



Pentecost

A Quaker Life Devotional

Wednesday, April 15

Mark 16:1-4

“Who will roll back the stone from the tomb for us?”

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome knew what to do as they headed to Jesus’ tomb. However they didn’t know how they were going to accomplish it. A huge stone was in their way, and it worried them. How were they going to move the stone? But you know the story. When they got to the tomb, the stone was already moved aside.

This scenario resonates with me because when we—as individuals or Meetings—are guided by the Spirit, we often have a sense of what we are led to do; but invariably there are obstacles in the way of our faithfulness. We think of ourselves as following Jesus. But we unconsciously have this image of Jesus giving instructions and the implementation is all on our shoulders. In actuality, a good leader—a good shepherd—goes ahead and clears the way of obstacles and makes every provision for those who follow. While we usually don’t know how things have been Spirit-prepared, we can walk in confidence that Christ is a trustworthy leader who walks ahead of us.

It reminds me of a quirky spiritual practice that I have been using over the years to put muscle memory to this truth. When I approach an automatic door in a building, I intentionally keep up my pace and let the door open as I keep walking, rather than slowing down to make sure the door is going to open. In some strange way, these small acts of trust help me stay in stride as I am following Jesus.

Jan Wood

Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting

Thursday, April 16

Mark 16:5-6

“Don’t be alarmed . . . You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified.

He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”

Resurrection is at the heart of Christianity. Jesus was crucified, killed, and buried on Friday. His loved ones spent Saturday in the depths of grief, sorrow, and fear. At the first break of dawn on Sunday, three women bring spices to care for his body, because he was buried so late on Friday they didn’t have time to do that before the Sabbath. So they walk to his tomb, still trying to adjust themselves to a world made dimmer by his death—and they find, instead of a dead body, a living man, giving them news they could barely believe—“Jesus is risen! He’s not in the grave, see?” They watched Jesus die—and now they see the tomb, empty of death.

This is a story that we can live over and over in our own lives. Each of us, if we live long enough, will experience loss and suffering. Each of us will live through grief, sorrow, and fear. And each of us can experience the wonder of waking up one day and finding life in our hearts and in the world instead of death.

We worship a God who brings beauty and life out of every heartbreak, every tragedy. There is no suffering too great for God to find ways to grow life out of it. This is the great hope of those who love Jesus. No matter what happens in our lives or in the world, we hope for the Resurrection. We hope for the life that will come on the other side of this pain. Our hope cannot be killed because three women went to anoint a body on a Sunday morning and found no body to anoint.

Jesus lives! So we can live without fear, because we know that, whatever happens on Friday, however long Saturday lasts . . . Sunday is coming.

Nikki Holland

Baltimore Yearly Meeting

Friday, April 17

Mark 16:7-8

*“Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb.
They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.”*

The end of Mark’s Gospel comes as a surprise to people who have heard the stories of the women sharing the resurrection news. It might be more surprising, though, that we don’t spend more time ourselves bewildered and trembling.

When we go looking for Jesus, is he where we expect? Does he take the form we anticipate? Have we become complacent with our understanding of the crucifixion, so easily overcome through our now-commonplace understanding of the resurrection?

These women were not expecting what they found at the tomb; should we not share their bewilderment?

The women at the tomb weren’t Quakers, but the Religious Society of Friends got our nickname through this kind of trembling—quaking in awe of the power of the Lord. When we read the phrase, “Be not afraid!” we easily recognize that the person addressed is in no immediate danger.

But in the resurrection story, something is happening outside of our control, beyond our expectations—perhaps even something wonderful! And yet, we also recognize the power that lies behind it, and the fragility of our own existence. Should we not also tremble when confronted with this power?

The women at the tomb weren’t Quakers, but I can imagine them asking themselves, “What can I say?” What was it that they just experienced, and how are they to put it into words that will be comprehensible to others? I suspect they did not truly comprehend what they had just experienced, and so did not know what to say.

How can we be certain of what they experienced that early morning so long ago, when they weren’t themselves sure?

But like the women at the tomb and like the early Friends, you shall see Christ, just as he told you.

Craig Dove

New York Yearly Meeting

Saturday, April 18

Matthew 28:8-10

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid...’”

It feels familiar, this experience of truth that brings a kind of uneasy excitement into our bodies: fear mixed with joy. A new thought, or direction, or inspiration challenges what we thought we knew. For the women, their established belief was, “Dead is dead.” Then they encountered an empty tomb, a new truth, “Resurrection is possible.” It is a new idea that brings the challenge of hope.

Hope is not our default. It requires something from us. Fatalism is so much easier. It’s simpler to decide there is nothing we can do, the problems are too big, the powers that be are too strong, and we may as well quit while we are ahead. That quitting might come in the form of denial, or disassociation from the news of the day. The two on the road to Emmaus were headed home. The other disciples were locked in a room, hiding. The women had accepted his death, but they were doing what they could in anointing his body.

The news that Jesus was alive called them to hope that there could be a good future. The story of Immanuel, God with us, would continue. It was scary, because no one knew what that would look like. It was challenging, because even with incomplete knowledge these women were tasked to share with the rest of the disciples the message: Jesus is alive.

Hope calls us to imagine something new, to allow that new thought to change our ideas about what is possible, and to participate in bringing a new future into being.

Charity Kemper Sandstrom

Great Plains Yearly Meeting

Sunday, April 19

Matthew 28:11-15

*“When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan,
they gave the soldiers a large sum of money . . .”*

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was a Soviet war hero until he was arrested for criticizing Stalin and was sentenced to eight years of forced labor. During this time, he became disillusioned with his ideologies and embraced the Russian Orthodox faith. In 1975, he was arrested and exiled from Russia. The day he was arrested, he published a now-famous essay called “Live Not By Lies.”

In this essay, Solzhenitsyn addressed the powerlessness felt by many of his fellow citizens by asking them to join him in making a simple but difficult (even dangerous) commitment: “non-participation in lies.”

Today’s reading is an unsettling story that is both ancient and devastatingly relevant. It is a story of religious, military, and political leaders conspiring to preserve their power using two powerful tools: money and story. The religious leaders gave the guards money to change their story about the resurrection to one that better served their interests. “They took the money and did as they were directed,” is a tale as old as time.

Most of us will not get caught up in dramatic pay-offs and cover-ups. But we are all tempted to speak or act in certain ways for economic reasons. We all feel the seductive power of ideology and propaganda (for the right cause, of course). We can all be tempted to make unspoken agreements with others to never name hard truths about one another.

How do we counter these temptations? We make a commitment to non-participation in lies. We practice the plain speech of radical candor. We create safe but brave spaces where we face hard truths. We practice being “valiant for truth” and “publishers of Truth” in the public square, learning how to “speak truth to power” while also “speaking the truth in love.” [Eph. 4:15]

The Way of Jesus and the Quaker Way call us to “live no lies.” The Present Teacher invites us to trust that Jesus will always tell us the truth and it will always be liberating. [Jn. 8:32] And when we live in truth, we testify to the Truth of the resurrection.

Andy Stanton-Henry

Wilmington Yearly Meeting

Monday, April 20

Matthew 28:16-20

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

This scripture is often declared The Great Commission, instructing the followers of Jesus to go out into the world and bring all into our Christian tent, saving as many souls as possible in accepting Jesus as their personal savior. At least that is what I was taught growing up in church and in my Christian high school and college.

On closer reflection (as is often the case in reading the Bible), these scriptures are so much more about the journey with Christ.

Jesus has gone from the human rabbi that the disciplines followed into the eternal Christ that will be with us to the end of the age—or forever. When the eleven disciples gathered at the mountain as instructed, some believed when they saw Christ and others doubted.

It feels like all followers of Christ, even the disciples, have periods of doubt in their faith journey. And Christ understands this and still embraces us as his beloved. We are told to bring this good news of Christ’s teachings, the eternal love He offers everyone, to all nations, including Gentiles, and to encourage people to follow in the path of Christ in living out their lives.

The Great Commission has been used to invade countries, to engage in violence to convert souls, to reject anyone that doesn’t embrace the path of Christian faith. I think Jesus would be appalled that this scripture has been used to carry out some of these activities. This scripture is all about sharing the teachings that Jesus shared and lived to all that come into our orbit.

God calls us to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves: may we accept this challenge and spread this gospel truth.

Beth Henricks

Western Yearly Meeting

Tuesday, April 21

Luke 24:4-8

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen!”

When have you experienced the presence of the divine, felt the wonder of the incomprehensible wash over you? When have you encountered the empty tomb with angels guiding you?

I doubt I felt it at sixteen, standing before Michelangelo’s *Pieta*, but I’ve felt wonder remembering the sight. I’ve felt it in the long-bare German cathedral and the warmth of the small Primitive Baptist church, in the music filling the Meetingroom at Christmas and the silence of a gathered Meeting, and in the striking mushroom I photographed in the woods last summer. I’ve seen it in the eyes of the homeless who had received some small service.

Is such wonder more available in contemplation or at work, and, if at work, is serving the church or Meeting more conducive to the experience or is serving the poor and disenfranchised the more likely way? Which were the spice-laden women at the tomb doing? I like to think of their task as serving God and others, reflecting the mystery of the nature of the Divine.

In any event, the women were at work, about their task. Surely, they had a variety of motivations, some that even they couldn’t articulate. They were being of service, doing the work before them.

A woman came upon her neighbor standing in the garage crying as she cut off such hair as remained from her cancer treatment. The woman took the scissors, finished the job, and let her neighbor cry, comforted by this gift. Serving God? Serving others? Such kindness opens my eyes to Divine Wonder.

Perhaps when we are our best selves, we are doing the work that puts us in a place, like the empty tomb for those women, where the stone is rolled away, and God’s wonder will wash over us and bring us life.

Bill Eagles

North Carolina Fellowship of Friends

Wednesday, April 22

Luke 24:9-12

“Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”

These women, these followers of Jesus, have received a message from the Divine. They go to share it with the other followers, but are not believed. God’s messages to us tend to be profoundly countercultural. God sending this message of the resurrection in that time and place through women was very countercultural.

Listening to God will often turn us away from the ways of the wider world, the ways of Empire, and the ways of addiction. We will live in the world but not of the world. Perhaps we are led away from doomscrolling on our phones. Perhaps God guides us to stop running the race to the economic top and instead put our time into developing a place of belonging and peace. Perhaps with God’s daily assistance, we can gain abstinence from our addictions: alcohol, drugs, sex, or numbing with food, TV, or smartphone use. God teaches us the ways of nonviolence. God guides us in loving all our neighbors, even those we’ve been taught to hate by the wider society around us. We become signs, guideposts, to others who seek the Way.

These women engaged in faithful action. They receive the message from the Divine and they spread it, despite likely knowing they would not be listened to. We can engage in faithful action whenever we sink down to the center and practice spiritual discernment. We always have choices: to ask, to listen, to act upon the guidance we are given. Acting in a way that defies conventions takes courage. God will grant us this courage. Courage doesn’t mean feeling no fear. It’s stepping out in spite of the fear.

Elizabeth Terney

New Association of Friends

Friday, April 24

Luke 24:17-24

*“He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people . . .
we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”*

They stood still, their faces downcast. Hope is not a delicate, light thing which only brings us what we want. Hope is an internal invitation to all the possibilities. It's not a tame lion.

We may have some control over the way we hope and what we hope for. We don't have control over the future and the outcome of our hope. Jesus' followers laid down palm fronds and cloaks with great hope, thinking they were welcoming a conquering ruler, but that path ended in tears at the cross.

Recently, I read this passage from N.T. Wright: “Christian nationalism is impoverished as it seeks a kingdom without a cross. It pursues a victory without mercy. It acclaims God's love of power rather than the power of God's love. We must remember that Jesus refused those who wanted to ‘make him king’ by force just as much as he refused to become king by calling upon ‘twelve legions of angels’. Jesus needs no army, arms or armored cavalry to bring about the kingdom of God. As such, we should resist Christian nationalism as giving a Christian facade to nakedly political, ethnocentric and impious ventures.”

Wright's words are interesting to me, not because of the warning about Christian nationalism, but because all of us find ourselves rulers of our own little kingdoms. Often in those kingdoms, on a much smaller scale, we become little kings pursuing victory without mercy.

Cleopas and his friend said, grieving the loss of the one they thought would be king, “We had hoped he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.” The redemption Jesus offers, though, is not a political or military victory. It is personal victory, first and foremost. Then it becomes the sum of those personal victories stacked together one upon the other, small changes of heart and attitude.

King David, a human king with many failings who sought after God's own heart, wrote, “You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; You take no pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” David's hope as a king and as a man was in God's pursuit of victory with mercy.

In the Gospel stories, the hope of a military conqueror is denied so that new life, new spirit, and realigned desire and priorities can grow from the fertile ground of broken and contrite hearts which God will not despise.

Michael Sherman

Winchester Friends Meeting (Independent)

Saturday, April 25

Luke 24:25-29

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

On the road to Emmaus, two of Jesus’ disciples were discussing the events of a very difficult weekend. They had witnessed how the rulers had handed Jesus over to be sentenced to death. They had seen his execution on the cross. And they were now dealing with rumors of an empty tomb. There were even reports that Jesus was alive, but they had not yet seen him themselves. In the midst of all of that, they encountered someone that they did not expect.

Jesus himself, risen from the dead, walked alongside them, though they didn’t recognize him. As they explained about their teacher to the Great Teacher himself, he chided them for their foolishness and their lack of belief. He then explained to them all the scripture concerning himself. Jesus opened the scripture to them so that they might know and believe in the risen Messiah.

Though these disciples had read the scriptures, had known Jesus, and had witnessed all the things concerning his death and resurrection, they still did not know him or understand these things. It was not until Jesus himself explained the scripture to them that they began to believe.

There are many people in our world today that have read the Bible, heard the evidence, and have even seen evidence for a living God, but they still do not believe. Even some of Jesus’ disciples in our modern faith communities walk with Christ every day, but still do not recognize him or believe that he is a living presence in their midst.

But as George Fox declared, “Christ has come to teach his people himself.” Jesus is still able to meet with us as we go along our way, to open our hearts to the scripture, to help us recognize him in the world, and to realize his living presence in our lives.

Ben Snyder

Western Yearly Meeting

Sunday, April 26

Luke 24: 30-36

“Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’”

As the disciples are walking down the road, grieving about the crucifixion, Jesus comes upon them and deepens their understanding of the scriptures—the Torah. One can say that Jesus’s true nature was fully revealed to them after the crucifixion. Have there been people on your journey whose true nature you have come to know only after journeying with them for some time? How does this teach us to walk with or accompany people in our journeys? How does reflecting on the movement from crucifixion to resurrection deepen your knowing of God’s presence in your life?

Jesus is revealed to them when he breaks bread with them—their eyes were opened. What happens when we break bread with others? Are our eyes and hearts opened to the fullness of their nature? What are the things that get in the way of seeing one another as kin? When our eyes are open, we can perceive the ways God is moving in, through, and around us more clearly.

The disciples ask: Were not our hearts burning? In this season of moving toward the resurrection, we too can ask, what is burning in our hearts? What seeds, leadings, and ministry is God calling you to tend?

For me, the lessons are not complete without including Jesus blessing "Peace be with you." The blessing of having peace within their hearts is needed to help them through the complexities of carrying the teachings forward.

Have you felt the peace that passeth understanding in your life? What are things that have helped you be tethered to the love that peace within reflects? As we anticipate the resurrection, what new things can help guide you in these complex times?

Anne Pomeroy

New York Yearly Meeting

Monday, April 27

Luke 24:36–39

“Touch me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

It seems that the body—Jesus’ body and the bodies of those who know him as teacher—are essential to living life aware of the abiding presence of Christ With Us. Jesus is not (just) for thinking about. Jesus is for recognizing and for relating to, in very embodied ways. Sometimes, we need to have God’s metaphorical fingers snapped in our faces to draw us out of distraction, despair, or other forgetful places, in order to find our way to presence—God’s presence and our own. And, even for those early disciples who walked with embodied Jesus, it took more than a single finger snap.

Jesus, resurrected with scars, perhaps unhealed wounds, uses these marks of his human life story to confirm who he is. Wounds need not define us, but they do mark us with authenticity. Jesus wants his followers to see him, and he also invites them to touch him. The sense of touch has the very interesting quality of being necessarily reciprocal. I can see you, even if you cannot see me. But, if I am touching you, you are also touching me. Those who touch are touched in return.

This chapter in Luke includes the story of the first preachers of Easter’s Good News. The women encountered the messengers of God in the otherwise empty tomb, and they preached the truth to the apostles, who did not believe them. To his credit, Peter runs to the tomb, perhaps because some part of him believes, or hopes.

Jesus wants his followers to risk hoping, to run toward the possibility of seeing and touching (and being touched). Those who do will see that he is not lifeless, not a ghostly presence with us, but is really here, available and inviting the reciprocity of touch, the practice and paradox of embodied life in flesh and bone and spirit, together.

Jennie Isbell Shinn

New England Yearly Meeting

Tuesday, April 28

Luke 24:40-49

“And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.”

It was a road I had driven many times through the mountains of New Mexico. I always enjoy the beauty—but on that particular day I had a heightened sense of joy at the sight. Maybe it was awe? Mixed with gratitude? Perhaps with a sense of oneness with God? Or all of that at once? Whatever it was, it was intense joy that persisted even through the panhandle of Oklahoma and all the way home to Wichita.

Joy should be an everyday occurrence. Just think of the many potential sources of joy that are everywhere: that first cup of coffee, a phone call from a friend, a quiet house, a noisy house, big flakes of snow falling gently, the expressions on a child’s face, watching a goose cross the road. (Oh? The goose is more likely a nuisance, you say? Thank you for making my point.) How much joy do we miss out on because we are simply looking at the situation in the wrong way? Or we let the worries of life take over and we simply cannot see the joy all around us?

In Luke 24, Jesus unexpectedly showed up in the room where the disciples were gathered. Some were apparently thinking, “This can’t be real; this can’t be real.” Even after Jesus showed them his hands and his feet, they were still standing there in disbelief—mingled with astonishment, which I think is like being stuck in the vortex between disbelief and intense joy at the same time. They had seen Jesus accomplish the impossible before. But this?

Jesus’ greatest defeat turned into his greatest victory. But we hold ourselves back by getting stuck in our certainty of what we think is impossible. When our hopes or dreams seem dead, joy provides little resurrections in life—to help us begin to see what might be possible. May you live life in the power of Jesus’ resurrection.

Cliff Loesch

Great Plains Yearly Meeting

Wednesday, April 29

Luke 24:45–48

“I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

This scripture is Luke’s summary of the Great Commission. It is Jesus’ last commandment for His disciples. Jesus summarizes the message of the gospel: He came to fulfill the scriptures. He lived, He died, and He rose again so that the message of repentance and forgiveness could be preached throughout the whole world. He charges His disciples to be His witnesses; starting where they are and taking the message to the nations. That is still His instruction to us today. The task would be overwhelming and impossible, if it were not for the promise He gives at the end—“Wait, and the Holy Spirit will give you power from on high.”

I was in high school when I first read the Book of Acts. I realized that even though I had committed my life to following Jesus, I had never experienced the power of the Spirit like the early church did. I began to pray that God would give me His Spirit. Then in college I read George Fox’s *Journal*, and I knew that the early Quakers had experienced this same power of God.

For four years I waited, prayed, and asked God to fill me with His Holy Spirit. Then one day, I had an encounter with God that changed everything. He asked me to surrender something that was very precious to me; to lay it on the altar and give it to Him. When I said, “Yes,” His Spirit came on me and overwhelmed me. My heart was filled with joy.

I have learned, since then, that the Holy Spirit leads us, teaches us, and empowers us. We cannot do the task Jesus has called us to do, without His Spirit. We must wait and pray until the Spirit comes with power.

Charlotte Stangeland

Iowa Yearly Meeting

Thursday, April 30

Exodus 3:1-6

“At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.”

When we want to be sure someone is telling us the truth, we want them to look us in the eye. If they look down or look away, we suspect they aren't able to face us because they are not telling us the truth. If we think someone is not leveling with us, we might say, “Look me in the eye and say that.” But that is not how it is with God.

There are just a few instances in the Bible where someone encounters God directly: Jacob wrestles with God one dark night (Genesis 32:24); God calls out to Moses from a burning bush (Exodus 3:1-6); Elijah hears God whisper (I Kings 19:11-18). Sometimes God sends an angel, as he did with Elizabeth, and then Mary. These are all powerful moments, indeed transformative experiences, but Jacob, Moses, and Elijah did not see the face of God, nor did Elizabeth or Mary. That would be too much for any human. At one time, we can only take in shards of the Truth.

When God broke into history by sending his son, Jesus, He made it easier for us to catch glimpses of divine Truth. Saul is blinded on the road to Damascus but hears Jesus's voice (Acts 9); Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for a drink of water (John 4). So can we, perhaps, if we will still ourselves and listen. That is the promise of worship and prayer.

After we encounter God, knowing a little but not as much as we might want, all we can do is say what Moses did, and what Samuel did (1 Samuel 3). We can say, “Here I am, Lord.”

Doug Bennett

New England Yearly Meeting

Friday, May 1

John 20:11-14

“They asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying?’”

It is a sad, somber Sunday morning. What unfolds in these few moments is so clear, so simple, and so profound. When I compared various translations of the passage (NIV, NRSVue, The Message, TLB, RSV, CEB, and many more) they read almost identically. (The KJV, although it uses “weeping” instead of “crying” and “sepulcher” instead of “tomb,” does not vary from the others.) It is a stark, heart-wrenching moment. Mary Magdalene is deeply mourning the death of her Lord. She is absolutely grief-stricken.

Many of us have lived long enough to know the grief of the death of someone we love dearly. Tears sometimes engulf us. We are numb. We cannot think about anything, but the emptiness, loneliness, and overwhelming sense of loss. In the early days of grief, it is all-consuming. While most of us have known this kind of grief, Mary Magdalene was also bearing the trauma of having seen Jesus executed right in front of her.

Now she is confronted with additional traumas: there are angels in front of her and Jesus’ body is gone. Nothing, not one single thing, makes any sense in that moment. Then the angels ask her why she is crying. We have no idea whether the words she uttered were said flatly with grief-stricken numbness, or with accusation against the angels for removing Jesus’ body, or with anger for asking her such a question when she is clearly mourning.

In the midst of her grief-stricken weeping, could any of this make any sense? She has seen her Lord, her friend, her rabbi, killed and buried. Now his body is gone. Can she bear this added indignity? Then suddenly there is a stranger behind her. Now what? Everything just keeps getting worse and worse. Her hope was killed. Her confusion is compounded. Is all good news gone?

We who stand on this side of history know that sad, somber Sunday morning changes. The next words Mary hears will be the best news ever. Before we rush forward to share Mary Magdalene’s joy at the glorious reality of the Living Christ, let us remember the anguish—a real part of the path to this best news, and let us hold in heart and spirit all of the people who are currently in anguish of one kind or another.

Della Stanley-Green

Western Yearly Meeting

Saturday, May 2

John 20:15-18

“He asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?’”

The time between three and six in the morning is the loneliest hour of the night. The long, slow grey time before sunrise seems to take forever. It can feel like the bleakest, most God-forsaken time of the whole day.

That was when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb.

There wasn't any kind of a vigil going on. There was no expectation of joy, no hope. Everyone had run away. There was just one woman dressed in mourning clothes.

When she got there, the tomb was empty. Here was grief added to grief, desecration of the dead added to the devastation of Jesus' death. She hardly knew what to do.

So there was Mary, weeping. And after a while, she just had to look, no matter how much it hurt her. And when she looked, she thought she saw two figures in white—angels, she said later, when she told the story—standing where Jesus' body had been.

One of them said, “Woman, why are you weeping?”

And she answered, “They have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they have put him!”

She turned around, and there was Jesus himself, standing by the entrance to the tomb. She didn't know him. Maybe she was blinded by her tears. Maybe she had her face in her hands.

Then he asked her, “Woman, why are you weeping?”

She cried out, “Oh, please, if you've taken him, tell me where, and I'll go and remove him!”

Then comes the great moment—the conversation that only took one word on each side to be complete. He quietly called her name—“Mary!” And through her tears, at the entrance to the grave, she knew him, and called back, “Master!”

Just those two words are the heart of the story—the living Christ calling a broken woman by name, and her reply. Two words—that's all. That's all that was necessary.

Josh Brown

North Carolina Fellowship of Friends

Sunday, May 3

John 20:19-20

“Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’”

The disciples are afraid. They are gathered in a room with the doors locked. They are worried people are out to get them. Have you found yourself in a similar situation? Maybe not fearing for your life, necessarily, but fearing persecution, misunderstanding, and conflict?

Couple that with the disciples’ inner turmoil at having just seen their leader, teacher, and friend crucified; their hope for an imagined future destroyed; wondering what is coming next. It is a dark, bleak moment.

Put yourself in that room. What are you feeling and thinking? What is the conversation like among the disciples? The only sense of security expressed in the passage is that the doors are locked. No one is going to show up unannounced. They are not going to be surprised. Now, imagine your reaction if—and this is how my mind illustrates the moment—someone just pops into the room as though by Star Trek transporter, materializing out of the air.

Then he says the words, “Peace be with you!” Do you think it worked? I like to think the disciples needed a little more convincing. Jesus showed them his scars. His identifying marks were his wounds, his vulnerability, his perceived weakness in dying.

Jesus could have told the disciples the story of where he had been, what he had been up to, who he had seen while he was gone, but no, none of that. Jesus met them where they were—hurt, scared and confused.

Because of that, the disciples were overjoyed. When we find ourselves lost in the wilderness—or locked in a room—and cry out, God hears our cry.

Michael Sherman

Winchester Monthly Meeting (Independent)

Monday, May 4

John 20:21-23

“And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

WOW, this is packed full of the empowerment of God’s presence with us, for us, and through us. This passage comes right after the verse that states Jesus comes to the apostles who are filled with fear after they saw him put to death. I can only imagine the fear that was within them. Not only did they lose a friend but they saw the cruelty in which that friend took his last breath and died—and now he is standing in front of them talking.

I recently came back from Belize City, visiting the Belize Friends Centre on a service trip with the Wilmington College Office of Campus Ministry. I believe I caught a cold in the airport or on the plane—and I have been coughing ever since I landed. I recently walked office to a meeting elsewhere on campus, and I experienced a spasm in my throat that produced a coughing spell that lasted at least five minutes—it took my breath away, and it was scary! My throat became so constricted that I struggled to take a breath in, and to allow my lungs to receive the air that I needed.

This experience reminded me of the gift of breath, the life-giving importance of breath, and the spiritual meaning of breath that is expressed in this passage.

This scripture includes words such as peace, breath, power, and forgiveness—all words that are encouraging and life-giving to me. Jesus breathing the breath of life over the apostles reminds me of the Genesis story in the Garden of Eden, when God created and blew into creation the very breath of life, just as Jesus blew spiritual life and power into the apostles.

Friends, that same breath is in us and on us. It is the breath of life. That breath is the reminder that God is with us as he sends us out! The Creator has not left us alone—we are never alone—the Spirit of Christ is with us, in us, and all around us.

It is because of this spiritual gift that we can and should forgive one another’s sins. If we don’t, our own sins will not be forgiven. We will not experience the freedom to move spontaneously if we carry the burden of unforgiveness—like that spasm in my throat it will strangle us, with the inability to move and breathe freely.

We have been given the gift of peace, with the knowledge that God is with us as we go out in love.

Nancy McCormick

Wilmington Yearly Meeting

Tuesday, May 5

Genesis 2:5–8

“YHWH Elohim formed the groundling, soil of the ground.

*He blew into its nostrils the blast of life
and the groundling became a living soul.”*

Jesus’s breath of the Holy Spirit, in the twentieth chapter of John, resonates with God’s breathing in Genesis, God’s breath blown into the soil of the earth, animating the first human being—the “groundling,” in Mary Phil Korsak’s translation, because the word for human in Hebrew is *’dm* and the human being is formed from the ground, *’dmh*. Without God’s first breath, we would be just so many molecules of minerals and vegetable matter, as, in fact, we become once breath is no longer in us.

The indwelling of the Spirit, then, becomes for us a second entry into life. Perhaps we have always felt that breath, heard the breathing, or the whispers, from the face of God. An inner voice that we have known even when we couldn’t name it. Or maybe it came upon us suddenly, like a second creation, a new birth, a new heart.

Either way, it animates us, brings life to us and drags us into life. If we attend to that life, breathed into each one of us by Christ, we begin to see through the illusion of death: the illusion being that death is more powerful than life, and that death and destruction will have the final victory over life, love, and creation.

“Not so,” says the resurrected Christ. “Here I am. And here you are. Now give yourselves away as I taught you.”

Dan Kasztelan

Wilmington Yearly Meeting

Wednesday, May 6

John 20:24-25

“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

The Honest “Unless”

Thomas, as the doubter, has often been the villain, but he was likely just a realist. When the other disciples claimed they had seen a dead man walking, Thomas didn't settle for hearsay. He famously retorted: “Unless I see and touch the nail marks in his hands...I will not believe.” Thomas wasn't being difficult; he was being real about the finality of death.

The Gap of Epinoia

Doubt is not a moral failure, but a human reality. Some ancient Christians used the word *epinoia* to describe the limits of our finite thoughts and language about our infinite God. Since God is infinite and our language finite, language can never fully convey God. Thomas's doubt is his finite understanding of death intersecting the infinite power of God in the resurrection.

A Leap of Faith

Because God is infinite, we can't think our way to him completely. This led the nineteenth-century theologian Søren Kierkegaard to argue that God is not an object to be studied but a person to be known relationally. For Kierkegaard, faith is not found in comprehension but in leaps—leaps of faith.

For Kierkegaard, both faith and doubt arise at the point where our finitude ends and God's infinitude continues.

Jesus gives Thomas the opportunity to touch his hands and side, and Thomas believes. Jesus says Thomas believed because he saw him, but blessed are those who haven't yet seen and believe. Believing without yet seeing is the leap of faith.

Jesus receives Thomas and his doubt without condemnation; he will do the same for you. Make a leap today: What is your honest “unless”—which doubt needs to meet the resurrected Jesus?

Robert Radcliff

Iowa Yearly Meeting

Thursday, May 7

John 20:26-29

*“Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands.
Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’”*

One of the things I cherish about our Quaker faith is the freedom to wonder, to question, and to sometimes think outside the box.

The disciple Thomas is often thought of as “doubting Thomas,” but I wonder if he was not the disciple who is most like us. The disciple who questioned, “How can this be?” The disciple who needed more than someone else’s words. The disciple who needed to see, touch, search out, and know the truth.

After Thomas refused to believe the others until he had seen Jesus’s wounds for himself, we see the extraordinary grace of Jesus. Jesus meets Thomas in his uncertainty and says, “Come, put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Jesus knows Thomas has questions and Jesus wants to provide answers to those questions. Jesus’s response in this verse points us to a God who meets us where we are, respects our belief, and gives us space and answers to our questions until we see.

Like Thomas, many of us struggle with doubts, have questions, and seek real proof before embracing belief. These verses remind me that questioning is a natural part of faith.

I wonder, do we believe because we have seen? Or do we see because we believe?

Lynda Ladwig

Western Association of Friends

Friday, May 8

John 21:1-6

“I’m going out to fish,’ Simon Peter told them, and they said, ‘We’ll go with you.’”

Seven friends in a large boat, large enough to hold at least thirteen and a large catch of fish; large enough to withstand the poundings of tempests and storms; large enough to transport them around the Sea of Galilee from Magda to Bethsaida or Tiberias to Capernaum in sweet, bright blue water teeming with life. For some, they had come full circle, since it was on the shores of this lake that they first heard their call, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people . . .” And, even after everything they had been through together, they still had no clue as to what was to come next.

After betrayal and denial, after skepticism and fear, after the death followed by the reemergence of the deceased, after three years of following, they had returned to the place of origin and did what they knew best—get in the boat, go out at night, and cast their nets. And their nets came up empty. Now, Simon knew these waters, had worked them most of his life, knew where the fish were likely to be and chased after them and caught—nothing.

Frustration? Despair? Bad turn of luck? When they heard the voice of a figure they did not recognize, telling them to haul again, what did they have to lose?

And so, they cast despite their doubt, their weariness, their wanting to shut it all down and go home to bed. And caught the biggest haul of their lives. In some versions we are told that despite the size of that haul and those fish, their nets did not break.

How often do we have that feeling of pure discouragement in a world that feels turned upside down? Is it in us, that voice that enables us to trust and make one more attempt, to love rather than fear, to hope rather than give in to despair, to follow when the path ahead is not clear? When we hear it, we know it and have the courage to trust it. Way will open, our nets will be filled.

Leslie Manning

New England Yearly Meeting

Saturday, May 9

John 21:7-14

*“When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter,
‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’”*

Where in your life have you felt a quiet distance, where something in love has been strained, or where you have not fully lived as you were led?

By the shore, Jesus meets Peter in a place that holds memories for both. The setting is familiar, yet that morning he carries the weight of his lies and denial, an unresolved break within his relationship with Jesus. And into that space, Jesus asks a simple, searching question: “Do you love me?” He asks it again, and again.

There is no accusation in his voice. No dragging up the past. And yet, nothing is ignored. The question itself carries the weight of what has been, while opening a way forward.

This is the way of restorative love.

It meets us honestly where we are. It does not turn away from places where love has faltered or grown quiet. But neither does it leave us there. Instead, it invites us to answer, to return, and to begin again.

Each time Peter responds to the question, “Do you love me?” Jesus gives him something to do: feed my lambs, tend my sheep. Love is given direction. It becomes care, expressed in steady, faithful attention to others.

So it is with us.

Restorative love often comes without announcement. It may come as a question that settles into the heart. It may come as an opening to respond differently than before. It may come as a quiet assurance that we are still called, still entrusted, still held.

We are not asked to resolve everything at once. We are asked to respond, truthfully and simply:
Do you love me?

And in that response, we find that love is already at work . . . mending, steadying, and guiding us forward.

Restorative love does not erase what has been. It gathers it into grace and leads us on, into a life that is quietly being made new.

Kelly Kellum

High Point Friends Meeting (Independent)

Sunday, May 10

John 21:15-17

“Feed my sheep.”

Surely it’s not lost on Simon Peter that Jesus poses his query three times, even as it causes the memory of a horrible self-inflicted wound in his life to come to the surface. But we can’t help but believe that he experiences tremendous gratefulness that Jesus even allows him to proclaim his love after the denial. And perhaps Jesus himself needs the disciple to affirm three times. He wants to be sure that Simon Peter is strong in his faith and ready to lead. As a result, both men have now come to a deep trust that didn’t exist before; a trust that both men require.

And Christ knows and Simon Peter surely suspects that this depth of trust and understanding will be crucial in bringing about what must now be done.

We can also immediately relate to their conversation as it happens after the familiar and traditional act of sharing a meal—a meal of fish that the disciples caught but could not have caught without the Lord’s help. Does Jesus, at least partially, perform this miracle to instill in Simon Peter the knowledge that the trust they share still requires obedience, as well as a definite statement that Simon Peter will never be alone?

It’s ironic (as Jesus no doubt intends!) that he asks a fisherman to care for his sheep. Does this mean to be a trustworthy follower of the Lord Jesus Christ you need to be a multitasker—or at least flexible to changing demands?

Elisabeth Elliot

Western Association of Friends

Monday, May 11

John 21:18-22

“Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.’”

I am often surprised by the words of Jesus. Like this rebuke at the end of our scripture for today, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me!”

Well, Jesus, tell us how you REALLY feel. That almost seems harsh, but is it? I have a feeling Jesus is trying to free us to be our unique selves.

This was supposed to get Peter’s attention, and it should get ours, too. Too often, you and I expect our neighbors, friends, even loved ones, to experience life in this world in a similar or the same way that we do. At times, we try to copy the lives of those around us who are successful, or seem wise in our world, or believe, value, and even vote for things that we think are important. Yet our relationship with the Divine is extremely personal (or maybe I should say internal), and that makes it unique to our individual faith and life journeys. That is why, as Friends, when we center down into the silence and listen for the nudging of the Spirit, we may each be nudged in different ways, causing different responses.

From what we read in the scriptures, Peter and John were uniquely different. Peter was a fireball, always quick to act. Remember, he was the disciple who, without thinking, jumped overboard—ready to walk on water with Jesus, only to have second thoughts. Yet John in this same scene on the boat could be described as more reflective and meditative. John waited patiently for the boat to land to be with Jesus again.

Since you and I are uniquely different, much like Peter and John, we must remember this when the Spirit nudges us. You and I are going to respond differently. We should not be overly concerned with how the Spirit is nudging our neighbors and friends but rather focus our attention on what the Spirit is saying to us. We each have certain gifts and talents, have been placed in distinctive families, neighborhoods, cultures, and workplaces, and we see the world through different lenses. Jesus wants us to follow his leading in our special way, right where we are and in all our diversity.

So don’t focus on what everyone else is doing. Listen and follow Jesus and embrace your unique call, today!

Bob Henry

Western Yearly Meeting

Tuesday, May 12

2 Chronicles 20:5-13

“We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”

What do you do when you are afraid and don't know what to do next? My brain goes into overdrive like a hamster wheel and I try to logic it out. I make mental lists of pros and cons and brainstorm all the solutions. It sounds productive but it is just my own form of worrying.

2 Chronicles 20 tells the story of a time when the Kingdom of Judah was about to be invaded by its enemies. They were completely outnumbered, and they didn't know what to do. Verses 3 and 4 tell us, “Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. The people of Judah came together to seek help from the Lord; indeed, they came from every town in Judah to seek him.”

Some of the things that stand out to me are that the king was alarmed—some versions say afraid. And I like the choice of words that says he “resolved to inquire of the Lord.” There were lots of options, but Jehoshaphat chose to seek the Lord. He also called all the people to fast and pray.

So King Jehoshaphat stood before all the people and led them in prayer, ending with, “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.” It takes a brave leader to admit to your people that you don't know what to do. And then God's spirit came upon a man named Jahaziel and he told them, “This is what the Lord says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's . . . You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.’” Then they prayed and worshipped the Lord.

What?!? I tend to think of those kinds of statements as being figurative, or hyperbole: he didn't really mean we wouldn't have to fight at all, he just means he's gonna help us. But it appears that King Jehoshaphat took him seriously. He appointed men to sing praises to God and he put them out at the front of the army as they went out to battle.

Again, what?!? Who puts their musicians out front to lead the army? If you were a musician, would you want to be on the front lines??

I don't understand how it all happened because it was a miracle, but it sounds like they still had to get all ready, be prepared, and march out there trusting God. And the miracle part is that as they marched out singing, God somehow caused a confusion to come over their enemies so that they ended up killing each other. Every last one. The Hebrews literally didn't have to fight. At all. Just like God said.

I believe that if we are diligent to pray and to listen, that God will give us directions. Am I willing to follow the directions even if it wasn't one of the solutions that I came up with on my vast brainstorm list? What about you? Are you facing a problem that looks impossible? Maybe it's time to turn to God and say, “We don't know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”

Katrina McConaughey

Western Yearly Meeting

Wednesday, May 13

Acts 1:1-7

“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait . . .”

For years my younger sister Susy and I perched on the top of the living room couch, planted our feet on the forced-air register and waited. The closer it got to Christmas the earlier we began our daily vigil, positive this was the day our mailman Lollipop (yes, he oft times left one for each of us) would set a package on the front porch or a card in the box mounted beside the front door. Either way it was worth the wait.

My experience of waiting has three components: what I am waiting for; how long I must wait; and the way in which I occupy myself. As Friends we speak of “expectant waiting,” “centering down,” “opening hearts and minds,” “standing in the Light.” I love that language! My process is to release words and thoughts as my focus turns inward and becomes expectant waiting silence. I may experience the peace that passes understanding; the Presence of the Living Christ; the Light of incredible, unconditional Love; being bathed in the Light—always worth the wait.

In today’s reading, Luke writes that Jesus, while staying and eating with the apostles, issued an order: Do not leave Jerusalem, but “wait there for the promise of the Father.” I hear someone ask, “What is this promise?”

“You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

“And how long must we wait?”

“Not many days from now,” Jesus assures them.

So they wait—to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, by the Holy Spirit—by the Comforter—who will empower these followers of Jesus to become his witnesses everywhere! Luke does not tell us how each disciple occupied him or herself, whether in expectant waiting silence, or by exuberant singing and joyous exhortation, but I am certain of this: the baptism with the Holy Spirit was and continues to be well worth the wait.

Patricia Thomas

Wilmington Yearly Meeting

Thursday, May 14

Acts 1:8-9

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses . . .”

The story of Jesus’ being taken up is memorialized in Jerusalem in a place called the Chapel of the Ascension. It’s a small building that is today part of a mosque complex on the Mount of Olives, east of the Old City. For what is arguably the second-most revered site in all of Christendom, the chapel is small and unassuming: an octagonal enclosure, the walls are bare block, with columns that date back to the Byzantine period. A frame set in the floor holds a stone said to contain the last footprint of Christ before he ascended, as in Acts 1:9.

I was there as part of a peacemaking group, and primarily interested in learning about the situation for Palestinians living in Jerusalem and the West Bank. But the chapel was right next to our hotel, so a quick visit was in order. I have to confess that as a Western Quaker, I was underwhelmed; the shape in the stone might be a footprint, or it might be something else. Yet there were other Christian pilgrims there, primarily from Eastern Orthodox churches, for whom this was clearly the holiest ground. They had come to walk where Jesus carried the cross, and to pray in the places where he was buried and rose from death. For them, the Chapel of the Ascension was integral to the experience.

Those Orthodox pilgrims and I are both part of the movement that Jesus left to his disciples with a final promise—that they would receive power and be his witnesses everywhere. The audacious claim of our faith is that the same Holy Spirit that Jesus promised his disciples is available to us, and that we, too, can witness in that Spirit. We may be led in very different ways; yet the important thing is to wait for the power, and then to witness faithfully as the Spirit leads.

Brian Young

New Association of Friends

Friday, May 15

Acts 1:10-11

“Why do you stand here looking into the sky?”

The disciples just witnessed something they could not wrap their minds around. They were stuck. Frozen in their confusion. Two angels appeared in order to comfort and reassure them that Jesus had it under control. Their clearer minds could now focus on Jesus’ task given in verse 8: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

In other words: “Time to stand up and get to work!”

The disciples would also have made the connection with events just forty days earlier. Angels had also appeared to the perplexed women at the tomb the morning of the resurrection. The angels reminded the women of Jesus’ words of promise. They also became un-stuck. They, too, stood up and acted.

Just think how the disciples would feel, only ten days later, when the Holy Spirit fell on them. And the joy of sharing this with other Jews, visitors and proselytes who were visiting Jerusalem. There was even to be another miraculous intervention when the message was able to be heard in the languages of the others. The disciples would be affirmed and comforted yet again.

Let us pray that when we become stuck we will be prepared. Prepared to hear words of comfort and prepared to hear what to do and strengthened to act. We won’t even need the appearance of angels! At Pentecost, Jesus gave us all—every one of us—the gift of the Holy Spirit deep in the core of our being. All we need to do is listen. And act.

John Burdick

Western Association of Friends

Saturday, May 16

Acts 1:15-26

“For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

The early church had to fill a position. This early movement was moving forward, and they had to replace Judas. The whole group knew why they had to replace Judas. His betrayal was well known, and his ultimate end was well documented. Peter makes it clear, though, it was time to move on. This new movement of Christ followers needed guidance and direction and so, as Peter puts it before the group: “May another take his place of leadership.” (Acts 1:20)

Peter makes it clear that they are looking for someone to be in leadership, which tells us that Judas was considered, at one point, part of the leadership. This may surprise us given Judas’s actions and ultimate end, but it’s also a reminder that leaders are very human and often sabotage their calling by their own human frailties and greed.

Peter’s requirements are simple: “Choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us.” (Acts 1:21) In other words, choose one who values community and has kept company with Jesus. We often overlook these qualities when searching for leaders in our faith communities. We are attracted by charisma or enamored by their influence or scan their resume, but how often do we pay attention to how they function in community with others, as well as whether or not they keep company with Jesus?

The writer of Acts then tells us, “Then they prayed.” (Acts 1:24) What they prayed may not be as important as the fact that they did pray. To pray is to offer a receptive and open space for Divine guidance and wisdom. It is an act of trust that God will guide.

Quakers may feel as if we are in a leadership crisis, but maybe we simply need to pay attention to those who value community and keep company with Jesus—and then trust that God will guide us as we pray.

Scott Wagoner

High Point Friends Meeting (Independent)

Sunday, May 17

Acts 2:1-4

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.”

When I was a kid, my family took long road trips. My parents developed a variety of tried and true ways to pass the time. One of my favorites was for them to recount the day each of us kids were born. They’d tell us details like what they had done that day, who was there, and what they ate before heading to the hospital. I loved knowing that my parents watched *Frosty the Snowman* before I was born. Or that my rushing uncle picked up my mom’s unzipped suitcase and dumped all her things all over the floor.

There is something powerful about telling stories, especially origin stories. The retelling of the past gives meaning to the present and hope for the future. It reminds us what is important and who we are.

Pentecost is often called the birthday of the church. This is the moment—the arrival of the Holy Spirit on all of Jesus’ followers—that our community was born. A ragtag group became the start of a movement, empowered by the promised Spirit.

In the story of that day, we get the important details. The ones that tell us what kind of people we are.

They were all together. We are a community that gathers.

The Spirit arrives with tongues of fire and a great wind. We are a community that serves a God who shows up in powerful ways, beyond our control.

Every single person there was filled with the Spirit. We are a community in which each person is connected to God.

Everyone was able to speak in tongues. We are a community that reaches out to the whole world with the good news.

So, church, happy birthday! Remember the day you were born.

Faith Kelley

Western Association of Friends

Monday, May 18

Acts 2: 5–13

*“When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment,
because each one heard their own language being spoken.”*

The miracle of Pentecost was not only in the speaking, but in the hearing. The crowd gathered in bewilderment because love—God’s love—was suddenly accessible. Love was no longer distant, filtered, or foreign. Love spoke to them in the rhythms and sounds that had shaped their lives.

Each listener carried their own story and wounds, their own ways of longing for meaning. The wonder of God met them right where they were. Perhaps they heard of mercy that restores dignity, of forgiveness that lifts shame, of a kingdom where the forgotten are seen. Maybe they heard that they were known, fully and intimately, and still loved.

What they heard, they heard in their heart language. Love came immediately, needing no translation. No wonder they were stunned.

Our inability to hear one another and hear God speaking is famously illustrated in the story of the Tower of Babel. The people come together to build their own way to God—to build a ziggurat, a Babylonian temple—and God frustrated their efforts by giving them different languages. Unable to communicate broadly, they fragmented: each small group peeling off language by language.

If Easter is about undoing the curse under which Adam and Eve left the garden, then Pentecost is the undoing of the curse of Babel. Love dismantles the barriers we create against hearing one another and hearing God. Love makes a way across the mires of our misunderstandings. Love speaks so we can hear.

And, bewilderment follows closely behind. When love meets us so precisely, it disrupts our assumptions. Love met this way asks us to reconsider what we thought we knew about God, about ourselves, about others.

Amazed and perplexed, the listeners asked one another, “What does this mean?”

Does it mean I am not alone after all?

Does it mean God has always been nearer than I believed?

Does it mean love is meant for me, not just for others?

Does it mean I am invited to trust, to respond, to change?

Perhaps the greatest miracle is this: love speaks so we can understand—and in understanding, we are transformed.

Julie Rudd

Wilmington Yearly Meeting

Tuesday, May 19

Acts 2:14-21

*“Upon my servants and my handmaids I will pour out a portion of my spirit
in those days, and they shall prophesy.”*

When we read this passage in the year of our Lord 2026, it may—it does—feel like these last days which Peter invokes, here in the passage from Pentecost Sunday. Wars and rumors of wars, economic and climate catastrophes, a hardening of society and an increased acceptance—even embrace—of cruelty. It is in days like this, says the prophet Joel, and thus the disciple Peter, that God will pour out a spirit of vision and prophecy. These must be the end days!

And yet, I am reminded of twenty years ago, when I was a younger man and this country was waist-deep in Iraq. And yet, though I wasn't alive, twenty-three years before that, the 1983 Able Archer military exercise, perceived by the Soviet Union as preparation for an actual nuclear first strike, almost ended the world—to a soundtrack of Nena's "99 Luftballons." And a little over twenty years before that, Armageddon almost arrived off the coast of Cuba, preceded twenty years earlier by the apocalyptic fires of globe-spanning war.

All of this is not a dirge, but a reminder—and a challenge to Friends. Do we agree with the early Friends who said, "Christ has come to teach his people himself?" And do we agree with the words of Jesus that only the Father knows the day and the hour? These words of Peter always apply—we live always in the spirit of the last days, because there are always challenges both new and also recurring. Despite political scientist Francis Fukuyama's bold declaration that we live at the end of history, we are not yet in the eschaton—but paradoxically, as Christians we are always there, and we are also always in the spirit of Joel's prophecy.

Indeed, this is not a dirge, though the keening for the world's loss is sharp, but a vision of rebirth, and an ongoing Pentecost. The spirit is continually poured out upon each generation, giving daughters and sons the opportunity to prophecy, for young women to have visions. Pentecost inaugurates the birthday of the Church, of beginning, but Peter's opening remarks begin in a place of ending. We understand as Quakers that the spirit is continually refreshing, and the tongues of fire are constantly alighting upon new gifted messengers, raised up to meet the needs and challenges of a new world. Perhaps the true and final end may come one day, perhaps our feelings about 2026 are even true—but in the meantime, we prophesy, we envision, and we dream. May we recognize the fresh challenges of each age—but may we also strive to recognize the fresh outpouring of the Spirit.

Jonathan Goff

Wilmington Yearly Meeting

Wednesday, May 20

Acts 2:22-24

“Because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”

The multinational crowd in Jerusalem at Pentecost was amazed at what had just happened in their midst. Many realized that they’d just witnessed a linguistic miracle, while some others had a more mundane explanation (alcohol!). Peter wastes no time in addressing that crowd directly, but his voice reaches all of us who’ve witnessed God’s power in ourselves and in our worldwide fellowship.

Peter reminded his original audience that the power that they had witnessed in that day’s signs and miracles was directly connected to Jesus of Nazareth—that same Jesus whom the religious establishment of the time, with his audience’s complicity and the help of the occupying forces of Rome, had put to death.

The living Gospel is still proclaimed worldwide. Wycliffe Bible Translators tells us the New Testament is available in 1,617 languages. But too often we find the world trying to smother the Gospel’s bondage-breaking, death-defeating message—through racism, greed, addictions, lust for power, and all other forms of functional atheism. Whether through participation or passivity, even Christians are complicit. In Acts 3:17, Peter allows that his original audience’s complicity may have come from ignorance. Peter’s audience today doesn’t have that same excuse.

In the second chapter of Acts, you and I are invited to hear Peter afresh for ourselves. Together, let’s discern what still keeps God’s beloved people in bondage, and pray that the Holy Spirit will guide our response. As we meet in all our varieties of language, temperaments, spiritual gifts, and life experiences, let’s ask ourselves the central question of Quaker process: “What does God want to say and do in this time and place, through us?”

Johan Maurer

Moscow (Russia) Friends Meeting (Independent)

Thursday, May 21

Acts 2:25-31

“You will not abandon me to the realm of the dead . . .”

In this passage, David is talking about anchoring in the Lord. In the very beginning he says that he “foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is at my right hand [and] I shall not be moved.”

This is great news for us. Here, Peter talks of a Christ who doesn’t let those who follow the Inward Light see corruption. There is corruption all around us, and at times it may feel like we are in a living Hell, buried by chaos. But here, Peter is telling us that even though, like David, our bodies may fade away for a time, later in scripture it says that we will all rise again with incorruptible bodies, at One again with the Lord. Like the parables in Luke 15 of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son, we are all being diligently sought.

I have a disorder called schizoaffective disorder. I’ve had a delusion before, in extreme circumstances, that I had died and was in literal Hell. What coming out of this delusion taught me was that Hell is not a place where Jesus leaves us. Hell is a state of mind. Hell is what we put each other through. As someone in the psych ward once told me, “Humankind has not dealt kindly with me!”

May we remember this and become kind. In doing so, darkness loses its grip on us. We have the power to go against the grain of corruption. May we all embrace this as our new-found superpower—all of us being an oasis in the wildness for all comers. May we all be the hands and feet of Christ, the Inward Light, may we all be that voice speaking tenderly to humankind. May we be curious rather than judgmental, showing all kinds of compassion to all kinds of people. May we be artists of empathy, “Epiphany Chasers,” may we teach others how to arrive, re-imagining our world and flying free. May we fill the empty, causing the darkness to flee. Amen and amen.

Christ, The Inward Light, is knocking at your door asking, “Will you follow me?” May we unearth rebirth like it is our career. Full of liberty, perfect love casting out all fears!

Shelly Font

New York Yearly Meeting

Friday, May 22

Acts 2:32-36

“God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.”

I take three important things from these five verses of Peter’s message to the crowd gathered for Pentecost. One is that the infilling of the Holy Spirit transformed Peter from a believer so afraid of being identified as Jesus’ friend that he was willing to betray him, into a man who boldly admitted that he had personally witnessed Jesus’ resurrection from death to life. That authentic witness of experiencing God’s life-giving power is still the most effective way to win others to the Lord.

Peter also knew the scriptures and was able to link what had happened to the writings of the prophet Joel and the psalmist David. He was able to tell the people that Jesus had not just appeared out of nowhere, but rather was a part of God’s redemptive plan that had begun centuries before and was ongoing into the future. Those truths still matter nowadays, too. Reading and understanding the scriptures is essential preparation for effective ministry.

The Spirit’s power equipped Peter to carry out a difficult assignment. He had to tell the people who had called for Jesus’ crucifixion that in ignorance or neglect, they had killed God’s promised Messiah whom they claimed to have been anxiously awaiting. That would be like having to tell someone they had just burned up an envelope full of cash in a bunch of mail they thought was junk not worth the time to open. There’s plenty of that spiritual inattention and laziness still happening today, so we will do well to seek the Lord’s wisdom and power for helping people to avoid choices they’ll regret for eternity.

Ron Ferguson

Winchester Friends Meeting (Independent)

Saturday, May 23

Acts 2:37-41

“The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

I vividly remember a time during worship where a scripture was read and gently unfolded before us. As the Word was spoken, something within me began to stir. The words felt alive. I sensed the Holy Spirit revealing areas of my heart I had ignored and complacency I had quietly embraced. Each word settled deeply, as though it had my name written on it. In that sacred moment, the Spirit tenderly illuminated truth with the quiet authority of the Inner Light.

Acts 2:37-41 captures such a holy moment. When the people heard Peter’s message about Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection, they were “cut to the heart.” This was a gentle and powerful work of the Holy Spirit, awakening them to the truth. This conviction did not crush them with despair; rather, it awakened hope. Their hearts, though pierced, were stirred to life, and they discovered that conviction was not condemnation, but an invitation to action. Their hearts, once oblivious, were quickly opened, hence their swift response: “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter’s answer was not a burden, but a message of hope: “Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The very Spirit who had brought conviction to their hearts now stood ready to dwell within them. As scripture assures us, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9) The One who exposed their sin was also the One who would cleanse, renew, and remain.

To be “cut to the heart” is a gift. It is evidence that God loves us too much to leave us unchanged. Conviction is not condemnation; it is a gentle invitation to draw closer to God. There are moments in life when God’s word reaches beyond our minds and settles into our hearts. It is in those moments that we realize the presence of the Light within us.

It is my prayer that we may not harden our hearts when the Holy Spirit speaks. May we receive those piercing moments as invitations to repentance, renewal, and deeper fellowship with God and one another. And when we feel that holy stirring within, may our prayer rise with theirs: “Lord, what shall I do?”

Lucy Azenga

Baltimore Yearly Meeting

Sunday, May 24

Acts 2:42-47

“...they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts...”

My study bible from seminary (NRSVue) headlines most of these verses of scripture, “Life among the Believers,” and what is life, of course, without the sustenance of food. Our days are marked by the repetition of breakfast, lunch, and dinner. But food is also what brings us together again and again in celebration and sorrow. Something special happens when we share a meal in community and, even more, in communion—just as was central to the faith practice of early Christian converts as Luke, the writer of Acts, tells us in this passage.

In the nearly twenty years I have been Quaker, it is the countless shared meals that embody my experience of, and my hope for, the Church. Thousands of years after the Apostles’ were spreading Jesus’ message and those communities shared in “the breaking of bread,” their lived faith that centered their communities persists today in each potluck and around countless dinner tables. For me, a Sunday Night Supper in the Fellowship Hall or cookies after worship in the Thorne Room is what should nourish Christian life and the life of the gathered Church.

On Pentecost Sunday, as we celebrate the birth of the Church, let us extend invitations and gather in community to eat together, “praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.” We are the Church, and may we nourish the present and future of the Church with each meal we gather around the table to share.

Lucy Enge

Wilmington Yearly Meeting

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