

First Friends Church, a Quaker Meeting  
Elisabeth Elliot  
I CHANGED MY MIND  
John 15: 5, Phil 3:11-14, 2 Tim 3:16, 1 Peter 2:1-3  
August 30, 2020

John 15: 5

<sup>5</sup>I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

Phil 3:11-14

<sup>11</sup>if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup>Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup>Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

2 Tim 3:16

<sup>6</sup>All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

1 Peter 2:1-3

Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. <sup>2</sup>Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— <sup>3</sup>if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Message

When you hear the term flip-flopping, what do you think of? As a term in politics and media, the connotation is not a good thing. It indicates hypocrisy, lack of moral courage or blatant inauthentic reaction to the latest poll.

That could be in some cases. We know it's true in some cases. But what happens if instead of flip-flopping, Dan Rather says, "The senator experienced continuing revelation today..."?

What do you think the reaction would be if a person in a government leadership position went on TV and admitted he or she was wrong. I'm not talking about an act of contrition—the all-encompassing "I used bad judgement and I'm sorry." I'm talking about someone explaining, "You know what I said before? I was wrong."

To use common 1990s parlance, "as if!"

Congress is making some pretty questionable calls right now. But imagine for a moment, if Senator Lindsay Graham called a press conference and said, "I've doing some hard thinking and soul searching lately and I'm changing my position on this. I was wrong." Would the American people today, not to mention the American media, allow him the grace to do that? Would we start throwing tomatoes and say 'no, you no-good confusing flip-flopper, you can't do that' or might we say, "Well, it took you long enough, what are you, a Quaker?"

Most of you Friends, being Quakers, know something about continuing revelation. We see, or at least aspire to see, when things need threshing or seasoning, that it's often not black or white. Maybe that's why we like gray. And someone who has a change of heart or mind, that's kind of terrific.

Today, I don't think you can think of white people's awakening to their own biases as anything but continued revelation.

We all have the tendency to be wrong. We're human. Shouldn't this be expected? Yet most discourse today is of the defensive variety, the inability to give yourself permission to change your mind.

In my days as a theatre director, I learned something early in my career that made me a better director and I believe a better Elisabeth.

I was directing a play in which a man does something bad and by doing so, treats his secretary very badly and she decides to leave his employ. During the third act, the secretary is putting his affairs in order before she leaves and at several points, comes to ask him questions.

I didn't feel that Wendy, the actor playing the secretary, was playing the scene with enough resolve. I told her, "Come in to the room, ask the question, don't look at him, get the answer and leave. She's done with him."

Wendy looked puzzled. "Then why does she come back into the room?," she asked.

"Because she wants to finish up and leave as quickly as possible," I said, trying not to put a 'Duh' in my voice.

“But, if she was really done with him, wouldn’t she just leave? She wouldn’t be putting his affairs in order. I don’t think she wants to leave. I think she’s giving him time, hoping that he will fix his mistake.”

Wendy’s interpretation was so much more interesting! Of course! I was wrong! Thirty odd years later, I still remember the thrill. From that day to this, I promised myself never to be absolutely right about anything ever again.

It also gave me a feeling of overwhelming generosity. Wendy gave me a free ticket into not only understanding human frailty more immediately but also the wonder that comes from assisting someone else’s continuing revelation.

You know, in baseball, you are considered a pretty good hitter if you fail 2/3 of the time. I like baseball.

Here’s another theater example. The actor who, frustrated, asks the director to “can you just say the line how you want me to say it?” The director will be sorely tempted at times thinking this will be a lot quicker than trying to actually, you know, have a discussion with another creative artist. Taking a shortcut will inevitably lead to a short-sighted result because as much as you want control, sometimes you have to accept that you are the verb and they are the noun. In order to direct, I need an actor. This is the beauty of a creative partnership. Cutting yourself off from another artist’s insight is far worse than losing control or fiercely trying to get what you want—now. That’s like sticking a DVD in your head with no pause button, let alone a rewind button.

Question: in the course of your life, should your beliefs and opinions change? If the answer is yes, a Gallup poll taker will tell you, you are less likely to be religious, that continuing revelation is just a placeholder until the majority gets their way.

Quaker tradition says no, continuing revelation is where it’s at, it’s the whole point. In the case of the Bible, we’re not always sure if it’s the series finale of a TV show or just the first season.

It doesn’t have to be one or the other and that’s not a bad thing.

How many times have heard someone say “Just for the ‘sake’ of argument” or “Let me play devil’s advocate” ? What, you have to be the devil to offer an opposing view? (Outside of Catholicism where it’s an official term).

That’s why I like Quakers. I’ve come to realize that being a Quaker is it has a lot in common with rehearsing a play. We have to all do your jobs, be prepared, not complain or make excuses for ourselves but we’re very good at comforting and supporting people who have every right to do those things. And however good we think our idea is, it stands a good chance of being better when we listen for a sec to someone who sees it differently. And rehearsal and performance are two completely different things—one is the process and one is the result and I think I’ve given you an idea of which one I like a little better.

Stay open to others. Be wrong. Let others be wrong. Recognize evolution of thoughts and feelings as a gift and a goal. Remember, we have a pause button and we can give others the opportunity to rewind.