



THE FRIENDS TESTIMONIES:
Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality

Peace Month 2012 Daily Reader



Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends

January 1 – Simplicity

Cherice Bock

Welcome to the Peace Month 2012 Daily Reader! We hope this month is restful and spiritually revitalizing after the holiday season. This year we're doing something a little different with Peace Month: we're looking at several of the ways of living that have come to be known as the "Friends testimonies." They conveniently spell the acronym SPICE: Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community and Equality. If you want to know more about these testimonies and their historical foundation, visit www.nwfriends.org/peacemonth and download the document entitled "SPICE: the Friends Testimonies."

In this reader we will spend several days on each testimony, seen from the perspective of various people around Northwest Yearly Meeting. We hope you will enjoy hearing how other Friends live these biblically-based testimonies, and will be challenged to grow in each of these areas by the Spirit of the Present Christ.

At the beginning of each section we will start with a query from the NWYM Faith & Practice. You are encouraged to spend time meditating on that query and allowing Christ to speak to you about how you are called to live out that testimony in your own life, and how we as a community of Friends in the Northwest are invited to live out that testimony together.

Let's begin with a query on simplicity.

NWYM Faith & Practice Query 13:

Is your life marked by simplicity? Are you free from the burden of unnecessary possessions? Do you avoid waste? Do you refuse to let the prevailing culture and media dictate your needs and values?

January 2 – Simplicity

Stan Thornburg

“Early Friends were committed to acting truth in their daily lives... at the same time they were quite specific about what would keep them focused on the divine will and what would deflect their attention from it.”

- Thomas Hamm, *Quakers in America*

Read: James 4:1-2

Simplicity is not just a move to have less stuff; it's a way of seeing and loving all created things. Much like purity of heart, simplicity is a way of seeing through God's eyes, a way of recognizing the sacred in all things. Such a view makes one loathe to waste the resources at one's disposal. Simplicity is always a corollary to purity of heart and cannot be separated from that virtue.

Since simplicity recognizes the divine origin in all things, it moves us to love all things according to the Creator's purpose for them, even those that are manufactured from the Earth's resources. We find that purpose for created things by being transformed so that we see all things through the eyes of God.

Simplicity sees wealth through God's eyes as well. Both the rich and the poor encumber themselves with money-making ventures at great cost to their families, their lives (often devoid of joy), and the chance for a meaningful experience of church as community. Thomas Hamm puts it very well: “Luxury is a contagious and killing disease. It creeps into all classes and types of people. The poorest people often exceed others in their ability to indulge their appetite. And the rich frequently wallow in those things that please the lusts of their eye and flesh and pride of life” (*Quakers in America*, p. 100).

Lastly, simplicity is a deterrent to war and wasteful disputes that grow out of our desire for more. As James indicates, when one puts material things above love, really bad things happen. Greed and covetousness kill the soul and tend to block our love for created things and dull our ears to God's instruction.

Queries:

Are you careful not to encumber yourselves with an excess of frivolous possessions?

Are you practiced in keeping your eyes under the discipline of the Holy Spirit?

January 3 – Simplicity

Lisa McMinn

Savoring What You Have

Read: Ecclesiastes 6:9

Wise, wealthy Solomon reflects on life in (often) cynical ways in Ecclesiastes. He draws poignant conclusions. Among them is to enjoy what you have rather than desiring and dreaming about what you don't have.

That wisdom runs counter to market economics that depend on our staying discontent so that we will keep buying stuff to make us happier. We're exposed to advertisements and commercials trying to convince us that our life isn't good enough, and that some new fashion, upgraded technology or car will make it better. What is good for our economy may well be bad for our soul.

Years ago I learned that when I needed something (or thought I did) to look for it among others' discards, like my office chair (someone's toss-away that needed refinishing), or the wood we salvaged from a deserted barn and used to finish our Potting Shed, or canning jars I buy at the Good Will store.

In recent years contentment and simplicity has included learning about abundance at our fingertips. We plant seeds and let God, the sun, and rain produce food. Mark and I are small-scale farmers and have found joy in the work of tending vegetables, bees and chickens. Tending dirt and creatures in ways that allow all life that shares this space to flourish reinforces my ideas about contentment and stuff. The most essential "stuff" for survival and wellbeing is under my feet.

A consumerism promising happiness can cause us to lose sight of God's simple and abundant gifts. Our relationship to Earth isn't tangential to our existence, rather our ties to Earth are essential to our collective wellbeing. Learning contentment with and care for God's simple gifts nourishes Life.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for this good Earth.
Forgive me when I do not love it enough.

January 4 – Simplicity

Nancy Thomas

Simplicity of Heart

Read: Psalm 73:23-26, Col. 3:3-4

As any who have attempted to de-clutter their life know, simplicity can be complicated. It involves tackling not only the accumulation of stuff—those bins of college syllabi, old magazines, childhood treasures—but extra tasks we’ve taken on, organizations we’ve joined, the demands other people make on us, and all the clutter in our minds.

Recently on a meditational walk I found myself repeating a simple prayer: “You are my life. You are my life.” It was as though God was reeling me in, bringing me back to the basic simplicity of soul from which all else flows. I found myself asking, with the psalmist, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire beside you.”

True simplicity begins in the heart. It flows from a life oriented to the source of all life, from the deep knowledge that in God alone we “live and move and have our being.”

As I walked that trail, I began to affirm, “Above all relationships and roles—spouse, parent, grandparent, friend, minister—you are my life. Above all I possess or hold on to for security—my home, my books, my insurance policies, my investments—you are my life. Above all the intangibles I cling to—my health, my education, my achievements, my talents, my rights, my dreams—above all this, you are my life.” And I found myself praying, “Oh Lord, let it be. Change my heart. Keep reeling me into yourself.”

I am sensing that only when we live from the center of a life oriented to God can we move out freely into our world as God’s agents of reconciliation and peace.

Prayer:

“Take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of thy peace.”

– John Greenleaf Whittier

January 5 – Simplicity

Nancy Thomas

Simplicity & Stuff

Read: Psalm 73:23-26, 1 Cor. 4:7

I love the word “stuff.” Its cocky irreverence encourages me to hold my possessions more lightly. Not that that’s easy to do. I have boxes of precious stuff in the attic and garage that challenge me—someday, maybe soon—to take another step in the simplification of my life.

To the question of the psalmist, “Who or what do we possess in heaven or on earth that compares to our relationship with God,” I like to add Paul’s rhetorical question, “What do we have that we did not receive?” In various of his letters Paul presents an interesting paradox in regards to our “possessions.” He tells us that in Christ, we possess nothing of our own, yet “all things” belong to us. In his list of hardships as a missionary, he includes “having nothing, yet possessing everything” (2 Cor. 6:10).

How can this be? And, harder yet to answer, how can I make this real in my life? The ideal of open-handed living clashes with the cultural values of consumerism, ownership, and doing all we can to insure security and some measure of the “good life” in our retirement years. I struggle with this on a daily basis.

In his book, *The Freedom of Simplicity*, Richard Foster point to a New Testament response to this dilemma in what he calls “unconditional generosity.” He writes that Jesus and other biblical writers “point to us a way of living in which everything we have we receive as a gift, and everything we have is care for by God, and everything we have is available to others when it is right and good. This reality frames the heart of Christian simplicity.”

Today, think of one concrete way you can live out unconditional generosity.

Prayer:

Lord, change my heart. Help me to recognize that all I have comes from you and belongs to you.
Then help me live with a spirit of unconditional generosity.

January 6 –Simplicity

Heather Tricola

Read: 1 Timothy 6:8-9

One of my favorite places to be is Interfaith Sanctuary, a homeless shelter that accepts all sorts of people...drunken, disorderly, and destitute...no questions asked, no requirements made. Here, I can hang out with my friend Bob, a sweet and kind gentleman in his 60's who is always up for a good conversation. His life lacks the clutter of yard work, mounds of laundry, and the rising price of gasoline. Bob once told me that he feels called to live at Interfaith Sanctuary, with so many people to love and minister to.

One of our NWYM queries asks of us, "Are you free from the burden of unnecessary possessions? Do you refuse to let the prevailing culture and media dictate your needs and values?" I think of the allure of camping, where I can spend all morning just sitting by the campfire. When I am in my house, I could spend all morning sitting next to my fireplace, but I find that I can't just sit still when there's vacuuming to be done, the cat box needs emptied, toys are strewn about... And here is where the "burden of unnecessary possessions" starts to take over our lives, where we have to go on vacation, away from our possessions, in order to relax. Possessions can truly be a burden when they take up so much of our time and space, making peace fleeting.

Sometimes I feel like I have been brainwashed by American culture, where we are encouraged to do our patriotic duty and consume things. If my income increases, perhaps I should spend more on helping people rather than on getting more stuff. Maybe I can take a lesson from Bob: all of his worldly possessions fit in bunk #23, surrounded by 80 other men...and he has found peace.

Prayer:

Lord, help me to realize that my time, talents, and resources are not my own, and to give my best to meet the needs of others, in your name.

January 7 – Simplicity

Jay Miller

Read: Isaiah 52:13-53:2

You would be hard pressed to find someone in Oregon, Washington, or Idaho today who would not on some level support the mantra, “Simplify, simplify.” People want to live simply today, whether out of a desire to unplug, be green, or generally have a less hectic life. One might think that the Friends testimony to simplicity is all the rage.

But being “all the rage” does not accurately describe Christian living. It was often when big crowds began following him that Jesus withdrew from the public eye to remember what he was all about. Which is why it may be helpful for Friends to remember that the testimony to simplicity was originally a call to plainness.

This very quickly changes the conversation, for the word plain is not nearly as cute as the word simple. Simplicity is beautiful and compelling. Plain is just . . . plain.

Yet for our spiritual fathers and mothers, plainness was an important discipline. It testified to a truth so powerful that the world demeaned it with insult, and has now co-opted it with trendiness. But there is a depth to plainness the world cannot realize, because plainness is not primarily an absence of adornment (or technology, trash, and time commitments), but the presence of peace. It is the radical presence of the Living Christ.

The world scoffs at the Suffering Servant, because it will not accept his presence, and refuses to see his beauty. It is beauty that does not seek recognition because it knows itself as already recognized. It is a beauty that does not seek to be desirable because it knows itself as already desired. It is a beauty of a young plant coming out of dry ground--tough, tender, and content with this plain truth: that it holds the Life which gives life to all things.

Queries:

Could my testimony to simplicity also be seen as a testimony to plainness? If so, how? If not, why?

Is the ground of my Christian witness contentment in and surrender to Christ’s Presence?

Does simplicity free me to live without the need to be recognized,
and help me to serve others genuinely?

January 8 – Peace

NWYM Query 20

Do you observe and teach the Friends testimony against military training and service, making clear that war is incompatible with the spirit and teachings of the Gospel? Do you find appropriate ways to work for peace?

January 9 – Peace
James Tower

Holy Harvest

Read: Galatians 5:22-26

Galatians 5:22 reminds us that peace is a byproduct of divine love, the very work the Holy Spirit labors toward. This is a miracle, and nothing short of participation in the very nature of God. We often speak of the “fruits” of the Spirit, yet in the Greek, “fruit” is singular. In our day and age we have lost sight of the inherently destructive and labor-intensive process of “sowing and reaping.” Now, wanting fruit, we simply walk into a store, pay, and walk out with it. In the ancient world it was not so. Sowing happened in its season; the hands of people and the legs of animals tore at the earth. Even children helped by scattering seed. God brought the rain, the sun, the life. After months of stewardship—patient waiting, pruning, weeding and guarding from pests and predators—the first fruits would come. Then, the fruit would swell and bloom, filling the field. Harvest was hard work, but also a time of celebration!

We should expect nothing less from seeking peace. You cannot walk into a store and buy peace. It is like farming: a journey, a process. There are no shortcuts. It is a dirty, messy affair involving broken skin, calluses and lots of waiting. It will require God’s grace to provide spiritual water and light and to bring life, but also people who want peace badly enough to get their own hands dirty. We as a church must be in tune with the seasons, and be willing to rip the ground and toss the seeds with our own hands. Vineyards do not happen by accident! Peace requires both God and humans to work together spreading life where once was only dust and weeds. We cannot expect to “reap peace” and taste its fruit at harvest if we are not planting—in love—its seeds today.

Prayer:

Look at the tags on your clothing for their countries of origin and pray Christ’s peace for the people who live there, especially the hands that labored to make them.

January 10 – Peace

Susan Ankeny

Read: Isaiah 11:6, 9

In June, my husband Scott and I took a short trip to Victoria, B.C. We used the B.C. Ferry line that runs out of Tsawassen, which has ferries that depart almost every hour. When we boarded, we realized that this was the port that most out-of-country tourists probably used as well. We saw many skin colors and heard many languages.

What was fun to notice was the camaraderie among all of us out on the deck. (Most of the Canadian commuters seemed to ride inside.) Everyone was focused on the beauty of the islands through which we were passing, the magnificence of the sea and the anticipation of more sightseeing when we reached Vancouver Island. There was much smiling and picture-taking. No one was shy to offer to take pictures of other passengers so that people could have pictures of their whole family.

A week later, our return trip had a much different feel. There were obviously less tourists. Many local people were traveling to the mainland to watch an ice-hockey game. People were more focused on their own little group of traveling companions, talking about work or the game ahead. There was less smiling, less viewing of the sights, hardly any picture-taking.

It struck me that though, on the first trip, we might not all have been “full of the knowledge of the Lord,” we were all focused on the beauty and wonder of God’s creation. Because that took the focus off of self, it allowed us to be at peace with each other, even enjoying one another, though we came from diverse backgrounds. Oh, if only we could learn to do that on a worldwide scale!

Prayer:

Gracious God, help us to be “full of the knowledge of the Lord” so that peace may reign! Amen.

January 11 – Peace
Mike Huber



BE HUMBLE

In humility, count others better than yourselves. Philippians 2:3

We speak with conviction, but without self-righteousness.

BE KIND

Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not love, I have become like a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. I Corinthians, 13:1.

We do not use shame, blame, or harsh words to make a point.

BE RESPECTFUL

First, be reconciled to your brother. Matthew 5:24.

We assume that those with whom we disagree are listening to God with sincerity and integrity, just as we are.

BE A PEACEMAKER

For the body is not one member, but many... And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you. I Corinthians, 12:14;21.

We listen for God's Light in each other and seek common ground.

January 12 – Peace

Karrie Brothers

Read: Ephesians 4:22-32

Many practitioners of various professions develop a knack for items specifically related to their area of expertise. Mediators develop a knack for recognizing conflict and causes of conflict: an invaluable skill to assist those who've asked for help. Quite often I can see the signs of conflict sprouting up before others in the room are even aware there might be a problem. It's also not uncommon to find seriously conflicted situations where there has been an implicit agreement by all involved to tacitly ignore and suppress the conflict itself.

I assumed everyone could perceive latent conflicts and so I rarely hesitated to point them out. Usually I had quite a few suggestions for resolution as well. It was quite dismaying when my actions resulted in additional and increased conflict rather than the result I wanted. Imagine my surprise when my offer of help and utilize my expertise was met with accusations of creating conflict for conflict's sake. Eventually I realized that tolerance for conflict is different for each individual. Some people are much less sensitive to perceiving a conflict than others. For these folks a conflict might need to get much more pronounced before they recognize a problem. An analogy might be the differences between two individuals' senses of smell. One might be overwhelmed by the mildest perfume while the other doesn't even notice there is a smell to be sensed.

People – me included – get used to the pain from ongoing conflicts in their lives. It can be like a sore tooth that isn't a problem unless you bite the wrong way. You keep meaning to get the tooth fixed, but you don't think of it until it's a problem, and it's not often a problem. Then, one day, you have an abscess and need a painful root canal instead of a relatively painless and quick filling. You might not let a tooth get that far, but have you thought about how much pain your latent conflicts have to inflict before you're motivated to change them?

Queries:

Do I have any latent conflicts that I need to resolve?
How is Christ calling me to make peace in this situation?

January 13 – Peace

Cherice Bock

Read: Ephesians 6:10-13

As many of you know, peace is a topic that is near and dear to my heart. It is also something that, honestly, I struggle with a great deal. My struggle is mainly with my sense of being caught in a lifestyle that feels generally peaceful, while I know that lurking underneath my “peaceful,” relatively easy existence is a great deal of pain, violence and evil. My personal life and relationships are fairly peaceable, but the system in which I live and must participate is not peaceful by any means. Violence occurs against individuals, other nations and the Earth in the way things are grown, harvested and transported to our stores. Injustices abound in the factories that produce our clothing, shoes and electronics. Wars are fought over resources from oil to rubber to diamonds.

Let's strive for interpersonal peace, but let's not stop there. Let's work together to refuse to cooperate with the principalities and powers of this world. Christ has already overcome them; let's join him.

Queries:

In what ways am I cooperating with the unjust powers of this world?

How is Christ calling me to act otherwise?

What is the first step I will take today?

January 14 – Peace

Ty Olson

Read: Romans 12:14-18

I grew up regularly hearing the “golden rule,” both in church and at home. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” my dear parents and wonderful Sunday school teachers reminded us dubious and often unruly youth. For years, I considered this the most important quote to live by—well, perhaps second only to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength”—and sought to adhere to it as best I could in my relationships with family, friends and strangers. This said, more recently I have grown suspicious of this phrase, and ultimately what it purports. I wonder if it is insufficient. And I wonder if Jesus would agree. Let me explain.

If I do to others what I want them to do to me, with good intentions I give a stranger on the street a peanut butter and jelly sandwich because I would like to be given a PB & J if I was living on the street. However, what if they're allergic to peanuts? (Peanut allergies are often severe, even fatal.) My point here is that we must consider the perspective and needs of others before we act. Perhaps this is a silly illustration; nevertheless, it causes me to question if my good intentions here are good enough.

Here's another scenario. One of my closest friends from high school is in the military. He attended West Point Army Academy, served some time in Iraq, and currently is in ranger training. We talk regularly. (Additionally, he was in my wedding and I was in his.) Often, our conversations lead to topics of war and peace. A year or so ago he was explaining to me why it is important that the US military stay in Iraq to help the Iraqis become a more stable and secure nation—establish a western style democracy and train their military. But is this what the Iraqis desire? Even if we would desire this type of support from them—even if this is what we would want done for us, is this what they want done for them?

As a current graduate student in peace and conflict studies, lately I've been ruminating on how I approach interpersonal conflict. Often times I'm prone to hastily give advice to folks, offering recommendations based on what would likely work for me. But the other person is not me. Recently, I've intentionally sought to take a different approach. In my experience, I believe that in working toward sustainable interpersonal peace we must, at the very least, try our best to understand the situation, perspective and needs of other folks (even though we never fully can). This requires authentic relationship, sincere listening and enough bravery to step outside of oneself.

In light of this, I recently learned the concept of the “platinum rule.” Unlike the commonly quoted golden rule, the platinum rule is expressed in slightly different terms: “Treat others as they would have you treat them.” This seemingly minuscule alteration is significant, for it moves beyond relating to others from a sympathetic orientation to one focused on empathy. This platinum rule suggests that empathy is more important than sympathy in promoting peaceful relationships. Though the Bible does not overtly use the language of empathy, the Jesus I read about relates to people from a place of empathy—especially those in distress, in pain and who are outsiders.

Queries:

What role does empathy play in my life?
How might I utilize it as a tool for peace?

January 15 – Integrity

NWYM Query 15

Are you honest and just in your dealings? Are you true to your promises, prompt in paying your debts, and responsible in handling money or property entrusted to you?

January 16 – Integrity

Paul Almquist

Read: James 2:14-26

Integrity is not only important to Friends, but in some way to most people. Isn't it true that if you do business with someone you sure hope they are a person of integrity? When you take your car to the mechanic you want them to fix only what really needs to be fixed and charge you a fair price.

The apparent lack of integrity that surrounds us these days makes it a powerful testimony when we act with integrity and do so in the name of Christ. I like to think of integrity as *integrating what we believe into what we do*. We have a document as Friends known as "Faith and Practice." Maybe we could say faith as practice, faith with practice or even perhaps faith-practice. You really cannot have one without the other: word matched with deed, belief demonstrated by action. If we act as if what we believe is not really true, then we may have to ask if we really believe it in the first place.

That doesn't negate the need for grace. In fact, one of the greatest ways we can show we are people of integrity is by admitting our mistakes, shortcomings and sins and seeking the forgiveness we need. If my integrity is formed out of my experience of God's grace and the grace of others I will not be able to be "proud" of my integrity. My actions will simply be a humble "thank you" to God and others.

Queries:

Do I practice integrity in all I do?

I say I believe in peace – do I get along with my own family?

I desire global justice – do I show compassion for my neighbor who is being oppressed in some way?

I "go" to church on Sunday – do I act like I "am" the church the rest of the week?

January 17 – Integrity

Paula Hampton

Truth and Integrity

Read: Matthew 5:33-37

My daily newspaper carries a column devoted to measuring the “truth quotient” of statements made by people in the public sphere. Ratings range from “true” to “pants on fire.” It’s a sign of our times—we expect our leaders to stretch the truth, to put their “spin” on statistics, or to out-and-out lie. We wonder what and who to believe, and we grow cynical about our ability to affect change. Yet most of us would say we value truth telling and integrity.

The old Quaker query “Is truth prospering among you?” resonates with me. In times of misunderstanding and confusion, I believe that truth—like cream—eventually floats to the top. It may seem overly optimistic and often requires waiting, but in the end, truth prevails. Integrity wins.

Jesus urged his disciples to let their “yes” be “yes” and their “no” be “no.” Early Quakers adopted plain speech in response to Jesus’ teaching. They became known as “Publishers of Truth” who “spoke truth to power.” As followers of Jesus we have a role in helping truth prosper. But what does that mean in our day-to-day lives? How can we be people of integrity and stand firmly on truth?

We need to be informed. Before we pass information on to others, we need to check our sources and be sure we’re not passing along misinformation. Rumors abound from both “sides” in many of our life situations. As we approach elections, a struggling economy, health care or educational reforms, what role—if any—do we play in propagating rumors, or in prospering truth?

We may need to be open to changing our view of the truth, to be willing to ask, “Is my faith defined by what I think I know, or defined by truth? Am I willing to lay aside preconceived ideas and traditions—to allow a ‘paradigm crash’—in order to embrace truth? Am I open to God’s voice; am I willing to receive truth from ‘unconventional’ sources?”

Truth speaks inwardly, and resonates with our sense of what is right and just and good. Truth affirms the dignity of humans created in the image of God.

Queries:

Am I willing to listen to another person’s point of view and discern the truth that might reside there?

Or, do I stubbornly cling to traditions or what I’ve been taught is “true,”

and in so doing quench the Spirit’s work in my life?

Do I grasp at dogma and defend my long-held beliefs—or am I open to change and the work of grace?

January 18 – Integrity

Lisby Rogers

Read: Luke 16:10

I made the choice to commute by bike about three years ago when I started thinking of how much money I could save on gas by riding rather than driving. The act started out as a selfish one: I am poor; this is how I can save money. But it has formed into a way of life, something I believe in deeply and feel called to.

There are some obvious benefits to bike commuting: saving gas money; using less gas, which contributes to our support of middle eastern conflict over oil; getting more exercise and never needing to find a parking spot. Over the years I have found other, more surprising benefits, like setting a slower pace to the day: you naturally give yourself more time and, therefore, schedule less into a day which contributes to a lower stress level. Living a simple life by using a simpler vehicle makes me more self-sufficient. When my car breaks down I am helpless, but when my bike breaks down I can usually figure it out and I am not out hundreds or thousands of dollars.

In a way, my bike has taught me about integrity. It is not always easy to ride in the rain, when driving would be so much warmer and more comfortable. I am not always motivated to give myself an extra half hour to get somewhere when I am anxious to complete a task. The wind is cold against the face and hands in the morning, and sometimes getting on my bike is the last thing I want to do. But each time I ride I think of it as prayer, as self-examination, as testimony, as prophecy, as compassion, as seeking peace in a conflicted world, as loving.

Trying to define how to live an integrity-filled life is near to impossible. For me, integrity looks like riding my bicycle everyday, no matter what; for you, it may look entirely different.

Queries:

What does integrity look like in my life?

In what ways do I already live with integrity?

How am I being invited to live out my professed beliefs with a deeper level of integrity?

January 19 – Integrity

Karrie Brothers

Read: Philippians 4:8-9

My family and I have been encountering quite a bit of change in our lives recently. As a result, the subject of integrity has been in the front of my mind for several months. How do we navigate and find our way in such different and ever-changing circumstances and not be buffeted by the stress? This question takes regular attention. The dictionary defines integrity as “possession of firm principles,” “completeness,” and “wholeness.” It doesn't say what those principles are – I am left to figure that part out on my own.

My religious education as a child encouraged ambiguousness rather than clear and defined boundaries. When I became a Christian my feet shifted, but the thing I noticed the most was the firmness of the ground – the integrity of my position. It soon became clear that the guidance of scripture coupled with the counsel of my pastor provided even more solid footing.

Without a clearly defined set of guidelines and boundaries it is difficult for individuals or a community to assess integrity because there is nothing to measure against. This is often presented as a benefit: you can't come up short when there is nothing to compare. In reality it creates an unattainable goal because the target is always changing, moving and redefining itself.

With Christ, the goal may still be unattainable, but I'm not judged for failing to meet the standard of the day. While I probably won't hit a bull's eye, I do have a chance at getting within range of the target because I know exactly what I'm aiming for. When I miss I can course-correct, knowing the goal hasn't changed. Slowly but surely our family is regaining our footing and determining next steps. There are still some things I have to just figure out by trial and error, and that's okay. Guided by the integrity of what I can count on it is much easier to chart a course through the unknowns.

Queries:

Am I considering the whole of all the parts when I aim for integrity in all my actions? What measure am I comparing against in judging integrity?

January 20 – Community

NWYM Query 6

As followers of Christ do you love and respect each other? Do patience and consideration govern your interactions; and when differences arise, do you resolve them promptly in a spirit of forgiveness and understanding? Are you careful with the reputation of others?

January 21 – Community

Kimberly Felton

Read: Romans 12:15

Rachel showed up on my doorstep, her eyes red and still wet. “I didn’t know it would be so hard,” she said. Her sister just gave birth, and asked Rachel to be with her. Rachel was in the midst of infertility, but wanted to support her sister.

“I shouldn’t think so much about myself. I should just be happy for them.” Shame cloaked her words. Once fresh in people’s minds, Rachel’s grief had faded for everyone – except her. And in this moment, her grief combined with self-loathing. If everyone else thought she should be fine, shouldn’t she?

Community is at its most powerful at both ends of the emotional spectrum: rejoicing and weeping. We celebrate well: weddings, baby showers, new jobs. We rally tight in a crisis: funerals, meals for the ill, consoling a friend when he loses a job.

But walking a long journey of pain with a friend is altogether different, and often difficult. We want friends to get better; move on; be happy. And...we forget. We move on, inadvertently communicating, “I’ll weep with you for a night, but joy had better come in the morning.”

Yet God gives gifts not only within joy, but also within pain. “I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places” (Isaiah 45:3). As Christ’s community, we have the privilege of finding those gifts with those who fight each day in the hope of such treasure. People like the woman who can’t find a job, the friend in chronic back pain whose activities are limited, the man struggling with depression.

Our tears for those who continue in pain...a look of compassion in our eyes...a note that says, “I haven’t forgotten,” help those who weep do the hard work of perseverance. It helps them believe God has treasures for them in the darkness.

Prayer:

God, it’s so hard to know what to say to my friends in pain.

I’m afraid of saying the wrong thing.

And sometimes I just forget.

Help me walk the journey with them.

Help me speak your peace into their hearts, even as the storm rages.

January 22 – Community

Cherice Bock

Read: I Corinthians 12

I've had the privilege of experiencing many situations where there is true community. I remember catching a glimpse of what community looked like when I went to camp as a high school student. I felt like there, more than almost anywhere else, I could be myself, and that self was good enough and challenged to be even more.

I've also experienced a lack of community. One summer during college I went overseas to work with an organization that helps kids from various underprivileged communities get to know one another and build relationships. While this organization does great work, it didn't do much to foster community among the volunteers, and I came home with the conviction—I believe it was Spirit-led—that if I was ever going to do something like that again, I needed to have some built-in community along with me.

Community is so important to us as members of Christ's body, the Church. As it says in I Corinthians 12:27, we are each part of the body of Christ—each one of us is an important part. For me this is of particular importance when I think about how to go outside my comfort zone to live in a way that is perhaps unpopular with our culture, but is how we as Christians are called to live. If I'm the only one living that way, perhaps that's good for me—I'm living out my calling in obedience to God. But wouldn't it be even better if all of us lived that way? What if every Christian in the United States suddenly stopped buying things that were made in sweat shops or that were grown or harvested at the expense of a worker's health? This is just one area that we as Christians may feel led to live out our belief in God's desire for love with justice, but if we try to live this way alone, it can feel overwhelming.

Throughout history, prophets have arisen to point the way that God is calling. In our history as a denomination, Quakers have been a prophetic people, calling the Church and the world to faithfulness. Our denomination has done this because of people who were willing to listen to Christ together in community, and who had the courage to act, supporting one another each step of the way. Will our generation continue this tradition?

Queries:

When have I experienced true community or lack of community?

In what ways do I sense God calling us to a fuller embodiment of Christ in the world?

How can I be part of a community with the discernment and courage to do this?

January 23 – Community

Jon Kershner

Read: 2 Corinthians 8

A few years ago my wife and I moved to Seattle. The physical labor of lugging dressers, boxes of books and cast-iron pans from one location to another is rarely enjoyable, and we had limited time. Our plan was to complete the move in one day – load up the trailer in the morning, drive an hour north and unload in the afternoon. By the afternoon we were exhausted, with much of the trailer left to unload. The low-point came as I was moving the refrigerator on a hand-truck through an uneven spot on the sidewalk, only to lose my balance and send the refrigerator crashing onto the cement. At that moment, and much to my relief, a carload of folks from North Seattle Friends Church pulled up to help finish unloading. They provided a much-needed boost of energy, strength and encouragement. This gift of time and energy meant a lot to my wife and I when we were at the end of our rope.

The Apostle Paul knew that if Christians in the first century were going to thrive they needed to work together. Paul encouraged the Corinthians with this simple principal: Give yourselves to God, then give yourselves to each other (2 Cor. 8:5, 7). Paul laid out what we might describe as a spiritual economy of plenty – there is always enough to do what we are called to do as we listen faithfully to the Spirit and respond generously with our time and resources (v. 13-15). Through the community of Christ, way opens where a door appeared shut. Even something as seemingly ordinary as lending a helping hand can be the pure grace of God.

Query:

What does it look like to be the community of Christ?

January 24 – Community

Jennifer Dalziel

Read: Matthew 5:14-16

The role of faith versus works is often an area of confusion in the Christian world. We're called to act like Christ, but why does it really matter what we do, when we receive salvation through faith alone?

The way I see it, faith is one's very personal connection with God. Faith defines our one-on-one relationship with Christ. Works, on the other hand, are an outwardly-directed aspect of a relationship with Christ. Works are what reach beyond the individual, impacting others in our community as a representation of Christ's inner working. Works reflecting God's love can challenge and uplift fellow believers. These actions, pointing towards Christ, become a continual reminder of his love for us.

Unfortunately, we often forget that God's community stretches much wider than just our church. God wants everyone to know God's love, and it is through our works that we can either spread that love or keep it closed in. We are called to be Christ's hands and feet, to shine God's light to all people, to the full community of this world, so that they may know the love of God.

Christ desires more than a relationship with solely you and me. He wants us to shine his light in work, in play, in school, in meetings, in our church, with our families and with our friends. Our works may very well be the only opportunity someone else has to encounter Christ. It is our responsibility to spread the love we have been given.

Though faith alone is enough to guarantee one's personal salvation, it is often our works that open doors for the salvation of others.

Query:

How are my works uplifting your community and welcoming others to find faith in Christ?

January 25 – Community

Jamie Johnson

S'More Community, Please

Read: Matthew 25:34-40

It was a beautiful evening in Kings Canyon National Park, one filled with a slight breeze that quickly excused the heat we had experienced all day. Our campground was carved into a scene that is difficult to recreate with words. Originally granite thousands of years ago, time and weather had turned the mountains encircling us into marble – smooth and impenetrable – carved through by a river that over time had created for itself a bed of incomprehensible beauty. The roar of the river served as a continuous backdrop, upon which birds overlaid their chirps, fires their crackles and children their laughter.

It was in this place of relative peace that my attention was drawn to an RV lumbering into my serenity, drowning out the natural noise and replacing it with the drone of an oversized engine tired from lugging a small house up and down these oversized mountains.

The driver's name was Thomas and, through a thick European accent, I learned that he and his family were from Switzerland and were passing through this remote location as part of a months-long road trip. As soon as it felt natural to move on from the requisite small talk, together we marveled at our surroundings before returning to our respective campsites.

Later that evening, our family had just begun making s'mores when Thomas and his family walked ever-so-cautiously over to us. As they approached it was with an expectation of being accepted, of being welcomed. Our entire family (all 15 of us!) simultaneously stood up, inched our multi-colored canvas chairs back, and added 4 more chairs to the circle.

As they looked curiously upon our ritual of marshmallow roasting, their eyes beckoned for an explanation of what we were doing. Someone in the group described the process of making s'mores, and as Thomas and his family listened, they nodded along, noting that they had heard of our American ritual but had never before experienced it.

So we stuck marshmallows on the end of sticks and taught them how to roast to perfection, then laid the hot, gooey marshmallows on top of the chocolate and sandwiched it between two pieces of Graham cracker.

Their faces displayed curiosity, a bit of enjoyment, and overall a sense of acceptance in this unique practice – a ritual experienced countless times by us, but by them for the first time.

In this simple act, community was being built. There was a connection being made between people who were willing to ask questions, to learn, to be shaped by each other. Like the marshmallow dripping over the edge of the Graham cracker, this sacramental moment was bursting with Christ's presence. And it was delicious.

Prayer:

God, please make me aware of places I can build spontaneous or long-term community today.

January 26 – Equality

NWYM Query 18

Do you speak out for justice and morality, and against oppression, exploitation, and public wrong? Do you recognize the equality of persons regardless of race, gender, or economic status?

January 27 – Equality

Melanie Mock

Seeking Equality, Seeking Peace

Read: Luke 4:18-19

Although I identify myself as a feminist now, this was not always the case. As a young adult, I resisted the feminist label and its man-hating, bra-burning connotations. But several strong women nurtured my voice—my written voice, my literal voice, my metaphysical voice—and in the process, helped me to see how, in reality, feminists help people who are silenced, in our own culture and abroad.

Cheryl WuDunn and Nicolas Kristof's transformative book, *Half the Sky*, describes the many ways women are oppressed around the world: silenced through abuse, rape, genital mutilation, prostitution. As a peace-seeking person, I am compelled to seek justice for these women who cannot speak for themselves, and I know my role as a vocal Christian feminist is one to which God called me.

Closer to home, I see young women who have been told that, according to biblical principle, they should remain silent. The messages from evangelical culture remind women to be submissive and meek, and that those females who would deign to speak—especially from the pulpit—are transgressing their godly-woman roles. In listening to these messages, too many young women fail to fully discover the gifts God has given them. As a peace-seeking person, and a professor at an evangelical Friends university, I am compelled to seek justice for these women, too, and hope my role as a vocal Christian feminist models for them a faithful response to God's calling.

In the past, when I've thought about pacifism, I've most often considered my response to war and bloodshed and retributive violence. But surely, in prompting us to seek peace, God also longs for us to seek equity. For me, the crux of the Gospel is this: that the Prince of Peace came to recover sight for the blind, to free the oppressed and to give voice to the silenced. May I seek, each day, to live the peace testimony to its fullest extent.

Query:

Do I promote social justice and make my life a testimony to equity?

Do I support fair treatment of all regardless of race, gender, age and other differences?

Am I concerned for those in our society who are disadvantaged?

Am I concerned for those who are silenced?

January 28 – Equality

Stan Thornburg

Read: Colossians 3:11

“Do not think you have made any (spiritual) progress, unless you esteem yourself less than all.”
—Thomas á Kempis

The practice of seeing all people as equals is a difficult discipline, but one that brings great joy and delight to those who are willing to submit to Christ to be thus formed. This practice, though, is at the heart of the Quaker testimony of equality of persons. Quakers historically lived out this testimony by living and working as equals with people such as prisoners, the mentally ill, the poor, Native Americans, and virtually every class of people including royalty, Cavaliers and other socially successful classes of people. Quaker women moved easily into leadership and were trusted as faithful prophets.

Some friends make the mistake of believing equality simply means a “level playing field.” Men, women and acceptable minorities supposedly have equal access to all the “goodies” of our society. Nothing could be further from the truth. The testimony of equality calls us to honor every person and value his or her unique characteristics, treating others’ uniqueness as precious gifts from which to learn. On a broader scope, the testimony of equality of persons means valuing different cultures in much the same way. We NEED women in leadership, for example, because we want to learn from their experience and benefit from the direction and style their leadership provides. The same could be said for every minority in our diverse culture—even the minorities whose behavior and/or beliefs we find questionable.

There is “that of God in every person,” so when we honor all others we honor God and God’s purposes for humanity.

Query:

Do I and/or my meeting seek the transforming power of God’s Spirit
so that we are able to fully love and honor all others equally?

January 29 – Equality

Megan Anna Neff

Read: Psalm 139

It was July of 2005, and I was traveling down a dusty, bumpy road with three Malawians: Gibson, Steve and Nixon. I clocked many hours in the car with these guys while interning at World Relief Malawi. Our conversations often drifted into interesting dialogue about politics and religion.

I remember that particular day in July because the bombings of London during their morning rush hour had just happened, and we were listening to the BBC. With the announcer's prompting, we honored a moment of silence for the victims. After the moment of silence had passed, Gibson pointedly asked me, "In the U.S did you ever observe a moment of silence for Rwanda?" He was referring to the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. Almost 800,000 people died, and we in the U.S. heard little about it.

I had to respond with a meek "No." Gibson laughed and proclaimed, "The life of one white person is worth the lives of a thousand Africans." I sat stunned and silent. I wanted to deny it, but I couldn't deny that I lived in a world that treated U.S. citizens with far more value than Africans. If we were to hit one of the many potholes that littered the road and spin out of control, I could anticipate how the news back home might read: "U.S. citizen dies in car accident." The three other lives might be mentioned as naught but a footnote.

As I pondered the reality of Gibson's comment, I kept asking myself: "How can I see beyond the bias of my culture in order to value the equality of all lives?" Since that conversation with Gibson, I have read reports of far-off tragedy with new eyes, imaging the people and faces as if that tragedy had happened to my friends, neighbors and community. It's a heavy, sobering way to read the news, but it reminds me of the humanity of all and the value of every life.

Prayer:

Lord and giver of all life, help us to value each person, created in love by you.
In your mercy, guide and assist our efforts to promote the dignity and value of all human life.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

January 30 – Equality

Nathanael Ankeny

Read: Ephesians 4:22-25

One night in grad school, I was walking down the hall on my way out of the music building and came upon one of my professors. "Goodnight, Dr. Graves," I said. Further down the hall, I saw Tom, the building's custodian. "Goodnight, Tom," I said in greeting. "Goodnight," he replied. The juxtaposition of the two greetings struck me; Tom performs an important role by keeping the building clean, yet no one addresses him with any special title. My teachers, on the other hand, were usually called Doctor or Professor.

That evening I started thinking about several questions: can we treat people equally while referring to them in different ways? If titles are meant to show respect, was there something about my professors that made them more deserving of respect than others? Was I being called to address my professors without titles as I do everyone else? As I thought and prayed about it, I began to see that when we choose to address people differently, we put them in different categories, usually according to their socio-economic level.

God made it clear to me that I needed to act on this new conviction, and though it was difficult for me to tell my professors how I was going to address them, most of them understood. One professor, however, told me that I was being narrow-minded and should reconsider. This difficult encounter made me sense the power in what I was being called to do, and how it stripped away a façade constructed in academia meant to make some people feel more important than others.

As I obeyed Christ's call, I felt a new sense of accountability to treat everyone with respect. After all, if my witness of referring to each person the same way was to have integrity, I had to treat people equally, too. I learned that treating people with respect has little to do with how we address them, and much do with whether or not we are viewing them as fellow children of God.

Queries:

Am I grateful for the people around me and the work they do?

Do I treat people in all walks of life in a way that values them as children of God?

January 31 – Equality

Wess Daniels

Who is My Neighbor?

Read: Luke 12

American society and, for that matter, Christians, has for a long time wrestled with the question, “Who is my neighbor?” This is in large part a question regarding to whom hospitality and equal rights should extend. Debates about equality in America often revolve around the subject of “fundamental rights” of humanity. Unfortunately, for both society and the church, it is often those in power, those with money and typically men (like me) who get to decide the answers to these questions. It’s hard to get a balanced perspective when there’s an imbalance of voices represented.

Jesus responded to the still-poignant question, “Who is my neighbor?” with the story of the Good Samaritan, weaving together a tale with a surprising ending. We are surprised (maybe even outraged?) to discover to whom the category of neighbor (equal) extends. At the very heart of Jesus’ ministry is an embodiment of this parable of radical equality. He ministered to and befriended the unexpected, the misfits and outcasts of his society. Jesus ate (and drank) with all the wrong people. To put it another way, his Facebook “friends” list wouldn’t lend him a great reputation among the “spiritual.”

But today we are often at odds with debates about equality and fundamental rights. I think this is because in modern society, everything is about “self-evident truths” and “individual rationality.” The individual self as authority on matters of morality poses a problem. The self, freed from the pursuit of the common good of humanity, freed from the responsibility to the Other, is now given access to achieve “whatever it is I so desire.” And this “at whatever or whomever’s cost I see fit.”

For instance, when African Americans’ “right” to vote infringed upon White Americans’ control over the political system, we had a major conflict in our society. Or consider the hotly-debated topic of nationalized health care. Some believe that health care is a right, while others believe that it infringes upon their rights to be forced to have health care. Who is right about rights? And who gets to decide?

It is here that our Quaker tradition comes to bear on these contemporary questions. When we talk about the testimonies we are talking about a “bigger story” that binds us together, one that moves beyond my own individual rationality or self-evident truths. Testimonies are embodied truths; they are attached to a tradition and a historical community. The “big story” of Quakerism helps us make sense of what is right: what is good to be pursued and what is wrong. But these testimonies are too often understood in the same way the world understands equality – as disconnected values so that I get to decide whether I agree with each or not, as if our values were like the cereal aisle at Fred Meyer’s. I go down the aisle and pick out the cereal that suits my tastes best.

But for early Friends, testimonies were not detached “values” that I select at my own whimsy. In fact, the early Friends didn’t even label these testimonies—they just lived them. The Friends testimonies we now have are consequences of individual and communal encounters with the Living Christ across the 350+ years of our denominational history. Our testimony to equality is not simply a “right” Quakers think is a good idea, but an outgrowth of a conviction rooted in the teachings and life of Jesus in the biblical witness, through the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit and generations of Quakers putting this conviction into practice, working out what it means to be a faithful people who believe that the “Samaritans” of the world are our neighbors. This grounds equality in something larger than ourselves. It is something I am subject to, not something I get to decide whether or not it suits me. This is how testimonies, I believe, are to be understood.