



IYM Quakers

Session Three

The Friends Peace Testimony



Blessed are the Peacemakers

- *The Peace Testimony in Action*
- *The Struggle for Peace*

The Peace Testimony in Action

Matthew 5:9

In 1650 George Fox was offered a ranking position in the Commonwealth army of Oliver Cromwell. Accepting this offer would have lessened the persecution that Fox was receiving. Instead, Fox declined, indicating that he operated out of a different power.

William Penn, the son of an Admiral in the British navy, became a Quaker in 1666 at the age of 22. He was so gripped by the incompatibility of warfare to his newfound faith that he returned his sword to his father and embraced the Friends testimony of peace.

Later in Penn's life he was offered a large grant of land in America by the King of England in payment of a debt owed to his father. Penn seized this opportunity to establish a colony based upon Quaker principles such as peace and equality. This colony, Pennsylvania, was characterized by humane laws and fair treatment of Native Americans. Penn's "Holy Experiment" indicates that given a chance, peace works!



William Penn

The Struggle for Peace

Romans 12:18

From the beginning the Friends testimony of peace arose out of a deeply held Christian faith. They sought to live out the New Testament teaching to "turn the other cheek" and "love your enemies." It was only later that religious pacifism was supplemented by economic and social arguments opposing warfare.



In Elton Trueblood's book, *The People Called Quakers*, he includes a chapter titled "The Struggle for Peace." He skillfully points out that applying the Friends peace testimony is not always cut and dried.

Today Friends churches in Indiana Yearly Meeting are filled with Friends who have struggled with how to live out this testimony. Some have registered as conscientious objectors and served in alternative service during times of warfare. Others have served in the military in non-combatant roles, and others have felt led to bear arms as a means of keeping the peace. The common thread in each of these responses is that they have been formed out of personal struggles to be faithful to the Spirit of God in the midst of complex political and social settings.

Conclusion

The story is told of William Penn, born into a military family, becoming uncomfortable with wearing his sword after becoming a Friend. When Penn sought the counsel of Fox in the matter he was advised to wear his sword as long as he could.

Today Friends stand in this stream of tradition. We understand that pacifism is not synonymous with Christianity, yet one who has truly experienced Christ will find it increasingly uncomfortable to embrace without a thought the unmerciful ways of this world. Our belief is that the Spirit of God will personally lead individuals away from warfare or aggression and toward attitudes and actions that would be described as “peacemaking.”



The Friends Peace Testimony

Blessed are the Peacemakers

From the very beginning George Fox and the early Friends saw the world differently than others. Instead of operating out of the conventional wisdom of their day, they had a new and fresh perspective springing from minds that had been renewed and transformed by the Light of Christ.

England, in the 17th century, could be quite uncivilized. Human life was not always valued highly as evidenced by the frequent use of capital punishment and inhumane conditions in prisons. There seemed to be a universal approval of war with little, if any, opposition from Christians. Participation in military campaigns was even viewed as a Christian enterprise during this age. Out of this environment, the early Friends sensed that something was amiss – that God was calling them to operate at a higher level.

The “Friends Peace Testimony” was not a new convention originating with Friends. A glance at church history shows that early Christian leaders like Justin Martyr and Tertullian were decidedly opposed to warfare. A quick read through the book of Acts paints a picture of Christianity as a spiritual movement focusing on the advancement of the Kingdom of God instead of the kingdoms of this world.

To this very day Friends seek to “live in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars” (Fox).