

First Friends Church, a Quaker meeting,
Rev. Dr. Loletta M. Barrett
May 16, 2021
Abundant Advice
Psalm 1

Reading

Psalm 1

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Message

Everywhere we look there is abundant advice. The Hebrew testament is full of it. Today's psalm today tells us not to follow the advice of the wicked and gives good reasons why not. The prophets gave warning and comforting advice to the people of God. The book of Proverbs is one line of advice after another, often without giving reasons because most seem timeless. Some people might need a little explanation in our times. For example, "A stitch in time saves nine" harks back to a time when everyone had to know or be a seamstress in order to have something to wear. Some people have never threaded a needle- even after isolation offered the opportunity to pick up old crafts or start a new hobby!

It seemed appropriate to bring a message about abundant advice the week after Mothers' and a month before Fathers' Day. Aren't mothers and fathers full of

advice? To a young child, “Don’t touch a hot stove,” to a young adult, “Try to make an extra loan payment each year and that way you will pay it off faster.” The most important pieces of advice I received from my parents were, “Always treat others the way you want to be treated, treat a janitor with the same respect as the president, and make sure there is always ‘room in the inn.’”

What advice did your parents give you? What advice did we listen to and why did we not listen to all of it? I know during a portion of our lives we might think parents are quite dull, couldn’t possibly understand us or the world we live in. But did we really want to learn lessons the hard way?

We also receive advice from teachers and weighty Friends. What advice has been and is now helpful to you? There is also advice from sources like friends, books, and acquaintances. I particularly like Robert Fulghum’s, “Everything I ever needed to know I learned from Kindergarten. And of course I live by “Everything I ever needed to know I learned from watching Star Trek.”

Lately there are the Facebook memes. Some of those make me wonder- it couldn’t be that simple could it? Many of them are silly, superficial knock offs. Some even raise anxiety, especially the ones presenting simple recipes for success and happiness. When down in the proverbial swamp wrestling with alligators the last thing we need to hear is, “Smile and help others it will make your day.” Trite advice like “Happiness is Following Your Dream’s” certainly doesn’t help when

we make bad decisions. In a “Pirates of the Caribbean” movie the pirates follow their dreams of treasure but catch the curse that went with it. They realized the truth of the advice they didn’t want to hear the hard way. “Having everything does not mean you will be satisfied.”

There are some memes with particularly poignant advice for pastors and churches. Here are some that made me think: “Jesus explained that the reign of God was like a mustard plant—a fast-growing weed that invades... and spreads with chaotic [uncontrollable] growth. It is the uncontrolled spread of radical ideas like nonviolent resistance, distributive economic justice, radically inclusive community, and a situational ethics of compassion—that has the creative power to transform the world—and may even transform the church... Call people to engage in the Jesus revolution- a conspiracy of love that rises up [in] everyday acts of kindness, compassion and resistance...”¹ “Instead of worshipping Jesus, follow him on the journey toward union with God and everything else... it is not a religion of ‘belonging and believing’ but transformation.”² And “Tradition [should be] the handing down of fire not the veneration of ashes.”³

Transformation is the intent of the Friends tradition of Advices. The first list of advices came from the Elders at Balby in 1656. It concluded: ‘Dearly beloved

¹ <https://m.facebook.com/followingjesus.org/> Kurt Struckmeyer, Mustard Seed School of Theology

² Richard Rohr paraphrased ProgressiveChristianity.org.

³ Gustav Mahler

Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by; but that all, with a measure of the light, which is pure and holy, may be guided: and so in the light walking and abiding, these things may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not in the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.’⁴

Lists of Advices are adjusted to meet changing times. They encourage continuing growth by individuals and meetings, with the intent of helping them to live more fully in the Spirit. They are a reminder of the insights of the Society and are used for inspiration, reflection and challenge.⁵ Some Yearly meetings have 12 advices and queries and they receive formal reports from meetings about how they are living into the advice.⁶ Some Friends end meetings with an advice. Some meetings are making use of advices for social media content. It’s a way to inject a little Quakerism into the everyday.⁷ Quaker memes anyone?!

I was invited to make a presentation at the National John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act Day of Action two weeks ago. The day was intended to encourage people to take action on Voting Rights, Equal representation, and open, honest dialogue for all the people of our country. Spirit inspired me to use our SPICES Quaker testimonies as the scaffold for my remarks. It seemed a fitting way

⁴ <https://quakerpodcast.org/advices-and-queries/>

⁵ <https://qfp.quaker.org.uk/chapter/1/> <https://jeffkislign.com/2017/11/02/advices-and-queries/>

⁶ <https://jeffkislign.com/2017/11/02/advices-and-queries/>

⁷ <https://quakerpodcast.org/advices-and-queries>

to be a beacon of Quaker values for the community. The advice I was given to share with group before they carried out their action was to act and live:

1) with simplicity because it demonstrates and encourages transparency and accountability, 2) peacefully- beyond silence and lack of violence to Shalom that invites everyone feel welcome to participate in our community, 3) with integrity so our words and actions are not only honest and beyond reproach, but help rebuild the trust we have lost, 4) in community because God created us diverse in order to incorporate all of God's aspects, and we are always better together, 5) in ways that further equality and justice so that the voices of all are heard and the dignity of all respected, and 6) responsibly caring for, and in service to all the resources we have been given including people; to stand up as allies with and empower the people and creation shoved to the margin.

Everywhere we look there is abundant advice. I may have reached an age where it is easier to spot and reject bad advice. But I also know there are reasons I can fail to listen to and act on good advice. Sometimes, like a book I read too quickly, the advice does not sink in. Sometimes the advice just doesn't make sense at the time, someone else's advice seems better, or I (mistakenly) think I know best. Sometimes I need to learn the hard way. Sometimes I even fail to ask!

Still, the best advice I know comes from an impeccable source: "Love the Lord your God with all your mind, heart, soul and strength, and your neighbor as

yourself - that includes your enemy.” Some might think it is Jesus’ advice. But he was passing on what he got from people in his tradition. They got it from our True Mother/Father. It kinda says it all. It is both the best advice and the most difficult to follow. I paraphrase Rabbi Hillel who said about it, “This is The Advice. All other advice is commentary.”

What is the best advice you have received? What advice has been most helpful? What advice has been most difficult to follow? What advice do you wish you had listened to? What is the best advice you have ever given?