

(Isaiah 66:10-14; Galatians 6:7-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20)

Well, this time last week I was in Kendal as part of a few days' midsummer break. Kendal, the 'auld grey town', is where my late mother was born and grew up. It's a place I know well: we spent many family holidays there. Kendal is also known for its strong Quaker presence. Indeed, my mother was brought up as a Quaker – and hence with the belief that at the heart of the practice of anyone's faith must be a personal experience of God. Like any good Quaker, she had therefore seen no need for churches or priests. I can only imagine her inner struggle when she found herself getting married to my father, a Church of England priest!

It was a few years ago that one of my mother's many first-cousins-once-removed told me about the Quaker Tapestry, on permanent display at the Friends' Meeting House in Kendal. And last week I finally managed to see it. Heavily influenced by the Bayeux Tapestry, the Quaker Tapestry comprises 77 panels illustrating the history of Quakerism. It was made in the 1980s by over 4,000 people in 15 different countries.

The first panel tells the story of George Fox, one of the 17th century founders of Quakerism. He travelled throughout Britain as a dissenting preacher, and was arrested and jailed for his beliefs on many occasions. He was joined by others on his travels, notably the nobleman William Penn whose own trial led to the precedent being set for juries to be free from control by the judge. (And by the way, have you spotted the prayer for July in our Parish Magazine, written by William Penn?)

Now think back to our gospel reading today. 'The Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.' They were to proclaim to anyone who would listen the reality of God's kingdom, and they would receive a mixed response. Tellingly, Jesus said to the seventy, 'Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me'.

It goes without saying that the kingdom of God is a reality not simply inside churches on a Sunday morning but 'out there', seven days a week. This morning, *we* are about seventy in number, and our task – like that of the original seventy – is to proclaim in word (and probably more importantly by the way we lead our lives) the values which show God's reign to be a reality. God's reign is about freedom and true liberation; about joyfulness and mutual flourishing. Being a citizen of that kingdom is therefore attractive, and the way we lead our lives should make people want to join us as fellow citizens – united under Christ our King.

The point about the seventy being sent out in pairs is simply to show that no one is asked to take on this task of proclamation alone. We are to be there for others, and to be assured that they are there for us.

Now Quakerism may deny the need for institutional religion, and in its radicalism may even have gone so far as to say that 'a direct experience of God is more

meaningful than Scripture' (Robert Barclay said this in his famous 'Apology' of 1678)! In response to that I hope you would agree with me that it is in the prayerful reading of Scripture that we can have the most profound, meaningful experience of God, speaking directly to us. Even so, the Quaker way of life can teach us much about the reality of the kingdom of God – as it can about how to proclaim that reality.

So listen to what the Quakers themselves say about their Values.

'How we act as Quakers goes together with what we believe', they say.

'We don't have a fixed creed because we have found that the search for truth can lead us to new expressions of values as well as confirming existing ones. We call these values 'testimonies'. Today we focus on equality, peace, truth, justice and simplicity, and how they relate to one another. Our testimonies encourage us to work for a more just, peaceful and sustainable world. It's not always easy to live this way, but as Quakers we encourage each other to keep trying.'

On Equality and Justice

'Quakers believe everyone is equal. This inspires us to try to change the systems that cause injustice and that stop us being genuine communities. It also means working with people who suffer injustice, such as prisoners of conscience and asylum seekers. We were campaigning for independent juries in the 17th-century, for marriage equality in the 21st, and for a range of things in between.'

On Peace

'Quakers are perhaps best known for our peace testimony. It comes from our belief that love is at the centre of existence and that all human life is of equal worth. It has led Quakers to refuse military service and work creatively for peace. This has ranged from practical work in areas affected by violent conflict to developing alternatives to violence at all levels. This could be personal or international.'

On Truth and Integrity

'Quakers try to live according to the deepest truth we know, and we connect most deeply to this in the stillness of worship. This means speaking the truth at all times, including to people in positions of power. As we are guided by integrity, so we expect to see it in public life.'

On Simplicity and Sustainability

'Quakers are concerned about excess and waste in our society. We want to make sure our use of natural resources is sustainable. We try to live simply and to find space for the things that really matter: the people around us, the natural world, and our experience of stillness.'

The process of living out their faith they call Quaker Witness.

As seventy (or so!) members of this Christian community I invite us all to reflect on our 'Anglican Witness' to the reality of God's reign in our lives. And as the people

who *are* the parish church of Richmond with Hudswell, does how we act, individually and collectively, genuinely go together with what we believe?

Perhaps next time you go along Quakers Lane here in Richmond you might be minded – with ‘inner stillness’ – to think on these things...

I close with St Paul’s advice, taken from our second reading today: ‘Let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all’.

Thanks be to God. Amen.