

Quaker Worship

A visitor coming into a Friends' meeting for the first time is often puzzled by seeing a company of people sitting in silence. He wonders what they are doing; he cannot understand what is going on; to him these people appear to be doing nothing; Does the silence mean that they are waiting for someone to give a signal for the meeting to begin or for someone to arrive and conduct the service?

It soon becomes evident that there is no pre-arranged programme or order of service and that the meeting began when people took their seats at the appropriate hour without any outward sign being given.

While sitting in silence the group are not wasting their time, or doing nothing, or waiting for something to happen. They are inwardly active and intensely busy exercising their minds and spirits in the business of worship. They have come together with the desire to share in the experience of communion with God, and to realize the sense of his presence in their midst. In the silence they are reaching out after him, believing that in the stillness his voice will be heard and the guidance of his Spirit will be known.

The silence is an opportunity for letting the mind dwell on those things that are lovely, and pure, and true, and thinking about God and about Jesus Christ whose character and teaching show us most clearly what God is like. It is also an opportunity of listening to the voice of God in our hearts, of hearing him speak and of learning his will. If we do not listen to our Quaker friends when they speak to us in meeting for worship, we shall not hear what they have to say. By this way of worship we learn the art of listening to what God wants to say to us.

Nothing sensational is likely to happen, but there will be given a clearer vision of God and a truer sense of values. There will come the sense of

being lifted to a higher level of life or the inward thrill of feeling “the evil within being weakened and the good raised up” or the consciousness of healing in the soul and new power by which to live.

As the meeting proceeds the visitor realizes that he is not simply one person amongst a number of individuals; there grows up a sense of sharing a common life and fellowship, of belonging to a group of friends who together are seeking after and finding God.

And then out of the silence there comes the spoken word. One and another (men and women alike) will offer vocal prayer or, speaking of what they know of God in their own experience, will pass on some helpful spoken message that they feel must be shared with the whole group.

Worship after this manner brings to those who practise it great enrichment of mind and spirit. They become aware of God’s Presence in the midst, and that the sense of the certainty of God is carried back to the home and the office and the market-place and brings sweetness and light and joy into all the relationships of life.

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