



(Part of the art installation)

created by all participants at the BYM gathering 'Bridging the Gap')

I headed off to the BYM sustainability gathering 'Bridging the Gap' at Swanick conference centre without a sense of walking cheerfully and more with a sense of heaviness. What had happened to the energy we all felt at the level of Quakers nationally in the UK with the Canterbury commitment expressed in Minute 36? How would I represent our own AM and the way we are all living out this commitment? So I went with a bit of a sense of a 'moral test', feeling that I would come up short. Would other local and area meetings be making a 'better job' of it all? This was all given sharp focus by the recent IPCC report, as Zee-Zee has outlined.

It turned out that this sense was not too far removed from how Quakers nationally have been feeling. Our three key-note speakers each provided a helpful and energising sense to our gathering, which complemented the inspiration of sharing with Friends, seeing what inspiring actions other Quakers are participating in, and reflecting with Friends in informal conversations on our personal and AM journeys.

One speaker, Jo-anne Veltman, a gp from Norfolk, spoke passionately and movingly of how she had become engaged with taking action, partly through actions taken by her child at secondary school. She has led a legal action, Plan B (<https://planb.earth/>), which is taking the Government to court over its lack of action to

implement the Paris Climate Agreement. What spoke to me was her journey from being an average person living her life like many people 'doing their bit' with recycling and so on, to one who is passionately engaged and facilitating urgent action on a political level.

Susanna Mattingly, Sustainability Communication Officer at Friends World Committee for Consultation, spoke very little, rather giving over her platform to video clips from 3 Quakers of very different traditions living in parts of the world which are right now directly affected by climate changes. I found it very simple and direct to hear from these Friends speaking to our gathering of British Friends in a way which was not trying to persuade, but rather simply sharing their experiences of how their lives were directly affected and made more difficult owing to climate change. It made me sit up and think that climate change is having an impact right now, not in the future, for many millions of people.

Finally Paul Hoggett, one of the founders of Climate Psychology Alliance, which several Friends are involved in, really spoke to my condition with his description of 'resentiment', a French word, translated as something along the lines of 'the enjoyment of nursing a grievance'. The title of the conference was 'Bridging the Gap' and this concept is helpful in understanding the political and cultural movements of entrenchment with the rise of populism and the sort of politics represented by Trump and Brazilian president Bolsonaro, as well as the nature of Brexit politics in the UK. However, what was particularly helpful was his identification of this psychological drive within us, with an easy slide into a sense of our 'virtue' and 'rightness'. He suggested it might be possible to bridge the gap by recognising this feeling within ourselves and using it connect with those we view as 'other'. He also reminded us of the dangers of 'exceptionalism', as a species, as a nation, and as people who might be feeling that we are 'doing our bit' and have a disguised sense of inner exceptionalism.

I was struck by having grown up at the height of the Cold War with the sense of an impending nuclear apocalypse, leading many people to either engage in protest or the many millions who did not and just switched off in the face of something they felt was outside their control. Perhaps the same is true when many people in Europe and America consider climate apocalypse.

Finally, as a Quaker, I found the following, which were referred to in the course of the weekend, inspiring and they spoke to my condition:

1. The life and testimony of 17<sup>th</sup> century Quaker Benjamin Lay, a vegetarian, and early challenger of slavery, challenging Quaker slave owners in the most dramatic fashion. See this weblink for more info. (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-42640782>)
2. Isaac Pennington QFP 26.70 'Give over thine own willing, give over thy own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee and be in thee and breathe in thee and act in thee'
3. QFP 20.32 'The Creator of this earth is the owner of it. He gave us being thereon and our nature requires nourishment, which is the produce of it. As he is kind and merciful, we as his creatures, while we live answerable to the design of our creation, are so far entitled to convenient subsistence that no man may justly deprive us of it. By the agreements and contracts of our fathers and predecessors, and by doings and proceedings of our own, some claim a much greater share of this world than others: and whilst those possessions are faithfully improved to the good of the whole, it consists with equity. But he who ...employs others in the luxuries of life acts contrary to the gracious design of him who is the true owner of the earth'
4. QFP 19.47 'I advise thee to wear it as long as thou canst' (George Fox to William Penn, regarding William Penn's question about whether he should wear a sword or not).

## Points for reflection as an AM and as LMs:

- How are we as an AM and LMs revisiting and considering how we might as meetings respond to Minute 36?
- How might we as a meeting gather round actions related to sustainability? For example, can we use our Meeting Houses as venues for training in direct action around such movements as 'Extinction Rebellion' (see <https://risingup.org.uk/XR/> and <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/26/facts-about-our-ecological-crisis-are-incontrovertible-we-must-take-action>)
- How can we as individuals and as a meeting 'bridge gaps' within our own meetings and within our communities? Might this help us reflect on the issues raised by MfSufferings in relation to diversity?
- What is the 'sword' you are wearing as an individual in relation to carbon/fossil fuel based living and how might you reach a point of not wearing it any longer?
- How can we support each other in living differently in a zero-carbon way?

## Suggested action:

Might we organise an all age LM or AM weekend away, in a venue reachable by public transport, where we can share cooking vegetarian/vegan food, enjoy community, creating our own entertainment and being inclusive, such as inviting/paying for one person, such as an asylum seeker, who would not otherwise be able to afford a weekend away?

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