



Newsletter – July 2017

Diary: July 2017

Sunday 2 July	Preparative Meeting – 11.15 am after Meeting for Worship
Saturday 8 July	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Sunday 9 July	Area Meeting – 2.00 pm, Ettington Meeting House
Saturday 22 July	Experiment with Light – 10.00 am, Stratford Meeting House
Sunday 30 July	Themed Meeting for Worship – 10.30 am

Reflections on love

Our next themed Meeting for Worship will be held on Sunday 30 July – the fifth Sunday in the month - and its theme will be “Love”.

A reminder that we have decided to try a themed approach to Meeting for Worship during 2017 whenever there is a fifth Sunday in the month. How does this work? We are all invited to share a reading or thought through ministry during the Meeting on the chosen theme. The Meeting begins in silence as usual, and then after about 20 minutes, people are invited to share their readings or ministry.

Love is fundamental to our worship and our life. “Take heed, dear Friends, to the prompting of love and truth in your hearts,” says the first of our *Advices & Queries*. Love is at the heart of Christianity: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.... And love your neighbour as yourself”, says Jesus (Matthews 22: 37-39).

But what do we mean by “love”? How is love worked out in our world? Famously, Paul says in his first epistle to the Corinthians: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13: 4-8).

Sometimes it is difficult to love. Sometimes it is challenging. Sometimes it seems impossible. And can we *try* to love – should it not come unbidden? But even *trying* can lead to insight, to a new vision, to a new expression of ourselves as well as our love. And then there is the question of how others see and respond to our love!

Come with your thoughts, or a reading to share, on Sunday 30 July.

Doctors without Borders

Stratford Quakers are currently collecting for MSF – Medecins Sans Frontieres or Doctors Without Borders – an international charity which provides emergency medical aid to help in humanitarian crises. Much of its work is in responses to situations where standard arrangements for medical aid cannot be expected, such as wars and natural disasters. The latest edition of *Dispatches*, its quarterly newsletter includes accounts of some of these: working in the Yemen, which is in a state of civil war, and emergency response in the Democratic Republic of Congo to localised emergencies, such as the emergence of a cholera epidemic.

But the latest *Dispatches* also gives accounts of other types of equally valuable work. One is a project in the west African country of Guinea, where an MSF team has helped to organise a mass vaccination campaign against measles. Since a measles epidemic was declared earlier this year in February, nearly 4,000 measles cases had been confirmed – and 20 deaths.



Supporting the Ministry of Health, MSF mobilised 126 teams, sending them to vaccination clinics in and around the capital Conakry. In 10 days, nearly 650,000 children between the ages of six months and 10 years were vaccinated against measles. *Dispatches* concludes: “Now the most important thing is to improve the routine vaccination programmes in Guinea. ... [This] requires strong backing from international partners, especially in Guinea, where the perennially weak health system is still reeling from the devastating Ebola epidemic.”

Meanwhile, in northern Nigeria, MSF has been undertaking a project using mobile phones and mapping technology to monitor malnutrition. Sarah St Arnaud, MSF’s specialist in the use of geographical information systems (GIS), was sent to Maiduguri, capital city in Borno state in northeast Nigeria to set up the project. She describes the work in the latest *Dispatches*.

The project arose because seven years of fighting between government forces and Boko Haram have forced 2.5 million people to flee their homes. Malnutrition rates are on the rise across the region, where it is estimated over 4 million people do not have enough to eat. More than a million of these displaced people are living in Maiduguri, where most of the refugees are living scattered across the city – often crowded together in compounds or houses with the local people.

With MSF the only organisation on the ground providing aid and medical care, it needed to know where people were living, who is most at risk of malnutrition, and who needs immediate medical attention. It recruited 25 teams of local surveyors – one man and one woman. Each day, the teams headed out into the city equipped with a smart phone, hospital referral forms and specially designed bands to measure the circumference of children’s mid-upper arms – a test for malnutrition.

GIS technology on the smart phones was used to identify the areas in which people were most at risk of malnutrition. All the data on the phones was transferred each day to the main computer, which was used to map and analyse the information. This enabled MSF to see where food needed to be distributed most urgently. Sarah writes: “Food distribution is not something MSF usually does, but the crisis is so bad that we’ve scaled up our response significantly”.



MSF food distribution in Maiduguri, northern Nigeria

The teams managed to screen around 1,100 households each day. After two months, 34,790 households had been visited and nearly 74,000 children screened for malnutrition. This not only enabled MSF to make immediate responses but also has prepared staff and medication for the “hunger gap” – the season between harvest when food becomes scarce and malnutrition rates rise.

Donations to MSF can be made in the collection box in the Meeting House or by contacting Elliot Wassell on elliott.wassell@yahoo.co.uk.

In turbulent times: be a Quaker

The theme of this year’s Quaker Week Saturday 30 September – Sunday 8 October is “*In turbulent times: be a Quaker*”. The main aim of Quaker Week is to ensure that Quakers are well known and widely understood, to help seekers to find us and to encourage newcomers to experience Quaker worship. Quaker Week is also a great opportunity to share with others the values that shape our lives through stories of Quaker witness to building a more just and peaceful world.

How might we go about this in Stratford-upon-Avon? Over the past few years we have publicised peace – for example, through the vigil we held on the 70 anniversary of the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima – and we have supported the development of Fairtrade in Stratford. Most recently, we have been active supporters of the community welcome for the Syrian refugees who have come to our town – and in the process made the wider issue of refugees more generally known – most recently through a vigil in Refugee Week 2017.

Do any of these initiatives suggest a way we could celebrate Quaker Week in Stratford? Or are there other ideas? We will be discussing this question at Preparative Meeting on 2 July, but if you cannot make that but have ideas to suggest, contact Roger Matthews at roger.matthews@phonecoop.coop or on 01789 298503.

Speaking Christian about ... creeds

This month, in our series based on theologian Marcus Borg’s book *Speaking Christian*, we look at the notion of creeds.

In Catholic, Orthodox and many Protestant churches, reciting a creed – an affirmation that begins “I believe ...” followed by a series of statements about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit – is a part of every worship service. Quakers are unusual, though not alone, in having no creed like this. But, says Borg “For many Christians the creeds have become a problem. ... The reason is that many Christians are uncomfortable professing affirmation of a series of statements they think they are supposed to believe to be literally and absolutely true.”

Borg looks in detail at the Nicene Creed, originally formulated in 325 and amended in 381. Some critics of the creed today note that the Nicene Creed says nothing about the life of Jesus, his teachings or his message – it moves from his birth to his death with nothing in between. “To the extent that this implies that his teaching and activity do not matter very much, this is a valid criticism,” says Borg. But, he continues, “this was not the purpose of the Nicene Creed”.



Borg recounts how the creed was drawn up at the command of the Emperor Constantine with a view to producing a unified version of Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire (it didn't!) Much of its content and language therefore reflects debates from the 4th Century, many of which seem no longer relevant today. But Borg notes one important aspect of the creed: it gave Jesus a status higher than that of the Roman Emperor (when Constantine realised this, he decided he didn't like the new creed).

This is an important point today, says Borg. “Are we to give our allegiance to Jesus in the religious realm and our allegiance to others in the other realms of life? Are our religious and political loyalties separate? ... The answer of the Nicene Creed (and the New Testament before it) is clear. Jesus as Lord and Son of God transcends all other lords. Given this, standing and saying the Nicene Creed is a subversive act.”

Borg also discusses the opening of the Creed: “I believe ...”. For many contemporary Christians, the problem is the modern meaning of the word “believe”: confirming statements to be true, most often statements that are not immediately credible! But as we explored when looking at Borg's views about believing and faith (Stratford Quaker Newsletter, September 2016), in English before about 1600, the verb *believe* was not commonly used to mean “believe that a statement is true”; instead it was used to express a belief *in* – as when we say we believe in someone. The older meanings link it to fidelity – faithfulness – and trust: “commitment, loyalty, allegiance and attentiveness to our relationship with God”.

This significantly changes our understanding of what we are doing when we say the creed, says Borg. It is a ritual, an affirmation. “Do affirmations of faith matter?” asks Borg. “Yes. Is there only one way of making that affirmation? No.” When we say the creed, we identify with Christians around the world, both past and present. But, Borg says, there are other ways in which do that – and as Quakers, we would agree.

If you would like to contribute to the newsletter, contact Roger Matthews on 01789 298503 or e-mail him at roger.matthews@phonecoop.coop.