

## **An Epistle from Jordans Young Adult Friends Gathering 2024**

To all Friends everywhere, in the Light and Love that draws us together, we send greetings.

From 21st-25th 8th Month, Oxford young adult Friends were joined by young adult Friends from London, Glasgow, Ireland, and different parts of the United States, as well as our accompanying elder from Pennsylvania, to experience Jesus teaching, helping, changing, and knitting us together in new ways. We began by considering James Doyle Penrose's widely circulated painting of *The Presence in the Midst*, which he had painted at Jordans, and his remarkable statement that, as he sat in the old meeting house,

I pondered on what it was that gave [early Friends] all their power; for they had power in those bygone times, and then I realized that it was the presence of Christ amongst them – 'The Presence in the Midst'. And I felt there was a subject that I ought to paint; and I did feel that it was a very great undertaking. The sunlight streaming through the window threw the shadow of the casement mullion and transom on the wall, and, although I was not conscious of it at the time, it must have been an unconscious inspiration, for years afterwards, it was pointed out to me that this shadow was a cross – an empty cross. The work on the cross was a finished work of redemption, and now He, who once hung there, was the risen, living Christ whose presence may be relied upon where two or three are gathered together in His name.

We came together to know the life-changing, earth-shaking power that early Friends had encountered, and to ask what it means for us to be a people gathered anew by that power. Friends came with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and concerns. Opening the gathering to Friends from all over the world meant that we could not rely on existing relationships of trust and support. We were not all on the same page. Patience, openness, and care were needed to keep us together, in a unity that goes deeper than agreement. At times, our differences could have divided us. Yet with God's grace, we were helped to continue to travel together, to lift each other up with care and tenderness, to turn each other to the Light. Our experience of being drawn together, in full view of the challenges of community, showed us the unifying power of the Presence in the Midst. When our differences became clear, Christ yoked us together.

During our time together, we had six sessions centred on this experience of the Presence in the Midst.

On the morning of the 22nd, we shared what drew us to the gathering, and then Chris Stern spoke of his experience of Jesus's presence in meeting for worship. Quaker worship is not based on silence, which is neutral and depends on what it's filled with. Instead, we are brought together to wait on the Lord, and we expect Him to show up and lead us. That is a

promise we found fulfilled in our time together. On the afternoon of the 22nd, Matt Rosen shared his experience of hearing and yielding to Christ's voice of love and hope in his heart. He shared how this changed his understanding of Quaker worship, testimony, and community – all centred on the sufficiency and power of Jesus as a guide and friend. We discussed this experience for each of us and then studied passages from the journals of George Fox and Thomas Wilson. We focused on the experience of Christ in all his offices, the ground of Quaker worship and community.

On the morning of the 23rd, Julia Dallaway led us in Bible study, focused on Matthew 5:1-12. We waited on the Lord to open these words – familiar to some, new to others – to our understandings, and we found this a rich and helpful time. After Bible study, we met for worship in the historic burial ground, and a Friend was enabled to give a moving testimony of reliance on a power greater than herself. On the afternoon of the 23rd, with the sun shining, we had a conversation outdoors about gospel order and gospel ministry. We heard stories of how the lives of early Friends were transformed by their encounter with the living Christ. We recognised that we are not called to replicate the 17th century but to turn to that Light and Guide that spoke so powerfully to 17th century Friends and can still speak to us with that power today, bringing us together in love and joy. We asked what a community centred on Jesus as a present teacher and Lord looks like, how we are being led to a liberating vision of Christ-centred community and Christ-centred ministry for our time.

On the morning of the 24th, Eleanor Beswick spoke about how Quaker testimony is rooted in witnessing Jesus to be the Christ. We are not called to be 'good Quakers' but are called to be changed by Christ's response to our need and brokenness. We then had a time of reflection on how our experience of God renews us and reorients our lives. This was a time blessed by the presence of the Comforter: hearts were softened, and many Friends were able to speak vulnerably about God's leadings and work in their lives. On the afternoon of the 24th, Katy Jenkinson carried this forward with a session on how we can support each other to live faithfully, in obedience to God's promptings and guidance. We spent time in mini meetings for clearness, sharing concerns on our hearts, praying for each other, and seeking God's will. This drew us even closer together.

On our final morning together, we joined local Friends for First Day meeting for worship. In worship, 'our hearts were made glad and our tongues loosened', much as Edward Burrough experienced, and all present were pointed to Jesus's constant accompaniment, to how the Kingdom of God is found in little ways all around us, and to the need to hearken to the Lord's voice. It was a joy for us to share in worship with Jordans Friends, and the joy seemed mutual. After worship, we had lunch with local Friends and visitors from other meetings and were able to have some deep conversations before departing from Jordans.

Between our sessions, we went for walks in the countryside, enjoyed cooking for each other, worked on a formidable jigsaw puzzle of Penrose's painting, told stories and sang songs around the campfire, and felt the Divine hand forging new connections between us as the days went by.

We even tried to recreate Penrose's painting:



One afternoon, two of us were sitting in the 1688 meeting house, reflecting on the gathering, when sunlight came through the window at the right angle and suddenly a cross appeared illuminated on the wall, that empty cross that Penrose had seen. We reflected then that we too felt the risen Christ as a presence that can be relied on, as a companion and free teacher present with us as we are gathered in His name and power. We left Jordans changed and joined together by that encounter. There is still one, even Christ Jesus, who can knit us together in love – when our differences are stark, when we least expect it, when we're at the end of our rope.

in Christ's love,

MaY, Julia, Katy, Eleanor, and Chris

YAF Gathering Planning  
Group 2tith 8th Month  
2024