



Dear Friends,

We continue our time of physical separation in support of our civil societies response to slow the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The suffering of people near and far is in the news each day. Here in Montgomery county the personal knowledge of its impact on people is day by day becoming known to us. More and more of us know people who are placing themselves at risk in the service of others, or know those who have become sick, or are striving from afar to comfort someone who has lost a beloved, or have indeed have lost a beloved of their family and are walking the grieving path without a physical embrace of their family and community. Sickness and death have become part of our lives now in a way that most of us have not experienced before. It is constantly on the news, it keeps us in our homes, separates us from our work (or ends our work), complicates the simple chores of going to the store for groceries. It threatens or has taken away our ability to earn our living and there by endangers the financial stability of our families. The stress of bills, mortgages and paying for food increases each day. For some of our community (Plymouth and the wider community) the impact of this endemic has already come, and they are swimming in troubled waters. For others of our community they watch from their homes, reach out on their phones or virtually on computers across the distance to help in whatever way they can, and there are those of us who are called out in the community daily in occupation or acts of service. These are the real challenges of our lives today.

The blessing of our community is its diversity of people. Diversity in the way we understand issues. Diversity in our spirituality. Diversity in our gifts of ministry to each other and our world. It is in that diversity that the many ways of ministry unfold in these times. As always there are those who go out into the world with acts of caring and those who remain and care for the community. Those who participate in the physical acts of ministry and those who hold the world in prayer. Prayers of holy listening and song create the space of healing and strengthening for the community. And there are those who travel in and out of these spaces of action and prayer as lead. Our community is living into what they are called to by Divine inward leadings. These challenging times are indeed times of discovery. Times when we come to know ourselves, our family, and our community in a new way. Times when we are increasingly tender in our listening to God's still small voice.

Our Meeting house remains closed. How often we have said that the Meeting is not the building. Now we are living into those words. So many questions:

What is a Friend's Meeting if the people of the Meeting cannot come together physically? How do we corporately hear God's will? Does what we have been taught over the years need to change? What is of use of what we have been taught and come to think of as a Friends way? Has our way of being in our community really changed? Has our way of knowing God's will changed?

Perhaps nothing has changed except the outward form. Listening is foundational to a Friends way of life. Deep holy listening. It is as important now as was prior to our separation. Important that we spend time in personal retirement listening inwardly. We are diverse in how that occurs and rightfully so. Friends enter their daily devotions by reading, writing, singing, walking, offering up prayer in its many forms.

The ways of prayer are as countless as there are Friends. It is no less important to continue in our personal devotions now as it was before the arrival of the virus. These times of personal devotion instructs our inner ear in the ways of holy listening. The practice of which is of such importance as we come together one with another to be of comfort or to help in discernment. Today we are called into this holy listening without being able to sit together in the same space. Our listening prayer instructs us as to how we are to be with one another. Distance is but a thin veil when we touch at the level of the heart.

And what of our cooperate worship and decision making? Can we corporately be with one another across the physical distancing imposed by this endemic? Bonnie and I were in Jerusalem, Hebron, and Ramallah years ago. I remember still vividly the power of being with members of my Meeting across distance and time. In the evenings when the pain of the communities we visited (Jew and Muslim and Christian) was acutely on my heart. My mind played out the day's events of anger, violence, and hatred, of fear and depression and of hopelessness and madness. The intentional turning to prayer connected me to the promise that others in my faith community here in Plymouth would be praying in the evening with us. This was not just a statement of "I will pray for you" that slides off our tongues after an event but a holy promise to be with in prayer as this journey of ours unfolded. To be with in our fear, creeping sense of hopelessness, our wavering sense of God's presence. In the love our faith communities promise to hold us tenderly each evening we opened our selves to God's renewing love in the reality of the challenges of the Israel and Palestine. Opened to a peace that was deeper than the conflict, to the renewal of the ability to hold in love all that we would meet in the tomorrow. We experience God's love through our faith community commitment across space and time to be a continuing reality that lead us in our daily discernments as to how to follow the path before us. Corporately we can be together in prayer across distance when we are intentional.

Today we do not have the ability to be physically with one another in our Meeting House. Yet we are one with another when there is intention. That intention occurs in a couple of ways. For some it is as above. A retirement to a place of enabling peace (a room in a home, a garden, a walk ....) with the focus of mind and spirit upon the faith community. Lifting up individuals or issues in prayer. Holding tenderly the hopes and fears, the difference, and the conundrums of problems that our Meeting embraces. Waiting upon the guiding light that comes through the creaks in those places of darkness that trouble us. For others technology provides an opportunity that allows us to see and hear one another across the physical distance. It can feel odd and superficial to sit in a room having jiggled technology this way and that to bring ourselves together. But in time, as in our Meeting House the distractions of the day, the distractions of the traffic outside yield to a drawing towards a place of being with but not of the world. A place of love for those gathered. As on the benches in the Meeting House yet now in our home and on a computer screen, we open an eye and give thanks for the faces before us one by one taking in their spirit in love. With time and practice we come to pray with the same intentionality of being with one another through the modernity of technology.

We continue as one faith community joining in a variety of ways with the same desire of expressing our love for one another and a longing to know what the Divine Teacher is asking of us this week. Send an email to [plymouthmonthlymeeting@gmail.com](mailto:plymouthmonthlymeeting@gmail.com) to request a zoom link. The same link will be used each week for Firstday (Sunday) and for mid-week worship. There is also a link for our school's Meeting for Worship on Thursday. Monthly business meeting will use the same link and occur prior to Meeting for Worship on the third First Day of the month.

Blessings to all and peace be with you. My contact and phone number are below if I can help you in any way.

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