

When I was thinking of becoming a pastor I read about a man acknowledge as one the greatest preachers of the 20th century—Harry Emerson Fosdick. Fosdick became widely known in the 1920's after preaching a sermon against fundamentalism. That sermon, *Shall the Fundamentalists Win?*, was circulated widely, was celebrated in some quarters and condemned in others. The pastor of a Presbyterian church, Fosdick was ordered to appear before the general assembly of the church so his theology could be examined. He was defended by a young man named John Foster Dulles, whose father was a Presbyterian pastor. Dulles would later serve as the Secretary of State under President Eisenhower, and have an airport named in his honor. All that came later. Meanwhile, the fundamentalists held sway within the Presbyterian church, so in order to avoid censure, Fosdick resigned his position as pastor.

One of his admirers was John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a Baptist, who asked Fosdick if he would be interested in pastoring the church he attended, the Park Avenue Baptist Church in New York City. Fosdick declined, saying he did not “want to be known as the pastor of the richest man in the country.”

To which Rockefeller replied, “Do you think that more people will criticize you on account of my wealth than will criticize me on account of your theology?” Fosdick relented, agreeing to become the pastor on the condition the church become nondenominational, and so Riverside Church was born.

Fosdick inspired many people, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who often cited Fosdick in his own writings and sermons. In one sermon, Fosdick said the Christian church should “be a fountainhead of a better social order” and that “any church that pretends to care for the souls of people but is not interested in the slums that damn them, the government that corrupts them, and the economic order that cripples them is a dry, passive do-nothing religion in need of new blood.” Fosdick had a habit of putting the hay down where the goats could get it.

I once pastored a dry, passive do-nothing Quaker meeting. When I was hired, they said I could preach about anything I wanted, so long as I never upset anyone, never said anything others might disagree with, and kept my opinions to myself. Because I was young and desperate for the \$50 a week the position paid, I did my best to honor their wishes, making sure never to upset anyone, say anything others might disagree with, and to keep my opinions to myself. Then one Sunday I spoke about the cold fundamentalism squeezing the life out of that meeting, and was fired. It was a passive do-nothing church, and several years later closed its doors. It was there I learned that speaking up had a cost, but so did silence.

Every Christian I know who takes their faith seriously has lived in that same tension. Whether to speak up and care, at the risk of upsetting people, or stay silent and be dry, passive do-nothings.

Should you decide to care and speak up, you will have to decide how best to care, how best to speak. And sometimes you will get it wrong. Your passions will occasionally override your judgement. And that's okay, as long as it's an anomaly and not a habit. The other evening at Ministry and Counsel, Chase said the two truths Quakers must balance are speaking truth to power, while seeing what love can do. Speaking truth to power, while never forgetting the primacy of love. That's hard to do. Especially in this age of social media when each of us have our very own printing press and the freedom to say whatever we wish. We are now our own censors, and some of us do that better than others.

But long before Facebook was invented, we Quakers had our own version of social media, meeting for worship, which from its start insisted pastors and priests were not the only ones with the right and responsibility to speak. The floor would be open to all. But our speech, our worship, was always intended to arise from the deep places of the Holy Within. Meeting for worship was never intended to serve as a letter to the editor, or an op-ed page, or a rehash of the daily news. It was to be Spirit-led, an insight rooted in our intimacy with God. I was speaking with a Friend recently, a Quaker from North Carolina, and she said, "Have you ever noticed how often today when Quakers speak out of the silence, they preface their remarks by saying, "I heard on NPR this week..." Now I listen to NPR. I love NPR, from *Click and Clack*, to *Prairie Home Companion*, *Fresh Air*, *All Things Considered*, and *Morning Edition*.

But our worship and our words must originate from a deeper source. We have a responsibility to drill for deeper water. Many of us are concerned about the social and political climate in our nation, I am one of them. And I intend to resist it with all the spiritual and intellectual vigor I can muster. Not because a Republican holds office, but because our nation is in the grip of great fear and intolerance. But as a Christian, as a Quaker, my resistance must be rooted in that Light and Life Within, what the Quaker Thomas Kelly called “the inner sanctuary of the soul.” For when our speech is rooted there, when our actions spring from there, they will not only be true, they will be tempered and fortified by the heat of love.

The interesting thing about Fosdick is that his message never changed. When he became the pastor of the wealthiest man in America, he didn’t stop challenging the economic system that made a minority wealthy and a majority poor. His message never changed. His devotion to justice never wavered. But whenever he spoke, those who heard him not only felt challenged and convicted, they also felt loved. So challenge and convict, but also love.

When you stand in meeting for worship to speak, challenge, but also love. Remember we are at all different places, and are sincerely trying our best.

When you post on Facebook, challenge, but also love.

When you visit with your neighbor, challenge, but also love.

When you phone or write your senator or representative, challenge, but also love.

When you talk with your family, challenge, but also love.

Most of all, let your words, no matter where or to whom you are speaking, let your speech arise from those deep places, those eternal places, which are not here today and gone tomorrow, but reside in eternity, always true and always with us.