

Bible study at Canadian Yearly Meeting

By Deborah Fisch

ONE OF THE THINGS that makes Bible study at Canadian Yearly Meeting interesting and unique is the opportunity for Friends to meet in small groups following the study to share their own experiences, answer questions prepared by the Bible study leader, or simply worship together. This was particularly effective this year because Bible study leader Katie Aven used most of each Bible study hour to share her prepared lesson for the day, reserving the second hour for small group discussions and reflection time.

As a Friend with a Masters of Divinity, Katie was well qualified to lead the study, though she was clear that she was not the only one present that could speak to what the Gospels might have to say to Friends today. By inviting Friends to hold questions for their small groups, she created a space for sharing what Friends were coming to know experientially through their lives, the Bible study and their week together. As she said, “There is a wealth of knowledge among us that can and should be drawn upon.”

Katie helped Friends of diverse spiritual beliefs use the Gospels to explore roots of the peace testimony within the Religious Society of Friends, reminding us that the testimonies are an outgrowth of faith and not in themselves the basis of Quakerism.

She invited us to explore the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) by looking at the historical, cultural, and religious context in which they were written. She reminded us that each Gospel was written for a different audience, at a different time in history, by a different person, and that understanding this helps us better understand the Truth being told in the “sacred stories.”

Examining our own sacred stories and sharing them with each other is just as important a part of the spiritual journey toward Truth as the reading of the Gospels.

She also invited Friends to investigate the multiple meanings of some words and how translation into modern English from the Koine Greek can impact and change our understanding of the story.

In short, Katie invited us to explore the Living Truth of the Gospels, but not get hung up on the literal truth of the stories. She invited us to engage in the teachings of Jesus both through the four Gospels and through the experiences of the Truth in our own lives, which she called the “Fifth Gospel.”

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and sharing them with each other is just as important a part of the spiritual journey toward Truth as the reading of the Gospels. We need both if we are to grow into the faith community Friends seem hungry for, and live into the testimony of peacemaking.

We heard and shared about radical inclusion of all people; radical detachment from material objects, status and power; servant leadership; direct and personal relationship of the Divine in the now; creating relationships and community; joy and compassion—all rooted and grounded in Love.

These were the Truths Jesus spoke of in the sacred stories we learned about in Bible study and talked about in small groups. These were the Truths that informed early Friends as they developed a testimony of peace. These are Truths that continue to inform us today as we also seek to walk in a manner that takes away the occasion of war in the twenty-first century.

Note: Katie’s Bible study looked at Matthew 5:1-12, Mark 10, Luke 15:11-32, and John 15:1-17. There was some talk that the text of her study might be made available in print and/or on the Canadian Yearly Meeting web page in the future. 🐸

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