough to spend a day at the Friends United Meeting triennials – and I saw a donation of a some lab equipment to a Friend’s hospital in Kenya. I was excited to see that Friends continue to show Christian love. When I first visited your meeting, and when I spoke with people about your meeting, I heard about your support of ministries to people facing difficult times in the Columbus area, whether it be crisis pregnancy or your support of the food bank. When I have heard about your history – or when I read the plaque in front of the meeting house I see that your meeting was involved in helping people escape the dehumanizing institution of slavery so they could live free. Friends in Bartholomew County are part of this amazing heritage of showing love to one another. When Friends seek to do good, we have a history of doing well.

How is it that we can get more involved in service? I will offer some practical advice:

First – I advise you to get closer to need so that you can see it for yourself. Talk to people who are involved, volunteer for a day, or perhaps more with one of the many great organizations which do social work. I’ve enjoyed working with the Salvation army the most. I have worked at the Salvation Army’s youth camps – I have also worked some with

receiving donations. You might know that a lot of items go through the Salvation Army. They have a lot of cooperate donations – largely physical items, which to be honest are not always given out of generosity but out of careful calculation – so, they have warehouses to deal with all the donations, whether they be damaged freight or overruns on seasonal items. Near Thanksgiving and Christmas, they need hundreds of volunteers to handle what goes through their hands – and as they are used to short term volunteers and they work locally they would be a good organization to work with.

I also advise you to take advantage of at least some of the many giving opportunities that we have. Remember the only scriptural example we have of an offertory, the money was raised for a famine relief fund. Friends are actively doing work in East Africa, South and Central America. We have hospitals, agricultural education programs, health education programs, and we preach the gospel. I know some of the fine people serving as missionaries in both in Mexico and in East Africa. I believe that just as the early church looked outside of their immediate community to show that the world wide church was still their Christian family – we should find some way to do the same. What missionaries do we support?

In addition to foreign missions, we can give to the same ministries that we volunteer our time with. I know that Friends are rather spread out in the United States these days. We are no longer able to do the things we did when our numbers greater and the population was smaller – we could not take on slavery the way we once did...but, we do take a lot on. We can give to the Salvation Army, or to the Food bank, or the crisis pregnancy center, or we can find some other local way of giving a cup of cold water in the name of Christ – these days, my personal favorite is the Hispanic ministry that Western and Indiana Yearly meeting are starting. They are building a new ministry, and doing much to meet the needs of the Hispanic community, there is no shortage of dreams or need – but there is a shortage of both money and workers. If we support the Hispanic ministry, we might not only support them as they start work in East Indianapolis and Marion Indiana, but perhaps like Maple Run Friends offer a space to worship. (For those who don't know, I am personally connected to this ministry through Karla, who came here to help start the Hispanic ministry in Indianapolis. She and her father work very hard giving ministry that both meets the physical and spiritual needs of Hispanic people in the community. Karla can hardly take a

day doing something else without being missed.) If you want to give money – Indiana Yearly Meeting is handling the funds for this ministry. If you want to volunteer with the kids ministry, or learn what the specific needs of the ministries are, talk to my lovely girlfriend – she’s handled the communications between the Hispanic and English speaking Friends in in Indiana. . . (and if you want to start a Hispanic ministry here, again, talk to Karla – It is a lot of work, but it it is good work. Carlos, her father, used to be the clerk of Guatemala Yearly meeting, and he knows several Hispanic Friends ministers, they could give practical advice about starting a ministry.

Remember, last week I spoke about listening and discerning God’s will. There is no doubt that it is God’s will that we should do something good. There might be some disagreement about what is best to do, but there is no doubt that we should be doing something. The original purpose for business meetings was so Friends could do good more effectively – and meet needs outside their own backyards. Currently, the world is filled with opportunities for work and for giving – all we need to do is step into place and work somewhere. I invite all of you to pray about doing something before the year ends. If you can find a weekend to volunteer for a project, or find something to worth giving to, and give and keep their ministry in your prayers. . . (or do both.) If you cannot give or work, do pray for the workers and the ministries.

Friends have always been effective in society. Our members, though small, are known for our work. I am proud to be part of a group that not only claims to seek God’s will – but we show that we work to carry it out – we obey. May we all consider how we can fulfill God’s desire that Christian’s take care of one another, and those who need during our day to day lives.