

Friend, You Speak To My Condition

The Call To Silence And Sound

By Carrie Newcomer

Although I didn't grow up in the Quaker community, I've spent many years hanging around with folk in The Religious Society Friends. There are particular ideas and phrases that have always sparked something in me, gave me pause and shifted my frame of reference. A Quaker phrase that I've always appreciated is "Friend, you speak to my condition." This phrase is used whenever someone says something that goes right to your heart, when the words spoken were what you most needed to hear.

To put it in context, in a silent Quaker meeting, people sit in contemplative silence for an hour. At the end of an hour, the people attending turn and shake the hand of the persons near them. In a world of so much sound, with language pressing in from every angle, the silence can feel like a cool drink of water on a hot day. In the course of an hour, a person may stand and briefly speak out of the silence. But since contemplative silence is deep and connecting, the general attitude is "unless you can improve upon the silence, it is better to wait in the quiet." If you break the silence, your heart should feel impressed to do so and that the words you speak are not for yourself, but for the gathered community. And so when someone speaks straight to your heart, it is considered good to let that person know after the meeting, "Friend, you speak to my condition" or some modern variation of that sentiment. It is a way to say thank you when someone risked following their heart and the impulse of love.

The experience of sitting in the silence and deciding whether or not to speak has been excellent practice for my daily encounters. Many times in meeting I have spoken and later felt like I'd pretty much had filled the space to hear the sound of my own voice. Other times I resisted speaking and later knew that I'd allowed my fears to keep me from what I was called to say in that moment. It took time to trust myself, trust the inner light and inner voice that said, "Be still and listen" or "Stand and speak the words that must be said."

It seems so much of my life has been learning to navigate and balance silence and sound. A song is just noise, a random cacophony of sound, unless it is balanced with breath, silence and pauses. An expressive melody line asks me to trust and allow connected sounds and language

to come forth and come together. I have found deepest connection in the silence. But as a musician I know so well how deeply sound connects us too.

In these troubling times when is it best to listen, wonder and really hear the story of another, even someone who's opinions and view of the world is very different than mine? When do I say aloud, "The words you are speaking are promoting fear, hate or othering-and it hurts me to hear them." The best I can do is to listen to my heart, do what I have been practicing for most of my adult life, and trust what love calls me to do. And honestly if I get it wrong—well, I've been wrong before and if I am open to befriending my own mistakes, they always have something important to teach me.

More times than I can count, a poem or song, book or spiritual text has spoken to my condition. How many times has a good friend said the words I most needed to hear? Recently someone I love sent me an email after reading one of my Substack posts. She had written to tell she had read and heard, and it spoke to her condition. It felt very circular because her message to me was exactly what I needed to hear. She had spoken to my heart's longing too. It was a simple thing to do, to say "you spoke to my condition" and yet it is incredibly courageous and generous to me, and I was deeply grateful.

So I guess the encouragement today (for myself and for you dear readers) is to trust when your heart calls you to speak, take the risk to reach out, have the grace and courage to speak the words that must be said, to risk making a mistake for love's sake. Also to allow silence to enter into your sound filled life, to listen before speaking during a pause in the conversation, and perhaps to listen when your heart needs a little calm and quiet...and seek it out.

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