

Week 1: Radical Gentleness

Day 4: Acknowledging Complexity



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I believe that radical gentleness is so important to develop because increasingly we find ourselves living in a world of extremism. Where everything seems to be “us” vs. “them”; or “cut and dried” or “I’m right and if you see it differently, you’re simply wrong”.

Gentleness is a radical alternative – dare I say antidote – to digging in to unyielding positions, stances, views, alliances. Everything feels so rigid and sometimes like it is impossible to begin to discuss anything. As Emily Provance says: “Extremism seems to breed more extremism, on both the same and the opposing side. If we can’t talk about things, acknowledge complexity, and compromise, we don’t move forward from an oppositional stalemate.” I don’t know about you, but I’m exhausted by oppositional stalemates!

Gentleness helps us to acknowledge complexity. Even the issues where we find ourselves most entrenched simply aren’t as simple as one side vs. the other. There are multiple factors, multiple ways of thinking about issues, and multiple experiences that each of us bring to the table. To acknowledge that most of the issues we face are incredibly complex opens up the playing field to the notion that there are a multitude of ways to think about, talk about and approach the problems we face as a world. Acknowledging complexity allows us to begin to find common ground and new ways to work together.

Provance also reminds us that one of our basic Quaker tenets: “there is that of God in everyone” is actually pulled from a far more complex and comprehensive statement by George Fox. Here is a taste of what he said about this:

“Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever you come....”

“...that your carriage and life may preach...”

“...among all sorts of people, and to them...”

“.. then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world...”

“...answering that of God in everyone...”

“...whereby in them you may be a blessing...”

“...and make the witness of God in them to bless you.”

We are called to live out of gentleness – to speak it, yes, but to act it as well – from the simple tasks of answering phone calls, to greeting the clerk at the store, to responding with grace when we disagree. If we can be that non-anxious, non-judgmental presence, with everyone – not just with those we agree with, like, or respect – but with all people, we can truly be a blessing. And when we’re a blessing? Guess what? We are blessed too.

Amazing God, you have created this immeasurably great and complex universe. Help us to acknowledge that we are but one small part, and that each small part is to be greeted and treated as if we are greeting You. For indeed, we are. Amen.