

The Jeremiah Peace

“They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace.” – Jeremiah 6:14 (NIV)

Ask any stranger what they know about Quakers, and they’re likely to respond with something about peace. They might even say that Quakers are pacifistic. But that word is an oversimplification and inaccurate. What George Fox actually said in the first-ever written articulation of the Quaker peace testimony was, “We live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars.” This implies a manner of day-to-day living that is neither reactive nor nonreactive but *proactive*. We are faithful to the Light so that the occasion of all wars can be prevented.

The prophet Jeremiah spoke to what happens when people declare peace and there is no peace. It means that injustices won’t be reconciled. The wounded remain wounded; the oppressors continue to oppress. It’s a pretending, a lack of integrity, a refusal to name things as they really are. *“Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace.”* This perspective is about maintaining the status quo.

Australia’s [advices and queries](#) address what’s really meant by peace. #34 begins, “Bring into God’s light those emotions, attitudes and prejudices in yourself which lie at the root of destructive conflict, acknowledging your need for forgiveness and grace.” This implies that we begin internally, as Fox also suggested. Early Friends spoke of being *searched* by the Light. It was an experience in worship that would illuminate those places within us that needed attention and transformation.

“Acknowledge your need for forgiveness and grace.” Shouldn’t we also acknowledge this need in other people? Do I extend forgiveness and grace as readily as I hope it will be extended to me? How do I extend forgiveness and grace while also naming persistent injustices? These are uncomfortable questions, but that’s precisely the point. The peace testimony is about creating peace, not peaceful feelings.

In his 2005 Backhouse Lecture, [“Peace Is a Struggle,”](#) David Johnson said, “In my experience there is no lasting inner peace. Seeking an inner peace so that every day we feel at peace, so that life is tranquil, and unhurried, so that life is happy and yet worthwhile, so that all our interactions are happy and warming, is in my experience heading for disappointment. In fact such a state is more focussed on personal comfort and happiness than on following the lead of the Spirit. My experience is that working for peace has plenty of uncomfortable feelings, difficult attitudes from others, long hours of work, frustrations, disappointments and tiredness.”

The second half of query #34 suggests we’ll be led to even further discomfort: “In what ways are you involved in the work of reconciliation between individuals, groups and

nations?" And here we return to the practice of the peace testimony being proactive, rather than reactive or nonreactive. What am I doing right now, today, to further the work of reconciliation between individuals, groups and nations? Am I initiating the difficult conversations? Am I speaking truthfully about injustice? Am I making choices in day-to-day life that further the cause of peace between nations?

The scope of this query may seem paralyzingly difficult. The good news is that it's not my responsibility, nor yours, to design a plan that will bring us all to world peace. It's our responsibility to [enter worship](#) with open hearts, prepared to be transformed and led and probably uncomfortable, willing to be searched by the Light, and expecting to be given one step at a time toward eliminating "'peace, peace,' when there is no peace." To be faithful to something much deeper and realer. To live in the virtue of that life and power.