

"There is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear" (I John 4:18)

"Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within" (James Baldwin)

We gathered together this week under a theme of **"Be Not Afraid, I Am With You"**.

Be not afraid. These three words point to a truth carried down through the centuries, in many traditions and cultures. Our week together offered us different ways to reflect on and bring these words alive into our being.

We discovered stories are a powerful tool to help us face fear. In Bible Study, Friends read and were read by a text that returns again and again to one story of overcoming fear. Our evening collections explored practical ways to lessen fear's grip on us: learning to share and to listen to another person, working for justice, building community with others who appear different from us as well as building community with those who belong to our worldwide family, and singing songs for courage. Junior Yearly Meeting brought us energy, gave us hope, and weakened our fears.

We sometimes fear our community isn't strong enough to sustain our differences, or the discussion of difficult topics where we are not in agreement. We had chances to face that fear at different times in our work this week. How good it was to remember that when our human strategies hit a wall, our practice teaches us to stop, stand in in the Light, and be open so that Spirit may enter.

And how do we stand in this Light?
Our worship takes us there.

And how do we overcome fears that we cannot live up to the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves?
Our worship takes us there.

Early Friend John Woolman told us, "There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion, nor excluded from anywhere the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become brethren."

Reading our queries and responses, our epistles, and the State of the Meeting Reports together reminded us that these are practices of our community to help each other stay honest in our our faith. Sometimes we fear we don't have the patience or courage to wait until our promptings are well seasoned before we act. In community, we help each other stay faithful.

This past week, we found joy in using our practices, and found joy in knowing we don't have to be ruled by fear. There was joy in touching the love we felt being with our youngest Friends and sitting together with them in worship. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear."

"Silence is the language of God. All else is poor translation" (Rumi)

We now conclude our 2016 annual session, planning to meet again, God willing, at Scattergood Friends School and Farm, near West Branch, Iowa, 7th month 25 to 30, 2017