

Finding the Prophetic Voice for Our Time

Voices from the 22nd FWCC Triennial

Dublin, Ireland
August 2007



Friends World
Committee for
Consultation

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)



Introduction

Finding the Prophetic Voice for our Time, with the text: ‘it is love, then, that you should strive for. Set your hearts on spiritual gifts, especially the gift of proclaiming God’s message’ (I Corinthians 14:1) was the theme for the 22nd FWCC Triennial, which took place in August 2007 in Dublin, Ireland.

Yearly Meetings were invited to consider the theme in advance of the Triennial, partly through working with the Study Booklet, a collection of reflections on aspects of the theme by Friends from a variety of Quaker traditions (see www.fwccworld.org).

Because there are many different understandings of what it means to have a prophetic voice, and what a prophet is, Marion McNaughton was asked to address Triennial on the meaning of prophecy and Friends’ views on it.

Worship was the cornerstone of the Triennial. The morning plenary each day was devoted to worship in one of our different traditions. Within that worship was a message from a speaker from that tradition relating to the theme. Some speakers spoke from the silence, some started their worship with hymns and prayers; some asked others to share the presentation. We believe these messages have broader value to all Friends so the speakers’ contributions are collected in this book: a strong and compelling witness to ‘Finding the Prophetic Voice for our Time’. The Triennial Epistle is also included.

Editorial note: please note that these contributions are as the Spirit moved the speaker – from what they said, lightly edited, rather than a written talk. We have however tried to follow the conventions each speaker adopted in his/her written text in terms of capitalising some words.

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If George Fox returned to the world today, would he feel that we were continuing his ministry? Prophetic words are however not enough – prophecy is also action. We can recognise prophetic ministry in the persistent and patient witness of our Quaker organisations and the many examples of peace and community building in the troubled regions of our world. The growing number of Friends transforming their lives to help our endangered planet are also living in the prophetic tradition.

We have felt the joy, passion and excitement of such committed living. It is our hope that we can recognise and encourage the prophets among us. Can we be open to the possibility of ourselves being called to such service which leads us to experience “the fruit of the spirit” (Gal.5:22)?

During the Triennial we worked together on many vital concerns of Friends today, such as the destruction of the environment, human rights, HIV/Aids, Violence, outreach and growth and the increasing involvement of young Friends. We were blessed by the energy of a larger number of Young Friends at this Triennial, several of whom played an important part in the planning and running of this meeting. Worship and sharing groups enriched and deepened friendships, as did the excursions organised by Irish Friends.

As we were together, news of the earthquake in Peru, the landslide in Kenya and the typhoon in the Phillipines reached us. We stopped our proceedings to pray for those affected by these disasters and continue to hold them in our hearts.

At the business sessions, some important decisions about the future of FWCC were reached. Instead of having a Triennial in 3 years’ time, there is to be a World Conference in five years’ time.

Welcome, Friends, to Kenya in 2012!

Duduzile Mtshazo, Clerk
Friends World Committee for Consultation

Message/Epistle from the 22nd FWCC Triennial

To Friends the world over:

308 Friends from 41 countries, representing many different branches of the Quaker family, met at King's Hospital School in Dublin from 11th to 19th August 2007. At our time of arrival, we were welcomed by Irish Friends, who with great love, dedication and enthusiasm made us feel part of their lives. Thanks to their contacts and enormous work by the visa team (Ireland and the FWCC World Office), visas were obtained for a much greater number of participants than was formerly possible, making the gathering more truly representative of our whole membership.

Ireland has a long Quaker tradition dating from 1654 when William Edmundson settled in Ulster. From the beginning Quakers established a reputation for fair dealing and good works. They are still remembered for providing food and employment during the great famine in the 1840s. More recently, in Northern Ireland, they worked to bring opposing sides together and thus contributed to reconciliation. The island of Ireland contains *the Republic of* Ireland and Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, but Irish Quakers have one Yearly Meeting.

The theme for the Triennial was

“Finding the prophetic voice for our time”

In our daily worship we have heard seven Friends giving their message on the theme. We have been reminded of the tradition of prophecy in the Old Testament and in the early Christian church. We have learned of the characteristics of the prophets, including humility and faithfulness, and even a reluctance to take on a job they never applied for. Just as the Old Testament prophets and George Fox challenged the people of their own time, we have been challenged to realise the prophetic message of God's love in our lives. “Let the love of Christ flow into us, and through us to others that they too may know Christ.”

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Doreen Dowd, Ireland Yearly Meeting addressed the Triennial during worship on Sunday 12th August 2007 as follows :

Good morning, Friends.

It is a privilege and a responsibility to speak to you during this Meeting for Worship. I am sure there were other Friends who shared my reaction on hearing the theme for this Triennial: 'Finding the prophetic voice for our time'. I immediately thought of the Old Testament prophets whose words and deeds are recorded in the Bible. Presumably those who chose the theme were not expecting to set Friends up as prognosticators or seers with an unusual ability to foretell the future. Rather, in this context 'prophetic' has the meaning, as my dictionary confirms, of 'being inspired by God'. I am reminded of our Meetings for Worship for attention to Business when we use not just our intelligence or our expert knowledge, but rather seek to find God's will in organising the affairs of the church.

It seemed a good starting point to look at who some of these men were. They were prophets, but we don't know very much about them. Firstly, some of them came from very humble origins. Moses, David and Amos were all minding sheep when they received their divine call. Elijah was ploughing; Ezekiel, Nehemiah and some of the others were prisoners of war. Secondly, several of them felt unequal to the task. Moses complained so much to God about his lack of eloquence that he was finally given Aaron to be his spokesman. Jeremiah said: 'I am but a child'. Isaiah confessed: 'I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell amongst a people of unclean lips', but when he accepted the forgiveness and cleansing offered by God he was able to say: 'here am I, send me'.

The environments in which they prophesied were very varied. At times Israel was materially wealthy, complacent that its military might could not be challenged, while the civil society was corrupt and promiscuous. Intermarriage with neighbouring tribes had introduced temple prostitution and worship of nature and fertility gods. At other times, the prophet was speaking to a people in captivity in exile, wondering if they would ever again see their native land let alone fulfil their destiny

Stephen Wamboka

Stephen Wamboka was born in Uganda, East Africa in 1972. He is married to Rose Wamboka and a father of daughters - Grace and Trust. He was spiritually nurtured and brought up by Pastor Christopher Wabula and his wife Robina in Bukimanai monthly meeting. After my O levels in Mbale progressive secondary school he felt a deep conviction in his heart to know more about Christ and the Bible. The desire grew stronger and his active participation in the church made his Pastor recognise a special gifting. Stephen did a diploma in Theology Friends Theological College in Kenya, East Africa.

After graduation he worked in Kisumu Friends Church, Kenya from 1997-2002; when he went back to Uganda, he and his wife began a church in a place called Mutoto. Besides being a pastor, Stephen is the general secretary of Uganda Yearly Meeting and works with the Quaker peace network (QPN) in mediation.

María Yi Reyna

María Armenia Yi Reyna, was born in Holguín, Cuba on 14 August 1968, into a Quaker family. She is a graduate in Economics.

After a period as treasurer and financial advisor to her national Quaker church, she was nominated as Clerk of the Yearly Meeting, the first woman Clerk in the century of Quaker presence in Cuba. During six years as Clerk she was also entrusted with the vice-presidency of the Cuban Council of Churches for four years, since when she has been their Minutes Secretary.

At present she is totally involved in pastoral service to her national church as Assistant YM Clerk. She is also a minister of Cuba Yearly Meeting.

She recently completed the extension course offered by the Evangelical Theological Seminary.

María is a member of the Executive Committee of the Latin American Council of Churches.

Marion McNaughton

Marion comes from an Irish/Scottish background and has lived most of her life in England. She has been at various times a teacher, lecturer and counsellor, and active in peace, justice and women's issues in Britain and the USA. She is a mother and a grandmother. She is a passionate gardener. Her home is in Birmingham, UK, where she is currently involved in several interfaith activities. She had been Co-ordinator of the Northern Friends Peace Board in Britain, and Lecturer in Practical Theology at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in Birmingham UK. She is a trustee and Chair of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, a Quaker trust which seeks to address the causes of social injustice, inequality and oppression, and search out the roots of conflict.

Bill Medlin

Bill Medlin is an evangelical Friend and pastor, peace and human rights activist, abolitionist, historian, and writer. Strongly committed to Christ and Quakerism, he values all branches of Friends and has keen interest in inner religious experience, spiritual healing, Friends missions, Quaker philately, Quaker books & business firms, ice cream, sweet fruit, and Friends worldwide. He leads workshops on spiritual gifts, modern slavery, Quaker genealogy, and meeting planting and growth. His ministry has included bold prophetic witness on unpopular concerns. He is married with three children and lives near Indianapolis, USA. Bill's love for FWCC goes back 40 years, when FWCC nurtured him as a Young Friend. He has written books on Quakerism, inner religious experience, and local history.

Lizz Roe

Lizz Roe is a member of Hereford and Mid-Wales MM, part of Britain Yearly Meeting. She works with Friends across Britain exploring what it means to live our faith in the world; and ways that spiritual activism can inform our own faith and life journeys. Lizz is passionately committed to a ministry that supports Friends living prophetic lives grounded in their experience of the Light. She has been involved in activism around gender rights, sustainability, conflict transformation, and community re-invigoration for more than 20 years, and is the current tutor in Practical Theology at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in Birmingham, UK.

of bringing to birth the messiah. Did you recognise the harp music, played earlier: 'By the waters of Babylon I sat down and wept'?

The messages of the prophets were very specific to the people to whom they spoke, but at the same time carried a universal message that can still speak to us today. So this Triennial can produce a message that is applicable to all the Yearly Meetings represented here, although some of us live in countries racked by hunger, by poverty, by AIDS, while others of us are surrounded by wealth and materialism. The common factor in the message of the prophets is restoration of the relationship between God and those who would worship Him in spirit and in truth. Those of you who think the Old Testament is only about battles and bloodshed should look again at some of its images of God: a faithful husband, a bird protecting its nestlings and, of course, 'the Lord is My Shepherd'.

It is interesting that the only reference I could find in the New Testament to the purpose of prophecy is: 'so that the church may be edified'. Although we have few details of New Testament prophecy, the young church needed divinely guided insights in how to deal with its internal structure and how to deal with the pagan world around it as it explored the meaning of the gospel of Jesus.

There are undoubtedly some Friends who are already thinking: 'this is all about words and ideas whereas I just want to feed the hungry, reduce dependence on arms, care for the environment, so that future generations can have clean air and water', but the prophets often inspired practical action. Nehemiah comes over like the rather bossy clerk of a large Premises Committee obsessed with rebuilding Jerusalem, abandoning his donkey so that he could clamber over the rubble to inspect enemy damage to the city walls. More than once, the words of the prophet led to the removal of pagan shrines. Although priests and prophets had specific roles in Israel, all of the people were expected to behave as children of God; farmers and merchants were to trade honestly and to treat their employees well - surely good Quaker principles.

These are some impressions of some biblical prophets. They were ordinary people, aware of their weaknesses, but willing to be used by God and to share insights with their communities. Have these ancient Hebrews a message for our 21st century world? To bring the question a little nearer in time, I believe the New Testament is also about restoring the relationship between God and human kind. Is not Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son about restoring communication between our Heavenly Father and his child?

Here also, in my experience, lies the huge challenge for present day Friends. Can we, with our enormous diversity of outlook, still find a united message for the 21st century? You are here as guests of Ireland Yearly Meeting and, for a variety of historical and social reasons, Friends in Ireland reflect the breadth of (theological) diversity that is found amongst Friends across the world. I know that even amongst the small group of Irish Friends here this morning, there is a great range of understanding about who Jesus is and His significance for the world today. How should we interpret the Bible? Was Jesus an inspired Jewish teacher, even a prophet, but only one of the people who have had a special perception of the nature of God? Or is He the only begotten son of God the Father, fully divine, fully human, who died on a cross as an expression of God's profound love for us and our need of restoration to wholeness and who rose again triumphing over death? Personally, I claim Jesus as my Saviour, my Guide, my Enabler; and that is not a creed, it is an experience. There are Irish and other Friends who cannot use such language, perhaps even find it offensive, yet they are very committed to living their lives according to Gospel Order, and their integrity constantly challenges my way of life. Irish Friends have recently had to confront our different interpretations of the Gospel as we updated our Book of Christian Experience, but we have managed, with tears and with struggles, to agree to continue worshipping together and sharing our search for God's will. I hope this Triennial will witness such love and grace also

Early Friends, and those who have followed them, believed that authentic Christian faith has to find expression in action feeding the hungry, freeing the slaves, and seeking reconciliation of conflicts. In

Speaker Biographies

Ken Comfort

Ken Comfort grew up in Bolivia where his parents worked as missionaries to the Aymara people in the highlands of the Andes, the jungle valleys and in the city of La Paz. After returning to the USA, Ken finished high school and then graduated from Oregon Institute of Technology. As a young adult, Ken took a management position at an auto dealership for several years and volunteered his free time to work with youth in Newberg, Oregon, before he heard God's call to go to Peru and work among the people of that country. Ken married Tonya Miller from Lynn, Indiana, and together they worked in Peru for sixteen years. Their duties in Peru included starting Friends churches, leadership training, community development and caring for other social concerns. Ken is presently released to minister full time as the clerk of the pastoral team at Reedwood Friends Church in Portland, Oregon. Ken and Tonya have been married for 23 years and have a 13 year old daughter, Katie.

Doreen Dowd

Doreen Dowd was born in 1941, and brought up in Dublin, Ireland amongst Friends. She qualified in medicine in 1966 and worked in Ireland, Scotland and London. In 1992 she went to Zambia to work in a Salvation Army mission hospital. In 1998 she went to Lesotho, and worked as The Flying Doctor for six years.

She has worshipped with Friends in many countries and attended the World Conference in Kenya in 1991 and in USA in 1967.

Doreen has now retired from medical practice, and is working ten hours per week in the office of the Recording Clerk at Quaker House Dublin.

things, in the path we walk, because, even with its difficulties, in our countries clear signs of the Kingdom of God are sprouting.

To conclude: our Meetings do not establish statutes and disciplines just to rule our internal lives, we also make statements appreciating human values and the community. They are readings that wish to be prophetic about social situations that challenge our Christian consciences. The images are varied - a people of God, a house of God, a body of Christ, the resting place of the Spirit - but they are all references to the presence of God and to the works of the Holy Spirit. In other words, any reference about being a church is necessarily a reference to its birth and life in God, to our identity and vocation in the Holy Spirit, in the permanent search for holiness, that gives testimony to the Holy God who sanctifies and who gives us the vocation of universality, that embraces all creation, and assumes responsibility for all human beings, carrying the message of the love of God in Jesus Christ. After this great event, let's not just keep this in our thoughts, but we need action, we need to commit and to be profoundly spiritual. Let him who has ears, let him hear.

the words of William Penn: 'true Godliness don't turn men out of the world, but enables them to live better in it and excites their endeavours to mend it'. I wonder if doing good works can sometimes become a ploy to occupy our minds and keep us too busy to consider our relationship with God? Is it 'true Godliness' that is enabling us? The best loved chapter in the Bible tells us that: 'if I give all my goods to the poor but have not love ... I gain nothing'. It is not just 'head knowledge' that we need but 'heart knowledge'. It would be well to remember during the coming week that even the gift of prophecy is nothing, it is useless if it does not spring from love. 1 John 4:19 tells us that 'we love because God first loved us'.

What then is our or God's prophetic message of love to the refugee mother watching her child die of hunger or malaria, to the politician promising bread and circuses or cheap oil with a view to re-election, to your workmate who thinks happiness is a new car, to the Friend sitting quietly in the corner of your meeting? You are going to spend the next week seeking to hear more plainly the message that God has for Friends in these days, for our Society and to share with the wider world. While we value our heritage, we should not be burdened by tradition. We cannot relive the experiences of previous generations, but we can learn from them. George Fox was a Seeker, but started finding truth when he heard a voice, which said 'there is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition'.

'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind'. I don't know how many times in my life I have sung that hymn, I have prayed that prayer, but the words are just as important to me today as they were when I first learned them 50 or 60 years ago. Most of us came today or yesterday or the day before, probably in a rush, fussing over airlines and that we haven't got everything ready for those people who are coming; in various different guises we were all uptight. The words of that poem or prayer are just as important now:

*Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease,
take from our souls the strain and stress
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.*

One of the problems for the prophets in the Old Testament was: how do you tell a true prophet from a false prophet? There were so many prophets. Some of them were professional prophets. Even with Jeremiah, there was a great argument after the city of Jerusalem had fallen and Jeremiah told the people that it had fallen because they didn't worship God, and the people said all these troubles came upon us because we stopped worshipping the queen of heaven. How do we tell the true from the false? It is our problem too. There is such a clamour of voices - journalists, politicians, religious leaders. The New Testament says: 'test the spirit'. We have to be able to test to hear what is true. Love is one of those tests. One test I have been thinking of is humility. The true prophets weren't saying 'look at me, look at me, listen to what I am saying'. They were saying: 'listen to God, listen to the voice of God in your own heart, see what is being said to you.' Another test, I think, is persistence and patience. If you look at the people who worked for the abolition of the North Atlantic slave trade, they worked for years and years and years doing the work, believing, hoping, converting people until finally it happened. I think another test is whether people live it themselves. If you look at John Woolman, he lived what he was teaching. Fox said: 'let your lives preach'.

If we are to be a prophetic people we have to be the message we are preaching.

means incorporating this reflection in the questions and the experiences and in the searches on these new subjects and scenarios.

It means starting from the point of where people are, with real concerns and uncertainties in a world that is increasingly less meaningful for them. Our elders don't want to dream anymore or envision the future because it seems that the common denominator is productivity, and for agile leadership in the work of God they are not qualified anymore. For this desire for immediate results is what seems to be what counts. It is very troublesome to see in the congregations that they don't give an opportunity for ministry to children, to boys and girls, to youth, to people who are handicapped or different or to women or those who don't have the theological preparation or to elderly men or women. In this way they are excluded just as they are excluded from the homes that they are fleeing from in search of the warm embrace of our congregations. But in the face of this reality, God presents himself with His love and this is a recurring theme in our sermons and in our daily devotions. The care that God has for His sons and daughters is manifest in them as a constant reason for praise and recognition. Our congregations are not sure of this reality of suffering and they ask themselves about the pain that accompanies their lives. Some needy souls look among the offerings in the religious marketplace for things that are convenient to them, such as salves, songs, liturgies, balms, sanctified earth, recorded sermons, all to help with the suffering and the pain.

What are Friends doing? We need to return to talk about mercy and love, not through inactive lives, but through our daily lives we need to witness to a daily life that is prophetic, that is revitalising. We must be prophets who denounce sin and announce love, but to do this requires great reflection on what that means. I give thanks that God has allowed this meeting the sufficient time to search for what is love and to frame our aspirations towards receiving spiritual gifts to announce the Good News of salvation. This Spirit of God urges us to be creative just as the flowers in some of our fields bloom after ten years of drought. That challenges us. A different view of reality can be seen in the daily

of worship and of surrender to human life. Let us not keep the Lamb of God waiting. Let us open the door of our hearts and hearts of our churches so that the Son of God can come into dine with us. Let us enjoy the most delicious experience on the face of the earth: intimacy with God! A church that keeps its purpose of living a spiritually fervent and committed life does not sicken its Lord and Saviour. It blesses the life of its members and is seen as a challenge to the visitor.

Our churches in Latin America are present in all the levels of society, in the depths of the mountains and the jungles, in the country and in the cities. Everywhere there are communities, people of God, the houses of the Holy Spirit, centres of affirmation and the gifts that God has distributed as a blessing to all and they are called to be places of comfort and reciprocal help. The fact that the church is present in all of these places is a great blessing, but it also is a great responsibility. It is a blessing that puts us in touch with all sectors of society and in particular with the most poor and with the neediest. That is why we are called together as places of welcome, of support, of comfort, of hope and of sustaining people.

How many solitary people there are in the big cities; how many millions of people have left their homes in search of a better life in these cities? But sometimes they only find disappointment and loneliness. That is why we are there as faith communities, as communities of love to offer help to the lonely one, to listen and to share the experience of the blessed love of God. That is in the same way our continent is full of violence, starting in the bosom of the family and we must be of comfort to the ones that suffer. We need to speak to the tragedies that affect the health of the community - AIDS, drug addiction, things that isolate and discriminate and separate us.

As we reflect on the work of God in our daily lives, we must pay attention to what this reality means in our countries. Marked by constant news that warns us about ecological damage, it is evident that the deterioration of life is not only in the larger economic arenas, but also in the personal arena. Listening attentively to our daily lives

Marion McNaughton, Britain Yearly Meeting, gave an address 'Orientation to Prophecy' to the Triennial on Sunday 12th August 2007 as follows:

Doreen's ministry to us this morning in our morning worship touched on many of the things that I have been thinking and praying about in the last few months as I prepared what I wanted to say to you today. When she sent me her text, I realised that she and I had been drawn to speak along very similar lines which of course is not surprising, but is always wonderful when it happens. So I invite you to stay in the place that she brought us to so we may explore it more deeply.

I believe that we are part of a very long tradition of being a people of God. It has its roots in the Jewish tradition. Jesus, who was a Jew, carried many of the elements of his tradition into the new Christian world and we as Quakers carry all this forward in a very special way today. To understand prophecy we must understand where we come from.

Many people have helped me understand this over the last year and I would like to thank them. Rabbi Margaret Jacobi of the Birmingham Progressive Synagogue for her knowledge of the Hebrew prophets; Rabbi James Baaden for his understanding of the ending of Jewish prophecy; Timothy Peat Ashworth of Woodbrooke for his insights into the early Christian communities; and my colleagues on Britain Yearly Meeting Testimonies Committee who, more than anyone else, have taught me what it is to live faithful prophetic lives.

I would like to begin with the elements that are there in what we are naming as prophecy:

- In both Jewish and Christian theology prophecy is understood as a spontaneous human response to a transforming encounter with God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

- The response can take the form of words, signs, actions or a way of life.
- It can be exercised by men, women, children, individuals or groups. It is a gift from God, it speaks God's truth.
- It is rooted in known values, the religious values of its community.
- It pinpoints the behaviours, attitudes and events that reveal where a people, or a ruler, are being faithful and where they have gone astray. It affirms and it criticises.
- It warns of the consequences of continuing on the wrong path, it foretells disasters. So the prophet both belongs and challenges.

Our task this week is going to be to find the prophetic voice for our time. So I would like to look briefly at the prophetic tradition we stand in and what riches and contradictions it brings with it.

I shall begin with the Hebrew tradition, because this is where it began for us, and this was the tradition that Jesus inherited. Then I shall look at how prophecy died away in the Jewish tradition, but came alive in the ministry of Jesus and then again in the early Christian communities. And then see how we as Quakers practise and affirm prophecy and what our prophetic calling might be as a people of God.

I will also be asking, because this is important to me in my own life, why prophecy has so often failed or proved to be ineffective. We know that prophets encounter resistance and apathy. The prophet Ezekiel was told by God:

I send you to them and you shall say to them: 'Thus says the Lord God'. And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious breed) they shall know that there has been a prophet among them.

People do know when there has been a prophet among them, but that does not mean they do what the prophet tells them. The prophet Jeremiah, one of the great Hebrew prophets, complained:

one day will go out of style - they become obsolete, worn out, 'but love abides'.

The first purpose of the church is to love God with all our hearts: 'the church exists to worship God'. Jesus invites us into a relationship of intimacy. Even when the church is in a cold deplorable state, Jesus stands at the door at the heart of each individual seeking to enter into Him. The image of Jesus at the door of our hearts, of our lives, awaiting the moment when we leave our isolation and indifference to dine with Him clearly illustrates the type of relationship that God wants with His church, an intimate relationship. One of the ways of achieving that is, precisely, through worship and that demands exclusivity.

These days there are many idols; many are devoted to money, to excessive worry, to selfishness or to things that should only be secondary to the reality of the sacred, but which end up being recognised as gods.

We know that worship is not confined to one location. But there is only one path for worship. Jesus, who worshipped the Father in spirit and in truth, there is only one path for worship - the path that Jesus walked. It was difficult because his path involved the Cross and involved the defence of those who suffered. Worship is a style of life. The Spirit is accompanied by loyalty, by truth. The Son died and He gave Him to humanity for love, for loyalty to life. The Father is interested in those people who worship Him with the same faithfulness towards human life that He had and that the Son of God has. God is Spirit, He is dynamism, He is love, He is surrender. He wants worshippers who worship Him in this way.

Today many people call themselves worshippers of God. They are people who are capable of raising their hands to the heavens, but not to their neighbour as a gesture of love. The experience of love is an experience with God and it should produce in each one of us the ability to love generously in the same way that each of us is loved. We must learn to love as God loved! We must learn to make our lives away

must intertwine in a way that they complement each other or we will never enjoy genuine spirituality in our churches. The healthy alternative is found in the word 'wholeness'.

When we do things - either inside or outside of the church - based on love, it is because we have grown in the Spirit to the point that Jesus continues to be our first love. When we do things just to be doing them, to support the institution or the denomination, or when we are seduced by numerical growth in the church or fame or the status to be gained in the city, or for other reasons of this nature, our motives are impure or misguided. The church is born, grows and develops, and runs the risk of doing things for their own sake, day after day, Sunday after Sunday; worship becomes just more worship service; the preaching is merely one more sermon that may or may not please people. I think that this process is similar to what we experience when we first come to know the Light. We encounter Jesus, and we are filled with new perspectives that lead us to a life filled with passion for the Master. Over time, we can grow cold, lose our motivation and no longer do the things that we were doing at the beginning of our walk with the Lord. It may be that things are becoming routine because we have gone cold and our own actions are just routine. In part, this explains the disillusionment many people feel towards institutions and churches which are more concerned with maintaining what they have already gained rather than stretching themselves to gain something new. Repentance in this case means returning to the acts of love that were present when it all again. The Apostle Paul urges us to this repentance, through I Corinthians 13: 1-8 which we read earlier.

As Quakers, we are living in a time when this exhortation is very relevant for us. I don't mean to speak of any country in particular, but I can't forget about the things that are happening in my own country. Marketing, turning sermons into theatrical presentations, competition between churches, manipulation of the masses of people, turning faith into a spectacle - all these tends to undermine Christian love, motives and ethics. As a result, the means of success for these churches will turn into the reasons for their failure eventually since all these things

for 23 years... the word of the Lord has come to me and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened..

I shall come back to Jeremiah. We need to ask: Why? Why did they not listen? Why do they not listen today? because we need to know the answers to this.

In choosing to use the word prophecy today we are acknowledging that we are part of a continuing sacred tradition. In the Hebrew Bible, what we call the Old Testament, prophecy comes through the great figures of the prophets. The prophet in Hebrew is referred to as *ish ha ruach* which means 'a person filled with the spirit of God'. The prophets are giants in the landscape of the Hebrew scriptures, a series of extraordinary inspired men and women. Doreen has already reminded us that there were women as well as men, though mostly the women's words have not been preserved and, apart from one or two like Huldah and Miriam, we do not even know their names.

In the Hebrew tradition, the prophet is someone who is chosen by God. Their task is to stand in the presence of God, hear God's pain and love for the world and transmit it to God's people. The prophet does not decide to be a prophet. He or she is called and responds to God's call often hesitantly or even unwillingly. The prophet is then filled with God's spirit, *ish haruach*, and then speaks in God's voice. God told Ezekiel:

I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth so that you shall be speechless... But when I speak with you I will open your mouth and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God'..

And Jeremiah cried out: "There is in my heart as it were a burning fire... and I am weary with holding it in and I cannot."

So the prophet utters God's words because he can do no other. But who must he speak them to? This is the crucial element, the absolute

essence of Hebrew prophecy. He must prophesy both to his own community and to those in power. This triangular relationship with God, the prophet, the people and the kings is at the heart of what the Hebrew prophet is about - strengthening his community and speaking truth to the power of the kings. This is a courageous and a daunting role to play.

He names where the people and the ruler are being faithful and where they have gone astray, he affirms them, but he criticises. He calls repeatedly for *teshuvah*, returning to God. He warns of the consequences of continuing on the wrong path, he both belongs and he challenges. The prophet is of the people, speaking the words of God from among the people both to the people and to the king. He recalls the people and their rulers to what is at the heart of their beliefs: "This is who we are. What does the Lord require of us?"

This role of standing both within and apart from the tradition, of belonging and constantly challenging, makes a prophet a strange and isolated person. Abraham Heschel who was a great Jewish philosopher, mystic, and activist of the 20th century has described it in this way:

'the prophet is a lonely figure, his standards are too high, his stature too great and his concern too intense for other men to share. Living on the highest peak, he has no company except God.'

Now, this is worrying if what we are looking for is a model of prophecy that is both inspired and effective, that reaches those it intends to change. Because what we often find in the Hebrew model with a few exceptions, is almost a built-in distancing. As Heschel has described it: God on the highest peak with the prophet, and the people and the king a long way off.

In Deuteronomy we read that after God had spoken out of the fire and given Moses the Ten Commandments, the elders and heads of the tribe, shaken by what they had overheard of the encounter, said to Moses:

level from which Jesus came. He began His ministry in Galilee, His fame spread throughout Galilee. He cast out demons and preached, He promised His disciples before his crucifixion that He would also appear there. In the process of warming up our spiritual lives, we pass through the life and example of our Master. If we don't rid ourselves of our obsession with material wealth, we will never have time to dedicate ourselves to building a healthy spirit. Dedication to our neighbour, especially to those afflicted, is absolutely necessary.

But there are signs that could help us avoid being deceived: what are those signs? They are the signs of love, of service, of sacrifice, of respect for the opinions of others in many cases, those of the truth. Christ is wherever we can see the signs - the marks of the nails. From Jesus we receive advice to be more merciful; however bad a community may be, there is still light in it, not through its own merits but because of Jesus' mercy. He is always ready to correct, to forgive and to welcome. The church is a project that was created in the heart of God. Jesus corrects us when we tread the path of a cold uncompromising spirituality.

Let's look at our third point - the lack of commitment of the churches of today.

People experience their spirituality at one extreme or the other. Some are interested in praying, fasting, living deeply mystical experiences with the spirit of God even though this may not result in loving service in solidarity with our neighbours. It is inconsistent to seek the power of the Holy Spirit unless this goes hand in hand with commitment to nature and to our fellow humans. We must complement it and guide it towards the help of the planet Earth. The problem is not one of seeking the gift of speaking in tongues, which is perhaps one of the most mystical experiences of Christianity; rather, it is in the separation of this search from commitment to the transformation in the society in which we live. On the other side are those who completely leave out such experiences and only concentrate on social action. The mystical life, without a loving commitment to nature and to the human race, is pure vanity. Social action without the warmth of the Holy Spirit of God in our hearts leads to nothing. Either the two experiences

Dear Lord, we come weighed down with our tiredness and our worries, but also with our joys today. Now we want to listen to Your voice and may Your word be life for our lives. Please show Yourself to us today. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

We are always looking for things in life - company, work, health, food. It is as if everything was going to run out all at once, and we do it for ourselves many times. In our churches, we don't keep good order and sometimes we don't even know what we are looking for. What's even worse, we don't know or sometimes are even indifferent to what others come seeking, thinking that our extraordinary actions imply holiness.

So the first point that we want to think about today is that Jesus knows when we are spiritually indifferent persons. I believe that there is no small number of people in our countries who think that not doing anything bad is enough to satisfy God. Jesus urges the church to abandon our tendency to spiritual omission. God knows when our offerings are motivated by selfish interests, when we sit in a particular bench or pew in the church in order to be noticed or when we raise our hands in a mechanical way, when we read the Bible just in order to fulfill our daily obligations or when we pray beautifully, but with no passion, when we look at the poor with disdain and at the rich with interest. God knows all things and wants to cure us of indifference! God affirms that He does not look indifferently on our spiritual coldness, and tells us that His heart is sad because we do not live in the wholeness that existed in the beginning of time. Often we feel proud of having obtained wealth through our own efforts. This is when Jesus also knows that we are people who are spiritually arrogant. A church that prospers materially outwardly can easily fall into the trap of thinking that outward prosperity is the measure of its spiritual prosperity. We humans build our identities based on models.

In John 14:12, the evangelist tells we are capable of performing the same work that Jesus did. Mark reveals that Jesus came from a humble background. Some passages in the Gospels tell us about the social

If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer we shall die. For what mortal ever heard the voice of the living God speak out of the fire as we did and lived? You go closer, [this is to Moses] you go closer and hear all that the Lord our God says, and then you tell us everything that the Lord our God tells you and we will listen and do it.
(Deuteronomy 5:25-27)

You can almost hear them shrinking back. The people felt that having heard God speak once they had gone to the limits of what they could endure. To hear God's voice directly exposed them to the heart of the divine fire and they wanted to withdraw to a safe distance, to have God's word in future mediated to them through someone else. This is familiar to us today, but there is a built-in difficulty for the prophet. The purpose is to connect, to transmit. If the people are reluctant to come close to God's presence, how can the prophet reproduce God's fire for them? And if people miss the fire do they also miss the force of the message?

This is the paradox of biblical prophecy. It is a challenge from God to do God's work in the world. It takes over the prophet's whole life and it may fail. We inherit a legacy of inspiration, courage, and spiritual power, but also a role model with built-in limitations. Sometimes the prophets influenced those in power as Nathan the prophet did with King David. At other times they were ignored. Living on the highest peak with no company except God, they sometimes failed to transmit their message. We, too, in our own times can be faithful for long periods without apparently succeeding in conveying God's word. We know the heartbreak of this. And we can be successful, and we know that joy.

We need to reflect this week on why this happens, what we can learn from it and what if anything we are doing about it.

But after generations of Hebrew prophets, we have a mystery: The line of prophets suddenly came to an end in the late 6th century BCE after the Jews who returned from captivity in Babylon had rebuilt the temple. No new prophets emerged. No one understood why. The power of the Holy Spirit that enabled the prophets to speak the word of God seemed not to be active amongst them. The rabbis eventually told the people, ‘Since the death of the prophets Haggai, Zachariah, and Malachi the Holy Spirit departed from Israel.’

The Holy Spirit departed from Israel. The effect of this on the continuing Jewish tradition has been profound. Prophecy now belonged to the past, what needed to be revealed had been revealed. New self-proclaimed prophets were regarded with suspicion. This is something that Jews still believe today, though they have no single explanation for why it should be said. They give many reasons. They will tell you, as my Jewish friends and teachers tell me, ‘Prophecy ended when the Holy Spirit departed from Israel.’

So today the Jewish community turns to the Bible and their holy texts for inspiration, to be studied and prayed with and explored, but they do not expect contemporary human prophecy. As a Quaker I feel some sadness at this and some bewilderment and I asked one of the rabbis: ‘But why? Why after all those years did God suddenly stop trying to communicate with God’s people? Why did the Holy Spirit abandon them?’ The rabbi smiled at this impertinent Quaker and said: ‘That’s a very good question, Marion, and we don’t know the answer’.

We don’t know the answer either and I would reject the Christian belief that God switched God’s favour from one chosen people to another. I think it is a desolate and a courageous place for a people of God to stand in because it means they are listening only for God’s voice. And it raises for us the ongoing question of the truth of scriptural revelation and the truth of contemporary revelation, because as Quakers we want to have both and we need to ask where do we feel the Holy Spirit at work?

María Yi Reyna, Cuba Yearly Meeting, addressed the Triennial during worship on Saturday 18th August 2007 as follows:

‘Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor and though I give my body to be burned and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffers long and is kind. Charity envieth not, charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, does not think evil. Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth, but whether there be prophecies they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease, whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.’

1 Corinthians 13: 1 - 8

Let us sing the hymn ‘Alleluia’.

I have been singing for a long time, but not speaking! So I want to say good morning, Friends. I want to thank God, I want to thank the World Committee and I want to thank my Yearly Meeting, which I represent, that I am here. My passport had been sent, was sent back, and finally the word arrived that I could come. Now it is almost time to say good-bye, but we continue seeking: ‘follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts especially the gift of prophecy.’ I invite you to pray.

spiritual gifts to work and act in unity? Are we a proclamational people? We do not exist as a Society for ourselves alone, but for the blessing of the world. Our task is to hear Christ, our present teacher. We are called to proclaim His truths as we work for His peace, for the restoration of all things. We are a consecrated people, spread throughout the world to scatter the seeds of the Gospel, and to water, to cultivate and to harvest as the Lord wills.

In his last prayer for his disciples, Jesus prayed that we here would be unified. He prayed that other people would come to know him and come into relationship with God because of what he gave to them. This is the proclamation that we have been given. For this we have been called to become prophets.

So into this extraordinary absence of Jewish prophecy came Jesus. Would we want to name Jesus as a prophet? Most Christian commentators now say, yes, this would be how Jesus would understand himself and how he was seen by his Jewish followers during his lifetime - as a prophet in the Hebrew tradition, mediating God's word to God's people and to the authorities. Christians of course would want to add that Jesus was much more, that he was divine, that he was the redeemer, but at the time the role he played was in line with the Jewish prophetic tradition. The people felt his authority. As we have seen, people know when there has been a prophet among them. The people heard the true voice of God through Jesus and acknowledged him as a prophet.

His role may have been familiar, but his teaching was new. The Sermon on the Mount offers us a radical and empowering way to realise the kingdom of heaven. It begins with a blessing and it ends with a call to action. So the way was opened for something to come into being which moved on from the old prophetic tradition and challenged the idea that after hundreds of years the Holy Spirit was no longer active and alive.

Beginning with the extraordinary events of Pentecost, the followers of Jesus began to experience the Holy Spirit for themselves in a transforming and empowering way. Not just a few lone individuals but as a gathered group. The spirit flowed among them. It is difficult to overestimate the wonder and significance of this.

They understood this spirit to come from God, it empowered them to teach and expand their beliefs. Prophecy was alive among them again, but the single prophet had become the prophetic community. Paul told the Corinthians:

Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts and especially that you may prophesy... those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation... those who prophesy build up the church. I would like all of you to prophesy.. (I Corinthians 14:1-5)

This is an extraordinary development. Paul's phrase - 'I would like all of you to prophesy' - takes us into a new way of being a community of prophecy. Instead of being the fearful community of Moses, standing a long way off, unwilling and unable to hear the word of God directly, dependent on their prophet to mediate God to them, we have an empowered prophetic community, sharing the gift, able to hear and respond to the Holy Spirit directly.

But is this the same kind of prophecy that we find in the Hebrew scriptures? Are we right to use the same word for it? It has many of the traditional characteristics. It is inspired by the Spirit, it empowers and builds the community, it challenges, it recalls us to God. But it is no longer dependent on lone voices to lead and expound, it is instead collective and egalitarian. This understanding of prophecy is what Christians developed, what the Jewish tradition stands apart from, and what early Quakers rediscovered 350 years ago as they felt the Spirit moving among them.

So, as Quakers today, we have inherited a long prophetic tradition of richness and complexity and it is all ours to use. Today in the Quaker family we interpret prophecy in different ways. Yet I believe there is an underlying unity in our practice and if we understand our tradition as a whole we can make this diversity a gift and not a stumbling block. Here are some of the key elements:

- Quaker prophecy is the experience of the Word of God alive among us, directly felt and recognised. It can come out of silence, speech, scripture or song, however we worship, however we minister.
- There is always a message of some kind: enlightening, clarifying, and demanding.
- The message is intended for us and for others. Who they are may be familiar- those in our meetings, or still unknown- those we must reach out to. These are the tasks of teaching and of mission.
- There can be both individual Quaker prophets and also prophetic Quaker communities, both have their strengths and their limitations.

truth through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thousands were put in prison, but thousands more responded to the brave witness to the unity of the faith. The message prevailed and we are here because of it. George Fox called Friends to answer that of God in everyone. We believe that God's Light is available to all people and any person can respond to that Light. The Light shines inwardly to awaken the seed that is found in every person. In the Light the seed of the Word germinates, setting down its roots. It grows to maturity, producing identifiable fruit of the Spirit. Without the light of Christ shining into the life of an individual, the seed lays dormant.

Early Friends knew that they had been empowered through whatever gift the Spirit had given them to communicate the love of God for a world desperate and needing hope. These dedicated men and women spoke and lived in holy expectation of what God could do and how God would bless their events - people down through history (and you know the heroes that we have talked about so much): William Penn in his treatment of the native Americans, John Woolman and Anthony Benezet's concern for slaves and their education, Mary Fisher's concern for the Turkish sultan, Steven Grellet's ministry to the Czar and even to the Pope, Elizabeth Fry's concern for the prisoners of Newgate Prison,. Literally millions of people have been impacted by the testimony of Friends. Governments have been called to account. People have been restored and lives have been changed because of the light of Christ that has penetrated the darkness.

Can we learn from the past? This is not a calling for a few, but for all. What is the Spirit saying to us today? Our present calling is a continuation of what our predecessors heard the Spirit say as they moved to transform their world. We also have to be in tune with what the Spirit continues to speak today. Ours is not a religion of the history book so much as a life of faith and love for God that is lived out in the world today. We do believe that the Spirit who spoke for the last few centuries continues to speak today. Healing of nations continues to happen, God's spirit continues to move. Do we love? Do we love one another in the things that are eternal? Do we love each other in the things that are temporal? Do we use our God-given abilities or our

needs? Are we questioning why our collective witness can proclaim God's love to those around the world? We must remember that we have been given a mandate to love and to serve in order to transform the world.

Words alone are not sufficient. How the gospel is lived out in our neighborhood, in our city, in our countryside is as important as what we say. We live as models of peace, restoration, unity, and love. We are a connectional people on a mission together. Love for God and love for others seeks to put the well being of our neighbours over our own. We are witnesses of integrity, morality and good character, compassion and we seek 'the least of these to lift them up'. We are a people where men, women and children gather to grow in authentic worship and transforming discipleship. So we ask the question: what is God wanting us to do and to say to continue the ministry of Christ within our present community and in our global context?

In a time when persecution could have erased the powerful message of Friends through the imprisonment and threats on the lives of the faithful, George Fox called Friends to unity for the Gospel's sake. From a cold prison tower, soaked to the skin in the middle of winter, Fox wrote his own rendition of Jesus' words to go into all the world and preach the gospel. Cold and wet, he knew that his human life could easily come to an end, but he also knew that God's message was more powerful that could be contained in a prison cell. Fox wrote in 1656:

*let all nations bear the Word, by sound or writing.
Spare no place, spare not tongue or pen, but be obedient
to the Lord God, be valiant for the truth upon the
earth; be patterns, be examples in all countries, places,
islands, nations, wherever you go; that your carriage
and your life may preach among all sorts of people and
to them, then you will come to walk cheerfully over the
world, answering that of God in everyone.*

How is that for a last will and testament! It didn't turn out that way. Soon there were thousands who were speaking boldly about Christ's

- George Fox never felt he needed to verify his leadings, but he noted that whenever he consulted scripture he found them confirmed. After the fall of James Naylor, Friends came to understand that prophecy must be tested and we still do this today. Some of us choose to confirm leadings by reference to scripture, others by reference to the collective discernment of the gathered meeting, but the leading from God is always primary for all of us.
- Quaker prophecy today, as in the Hebrew tradition, has the same dual purpose, the same triangular relationship with God - to enlighten, nurture, and extend the spiritual community and also to speak truth to those in power, to take prophetic action, to press for change in the world. We can do both. We must do both, both are holy. Abraham Heschel, a Jew, marched from Selma to Montgomery with Martin Luther King in 1965. It was a bloody, confrontational event, but it was for him a deeply spiritual occasion. When he returned, he told his daughter: 'I felt as if my legs were praying.'

There is a whole spectrum of prophetic possibility open to us as Quakers calling for our attention. Do we practise it all, or do we settle for just a part, just one place on the spectrum? I see our diversity as an uncomfortable challenge that we hold out to each other for all of us to be more than we are being at present. Some of us concentrate on silent waiting, some on proclamation, some on mission, some on social action. All of these things are part of the prophetic tradition and maybe none of us fulfils them all. So we serve as uncomfortable reminders and loving prompts to each other - 'Friend, is there something you are neglecting?'

So what kind of Quaker prophetic voice is needed today? What will enable people to hear the voice of God, what will bring the changes we long to hear? Let us go back to Jeremiah for a moment, prophesying for 23 years without anyone listening to him. His name has been immortalised for this. The dictionary says:

a Jeremiah: someone who is pessimistic about the present and who foresees a calamitous future; a person given to woeful lamentation and complaining.

I don't know about you, but I find it incredibly hard to listen to someone filled with woeful lamentation for 23 minutes, let alone 23 years. The Hebrew prophets were always ready to blame the people for refusing to hear the word of God. But I have to wonder, was it something to do with the way the word of God was being preached? Did the prophets fall into the trap of expressing their own frustration and anger? Did their own despairing voices sometimes speak louder than God's?

I was recently at a conference when a Friend who was deeply concerned about a matter of great spiritual importance stood up and lectured us all for a long time about how urgent this was, how we must all stop what we were doing and turn our energies to this one problem. We listened with sinking hearts. When he finished and sat down the person next to me leaned across and whispered: 'this nagging has to stop'. I am sure there is a word in everyone's language for nagging. It is persistent, useless scolding and we all do it.

How can we help each other from falling into this trap? Let us think for a moment of the self-appointed prophets that we all know, that we all turn away from. They are well intentioned, but they drown us in their urgency and their fear. They make us feel guilty and inadequate, they blame us, they depress and immobilise us. They are doing their best, but they are having no effect. This nagging has to stop.

If we want to bring the kingdom of heaven, we must have insight, skills, compassion, abounding love, and methods that work. We must be people who fill other people with hope, not despair. It is no good being right for 23 years if no one is listening to us.

Effective prophecy energises and encourages, it acknowledges people's failures and inadequacies but it doesn't blame, it comforts and consoles. It believes in people. It is an invitation to return to God. And because it is deeply rooted in God it can bring others to God's presence. Open Isaiah at chapter 40 and hear the unknown prophet we call the Second

Our role is to corporately wait on God and listen to the Spirit. Once we have heard the Spirit speak, we cannot stay quiet any longer. What the Spirit says must become action. Rather than focus on our peculiarities or our differences, we are called as individuals and as a collective people to be a living witness of the love of God. We are called to be expectant of a new ordering of creation values that are not based on pride, ego, fear or greed but on unity within the kingdom of God. All people are to be seen in their true potential to live in harmony with their creator. This is the vision of Isaiah when he declared the lion and the lamb lay down together. The peaceable kingdom is possible because we live in harmony with God's unifying spirit and we don't react against it. We are called to be co-labourers of Christ to minister in situations where healing brings wholeness and restoration where critical attitudes and destructive ways of living are left behind. We are called to speak God's love into unjust situations so that the power of Christ can make all things new. Our collective witness communicates the goal of equality of all through compassion and grace. This is the goal of love. People want to become participants of communities like this. The proclamation of Christ's gospel is to invite people to become a part of God's new community and to live in relationship with the Spirit, not against it.

The way of Jesus radically transforms our existence to be one wholly focused on sacrificially living for Him and for others. This is truly in the nature of being a friend of Jesus and a friend of humanity. We are to take up our own cross in the ministry of uniting people to God so that they can also live in the power of His resurrection. Jesus told us to go into all the world to be His ambassadors. The power of our worship is so that we can respond to the needs of the world in power and in truth. Our worship does not end at the rise of the Meeting. All week long, we are to be in service to the Lord. Have we let our proclamation go quiet? Are we known more for our silence, the silence of our Meetings than for the power of truth that we stand for? Are we more interested in protecting our identity as a Society than in going to communicate Christ's love for all humanity by meeting people's

gifts are meant to be utilised for the building up of the body. Some of us have gifts that help people with spiritual needs, some have gifts to live bold lives meeting physical needs, others are better equipped to explain faith issues. Everyone must desire unity of purpose so that Christ's message will be expressed in all of its fullness to all people. Together we reach out to those around us in a spirit of love, actively letting our lives speak of the hope that is in us.

The gathering of the faithful is to be a continuation of Christ's blessing to the world. We are called to live a life that brings the creation back into God's intended order that a life that speaks truth without fear, a life that proclaims the work of Christ for salvation in an ongoing relationship with God and with all of humanity. We understand that the spirit of God is already present and at work in the culture where we live. We are called to partner and to bring witness to the Spirit's moving. We are to be bold about what God wants to do to bring wholeness in people's lives. Christ did this for us when he became human in order to show us the love of God. The Spirit comes with power to mend the fallen creation and to make all things new. The Spirit is present so that the world might be touched by God's divine grace, the body of Christ made up of all of its parts is placed as the witness and conduit of God's blessing in the world. We can't help but declare God's mighty deeds through words and actions as we live out the values of the Kingdom every day through the diversity of ways that the Spirit has gifted us.

Proclamation rises out of our encounter with God. Proclaiming God's message is the natural and spontaneous result of being blessed with God's spirit. God speaks with those who are listening to His truth. Jesus said: 'it is not you who speak, but the spirit of your Heavenly Father speaking through you'.(Matthew 10:20). God gives the word needed for any given moment. They are words that speak to the heart. Prophetic words are inspired words designed to build up, to encourage and to console those who hear. They can also be words that challenge, correct, and question motives.

Isaiah pour out love and consolation: 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.' This is a prophetic voice that we can respond it to, it lifts our hearts and renews our strength, we can, as the Second Isaiah says, can 'mount up with wings like eagles.'

So what do we need in prophecy that will enable people to hear the voice of God? It is very simple: Jean Leclercq, a Benedictine, has said:

We must love the age we live in. From the point of view of faith the best age for each of us is the one God has placed us in, the one He has given us which we must give back to Him.

We must love the age we live in. Sometimes this is very hard to do, but it is our task:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

(1 Corinthians, 13:1-3)

Effective prophets work from a place of love. They nurture us, they inspire us to engage with our faith in deeper and deeper ways. We lead committed lives, which return us always to our spiritual core. It is circular. Our outward lives are shaped from within, our actions in the world bring us closer to God and we live God's truth in the world.

Because, whatever form it takes, prophecy is essentially mystical. God breaks through. The world is imperfect. Duduzile Mtshazo has described it in our programme as 'a broken and still breaking world'. But it is wholly of God, wholly divine. The prophets are those that enable us to see that God is always available to us, the kingdom is always about us. Rosa Parks, one of my inspirations, one of the enablers

of the American Civil Rights Movement, sat down in the middle of a bus and enacted the kingdom of heaven, a world of justice and equality. And God's voice was heard. One of the people sitting at the back, unable to move, said later: 'it was holy in that bus.' When we can prophesy with this kind of love, this kind of clarity, this kind of holiness, God's voice will be heard.

We have come a long way as a people of God, we have grown and changed, we have found new ways and held on to old ways. We are still gathered, still waiting to hear God's voice, waiting for prophecy to flourish amongst us. We will hear God's voice again and again this week saying familiar and comforting things, saying challenging and uncomfortable things. In love. Let us listen with open hearts.

There is a Hebrew blessing for absolutely everything, and there is a special blessing for a moment like this, and I would like to end with it. It acknowledges that we have come on a long journey to arrive where we are today, we have been held safe, like a child in the womb, nurtured and fed, and now delivered safely into this moment to do what we are called to do next. I will say it in Hebrew and then in English.

*Baruch atah, adonai elohainu, melech ha'olam,
shebechianu, v'kimanu, v'higianu, lazman hazeh.*

*Blessed are you Lord our God creator of the universe
who has kept us alive, sustained us and brought us
forth to this moment.*

witnessed to authorities of many nations with the goal of communicating God's will for those countries. The powerful witness of early Friends to the power of God humbly brought people to their knees. Lives changed and history changed because of the unity of purpose through Christ that compelled early Friends to love and care for all people.

Christ said that 'He could do nothing outside the will of His Father'. Christ showed this love and unity with the will of God in all He did. We too can walk and live this way, we do not walk in the light for our own benefit, but to become disciples of Christ, to witness to the world about the true Kingdom of God. We have been brought into life with Christ in order to love in ways that contrast with the world's ways. We can live, work, exist and minister together because we love Christ. Just as all cells and organs work together to maintain life in a body, God made it possible through the life and death of Christ to transform us into cells and organs of His new body. We work together with all of our gifts and abilities to give witness to God's redeeming love. No-one is any more important than anyone else but divine love moves us to build each other up and to persevere in a task that we have been given.

God did not bless us with spiritual gifts for our own benefit. The purpose of the Spirit's blessing was, and is, to empower individuals to work collectively as witnesses of the Kingdom. God wants us to care for all individuals and to bring people into faith in Him, to live in His ways, to be holy. This is the covenant that God intends to have with His creation. It is through the gifting of the Holy Spirit that the body of believers is enabled to minister in the power of God. Early Friends realised this from the beginning. We continue to realise today that the goal of love and proclaiming God's message was and is to transform the world. Jesus said: 'see, I am making all things new'. God touches the world when the faithful speak truth. When they proclaim good news, when we identify with pain, when we build community, when we share resources, when we grant forgiveness, when we give mercy, when we care for the less fortunate just as Jesus would do. The goal is ministry in Jesus' name through the power of His love. The spiritual

Everyone needs each other and is dependent on each other no matter what their rank or their status. So Paul writes: ‘it is love that we should strive for’. Love is not a natural response of the human heart; face it, the problems in this world are caused by a lack of love for each other. The gospel writers tell us that true love comes from God and we respond to that love. God’s love transforms our natural self and makes us into a whole new person. Love for our neighbour and love for each other is a Spirit event. Because of the transformational love of God in work in us, we work for God’s glory not our own. We work and speak for peace, for human rights, for equality of all people, for care of the earth and for care of each other.

The central theme of all these issues is the love of God that flows through those who make their lives available to God’s transforming power and his love. We have seen in Portland, Oregon among children - and I am sure you have seen it in the places you live - that prejudice is a learned response, children aren’t born prejudiced. In their early years they learn the attitudes from older people. It takes Divine love to transform hate into the opposite emotion. War and violence are a natural response to settle disputes.

The way of love transforms all natural humanistic reactions into supernatural responses of seeking peace, forgiveness and blessing. Love speaks of God’s intentions for the world, love seeks what is best for all people, not just a select few. Speaking out about the values of God’s kingdom brings about a change so that God’s justice and mercy can prevail in society. Loving all people as God loves is the ultimate aim. God so loves the world that He sent his Son to show us that love, to bring us into relationship with Him so that He can all model this love to each other. Our unity is founded in the love of Christ that flows among us. Early Friends could not hold back from loving all people because of the transformation that comes through Christ. Love sent people across the ocean into unknown places to bring Christ’s light and love into a world filled with darkness and hate. Our forbearers sold themselves into slavery to free slaves. They traded places with each other in prison to care for ailing members, they visited and

Bill Medlin, Indiana Yearly Meeting addressed the Triennial during worship on Monday, 13th August 2007 as follows:

Good morning, Friends.

A prophetic word is not an isolated thing. It never begins with a prophet, but always with the living God. After all, a prophet is just one who is called by God and directed by God to deliver a message from God. That message might be to an individual, to a church or gathering for worship such as we have today, or to some other group. It might be to a community or a people, to a nation or its ruler or government, or even to humanity itself.

It can be a message about most anything, as long as it’s God’s message and not the message of the prophet. The prophetic word is always a word given by God.

Among the recurring themes in recorded prophetic messages of our Judaeo-Christian tradition, some stand out strongly - social justice, idolatry, the present and coming Kingdom of God, and obedience to God. But an even more frequently recurring theme is the assurance of the steadfast loving kindness of God, in Hebrew called *Chesed*. Closely connected to it is the theme of covenant.

Many prophetic messages in scripture confronted God’s people about injustices or other intolerable sin against God, or against fellow humanity. These usually included a warning about the consequences of continued sin and disobedience. Sometimes there was also an encouraging word, a word of promise of God’s blessings that would follow repentance, the ‘turning’ that was described yesterday. Sometimes the prophetic word was a direction NOT to do something that looked tempting, as when God sent Jeremiah to warn the king not to go to war against Iraq. The consequences of disobedience that God warned and then imposed for the wilful disobedience of this king should have given some of the world’s present day leaders pause to reflect before they acted. I believe we are experiencing some of the consequences of that disobedience and it falls heavy upon us.

In these recorded prophetic examples from scripture we can see an emphasis on how patient and gentle God has been because of His loving kindness towards His people. This loving kindness does not end just because human defiance causes painful consequences. Watching His people suffer from the promised consequences of their disobedience brings sadness and suffering to God. His heart aches for his beloved, even as they betray Him.

Sometimes the prophetic word was to give a hopeless people hope, as in the many Messianic prophecies that should have prepared people for the coming of Christ and of his Kingdom of Love, Peace, Joy, Light and Life. It is nothing short of amazing that religious leaders still miss the nature of His Peaceful Kingdom that is so clearly and beautifully described by the prophets. They also give us some insight into the heart of God and the values God considers most important. Most of those values were opposite to the values of that day in which the prophet first spoke and they are also opposite to the prevailing values of our own day.

That should also give us cause to think. As previous speakers have said, the purpose of most Biblical prophecy seems to be God's loving desire to restore His people to faithful relationship with Him. It is unfortunate that usually this comes only after a lesson painfully learned by suffering the natural consequences of disobedience.

Few of the prophets are very eager to take on this task of being God's messenger. They've heard of past experiences of other prophets and usually things get pretty messy, especially for them. No one applies for the job of prophet - at least, if they really are a prophet. The man or woman God calls is anointed by God's Spirit and sometimes also by someone God sends to confirm their call. At the right moment God places His own words in the prophet's mouth. God initiates the prophetic relationship and sometimes meets stern resistance from the prophet.

I get very uneasy with self-appointed or self-proclaimed prophets, especially if they claim some special status that entitles them to

wasn't part of the original group of disciples who ministered with Jesus. There were discussions about what constituted true or essential religious practices that would identify them as followers of Christ. People were not in agreement about the covenant of marriage and some were consenting to an interpersonal relationship that had unchurched people in the city wondering about its correctness. Members of the church were dragging others into court to prove their rights over one another. There were some who did not share their food at mealtimes forcing those who had no food to watch and go hungry while the weekly banquets ensued. To top off the list of divisions, people lorded their spiritual abilities over others in the body and considered themselves better or more important than anyone else. It is plain to see that the communion of the body of Christ was broken in the meeting at Corinth and that the testimony of love and unity had lost its power. All of this confusion had derailed the lived out proclamation of the message of Christ's power to transform as the premier activity of that body. Disunity of purpose between the members has dissolved the message of Christ's love for humanity.

For this reason, Paul describes the cooperation of the body in chapter 12, in the definition of love in chapter 13 of I Corinthians and makes proclamation through diversity the highest aim of everyone. Love for others seeks what is right and true. Love unites people and seeks the best for every individual. Love for Christ and for each other is the basis for maintaining unity within the body of believers, but love in action is the greatest witness to the power of God to bring about blessing for humanity. Unity of diverse people is the greatest testimony of the power and the love of God to change lives.

A few months ago I learned a South African word: *Ubuntu*. Desmond Tutu defined the concept behind the word:

a person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others and does not feel threatened that others are able and good for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs to the greater whole.

darkness of the human soul and today in Bolivia and Peru there are over 40,000 Friends who walk in the Light. To be a Friend of Christ brings peace and liberty to share freely about the unending love of God that is available to all; it is not limited. It also witnesses to the change of attitude of those in Christ who live 'not as the world lives' in fear and greed, but in freedom and love for each other. People like Noe, who as a 16-year-old (he was my translator) felt compassion for the families of his classmates in high school; he would walk for two hours over the mountains to go and share the source of all things good in those remote villages. Juan was another who was ridiculed because he didn't have children and he had epilepsy. He would leave his community every Sunday after Meeting to go and share the good news with his rival communities. Juan brought the Light of Christ to so many people that he is no longer ridiculed, but he is seen as one who truly cares for all people. Ruth's spiritual gifts were recognised even though she was an unmarried woman. She pastored at a Friend's church in a male dominated society that looked down on unmarried people.

The list is so extensive of people like this that it is impossible to tell you all of their stories. I do need to tell you about Manuela who is here with us today. She is the first woman Clerk of a South American Yearly Meeting. We need to hold her in the Light not just during these days together, but continuously. You can tell from what I have just said about their culture, she has a hard way to go. Friends gathered through the Andes are witnesses to the power of the Spirit, moving and breaking the social norms so that God's message is proclaimed. People are responding to the Light and living in unity through the Spirit because of what Christ has done and continues to do in them.

Paul of Tarsus, who wrote the letters to his friends in Corinth, considered unity through love and proclamation of God's message as the most important activity of the people of God. Yet the picture that Paul paints in the whole of I Corinthians is not of a people waiting on God or listening to the Spirit. This group of believers was divided over a long list of issues. See if these issues might ring true today. These people were arguing if Paul was really a true apostle since he

recognition and if they claim the right to exercise authoritarian power over any church or group. There are other warning signs to notice. The false prophets of the Bible are the ones that usually agree with the government and the establishment and the prevailing values of the day. They are the ones who attack the critics of the status quo. We call these false prophets 'court prophets' because they like to hang out at the royal courts of the Bible. We have our share of these court prophets today. They have today radio and television shows where they sing the praises of the powerful and brag about all the great things God is doing through them. They are surrounded by wealth and glitter and seem to bask in what they call God's blessings of prosperity to them. I do not find that among the faithful prophets of scripture. These prophets may receive lots of praise and lots of money, but they are false prophets. Remember that a false prophet can be sincere, but misguided or deluded - even Friends have had some false prophets among us. If they suggest that they alone have the answers from God or that they enjoy a unique relationship with God that no-one else can have, or that they somehow have God's ear uniquely, and can get God to do their bidding, then those so-called prophets sound very much like leaders of a cult. As someone said yesterday, a true prophet is not impressed with his or her own importance. Prophets demonstrate great humility if they are true prophets.

The New Testament teaches that prophecy is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that should flourish in the church's worship and witness today. Indeed, it seems to be one of the most important gifts. I believe it to be critically important today. As a spiritual gift, prophecy has a very specific and limited meaning, much more limited than the way we are using that phrase this week. Using the understanding of prophetic word as God's message delivered through a prophet, I want to share with you a few examples of what looks to me like prophetic witness among Friends.

At the Eighth Triennial of Friends World Committee for Consultation held in Kaimosi, Kenya in 1961, FWCC received an invitation to hold a World Conference at Guilford College in North Carolina in 1967. Some of you were there. A great deal of preparatory work had been

done by Friends prior to submitting this invitation for approval. Then, out of the silence, one Friend from Scandinavia rose with a deeply led, prophetic concern. Guilford, like almost every college in the South of the USA at that time, did not admit black students to its classes. How could FWCC meet on a racially segregated campus? Even if the college accepted Africans and other black Quakers for this conference, the college practiced racial discrimination in student admissions. This Scandinavian Friend made an important prophetic witness, for the college officials immediately contacted the governing board and obtained a commitment to end racial discrimination and begin admitting black students to Guilford on an equal basis. Friends approved the invitation. Today Guilford is a leading institution of higher education in the southern part of the United States with a strong commitment to racial justice and racial diversity. North Carolina Friends are very thankful that the prophetic word of a lone Friend from another nation enabled them to take this historic stand for equality ahead of almost all other southern colleges. God spoke through one Friend in FWCC and changed history.

A second example happened in my own experience in 1965. I had been attending a small unprogrammed Meeting that gathered for worship each week in a home in Philadelphia - a house church. I was not yet a Quaker. After a few months, one First Day morning I received a clear leading to speak in the worship. The leading was detailed, with specific words I was told to say. I was horrified. I disobeyed the leading by remaining silent. Within five minutes a young man named Russell Johnson stood up. He gave exactly the message to that meeting that God had directed me to give, including the specific details. We had never discussed anything about the subject together. Then I was even more horrified, for I knew from many years of Sunday school lessons that it was not good to disobey God. God had given me a specific message to deliver to that group and I disobeyed him. It taught me a lesson, and confirmed that these Quakers must really be God's people, after all.

The third and last example is about a historic Quaker testimony. We are well known for Quaker leadership in the work to free slaves

people with spiritual gifts so that God's kingdom on earth will continue to grow - that people everywhere would be unified in the task of proclaiming God's message in whatever way possible so that others will come to believe and trust in our God who loves all humanity equally. Christ empowers us to love as God loves, to bring peace as God is peace, to care for humanity as God cares for humanity, to administrate the creation as God intended it to be and not to exploit it for our own greed. We are a body made up of many parts that is designed to minister in Christ's name and in His power to care for the needs of the world. So Paul wrote: 'it is love then that you should strive for, set your hearts on spiritual gifts, especially the gift of proclaiming God's message.'

Love proclaims God's message. I once lived among a people group who did not have the word for forgiveness or for reconciliation. I have asked them permission to share this. The ideas behind those two words - forgiveness and reconciliation - are as foreign to the Aymara people as if I was to talk to you in their language. Love was not an idea or an emotion that was expressed very well; even the word 'friend' meant traitor.

A friend was someone who knew things about you and then could use those things against you so that they could gain an advantage. Imagine their understanding of John 15: 14 that gives us our name: 'you are our friend if you do what I command you to'. This people group believed that there was only so much good in the world and it was a scramble or a fight to get what you could for yourself. Sharing, giving, caring always had an ulterior motive of what one could get back for their own benefit. Unity was not something that people strove for because of love for each other. The idea of community was a means of survival in the harsh environment of the high Andes, the concept behind this word was control because of distrust of one another. Community rules brought everyone to the same level and provided little room for personal advancement.

It was only through the transformation of God's love in the heart of the people that brought about change. God's light penetrated the

I am a Birthright Friend with a long family history that stretches down through time originating here in England and Ireland. My family emigrated to the colonies and across the expanse of the frontier known as the United States of America. My family has always been Quaker. I need to tell you that I am also a Convinced Friend. Whether born into or convinced, each of us comes to understand and believe in the truth as the Spirit writes it on our hearts. I am recorded in North West Yearly Meeting as a Minister of the Gospel, I have been released by the meeting known as Reedwood Friends Church in Portland, Oregon to minister among them. I want to be sensitive this morning to those who are questioning the place of people like myself, who are released to minister in pastoral Yearly Meetings. I truly believe that Christ is the True Shepherd, he is our True High Priest and the gifts He gifts are not meant to be lorded over anyone else. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 14:29: ‘when one speaks, others need to weigh what is being said because prophets are subject to the gathered body and are not exalted over it.’ Hold these words in the Light and the weigh them according to what the Spirit is saying to us as a gathered body.

Isn't it great to be here representing so many Yearly Meetings and so many countries from around the world? I have dreamed of being a part of a gathered Meeting like this for many years. We are a great number here in Ireland, but we represent so many more people who make up the Society of Friends in places that we come from. George Fox's vision of a great people to be gathered continues to come true.

It is meetings like this that help us focus on the task at hand of gathering more people into the light of Christ. Christ has given us a great light to be shown and we are called to be torchbearers of Christ's truth to all people and all nations. Christ's message is simple: He is sufficient to speak to our condition, to bring all people out of darkness and into glorious life-giving light. Our faith, the Friends' faith, is so simple yet so profound. Christ is our High Priest. He alone is our Shepherd. He is the Saviour of our souls. He alone brings us into relationship with our Creator. There is no other mediator or sacrament needed to merit or to maintain God's love or His redemption. Christ continues to welcome all into His holiness. He continues to teach and to empower

throughout the world. That witness began when George Fox wrote a letter to Friends in Barbados, but it lay dormant. It began to really be effective when John Woolman made his gentle but persistent prophetic witness against slavery both at his preaching but also in his quiet words with slaveholders, one family at a time. John Woolman, more than any other American, made a prophetic witness that provided the foundation for the antislavery movement in that country that eventually freed the slaves. But Woolman is only half of the story. Slavery has raised its ugly head again in the world and more people are held as slaves today than before the American Civil War. Over 27 million human beings are owned, and their lives are totally controlled by someone else who pays them nothing for their labour.

I became aware of this problem of modern slavery when helping young Friends prepare for a model United Nations. I immediately contacted Quaker social witness organisations in several countries to find out what they were doing to oppose this evil. I found they were doing nothing and did not seem even interested. Then I discovered one man named Kevin Bales. He was born in the United States and is a member of Britain Yearly Meeting, though he now lives in Mississippi and teaches at Ole Miss, the site of racial violence. He is the leading expert in the world on modern slavery and has dedicated his life to abolition. He is a committed Friend who started a new Friends' meeting in Oxford, Mississippi.

Someone mentioned yesterday that our lives should be a prophetic word. Kevin Bales seems to do that. I hope some of you invite him to speak at your Yearly Meeting and begin to make a prophetic witness against this evil of slavery. I believe it is one of the things that cries out for prophetic word today.

George Fox and early Friends certainly had profound prophetic witness in their day. Many people believe that had Fox may have had a spiritual gift of prophecy, but what Fox emphasised about prophecy in his day was the biblical teaching of Christ as the great prophet of all time. Of course Christ was much more, the Saviour of the world. The same Christ indeed has a prophetic role if we allow him to work within us.

It is Jesus Christ today as the prophet Who still preaches and proclaims the prophetic word of life through the silence of the gathered Meeting for Worship. George Fox asks: ‘why should we not sit under Christ our prophet, shepherd, bishop and priest and hear Him?’ In another document he is referring to Jesus when he declares that ‘we can hear our prophet in [the] silence’ of worship, if we really listen.

God does speak today and He speaks a prophetic word to His people to deliver directly as He commands. The spirit of Christ is alive and well and still frees people to be His vessels to carry His light, to shatter the darkness of our present world. Listen for the still small voice within you, perhaps confirm it with the witness of Christ in Scripture, and obey the call to prophetic witness if it is given to you.

Not everyone is called to be a prophet, but we all have received in the Gospel the call to be peacemakers, to give generously to the poor, to free the oppressed, to oppose evil and to share the Good News that Christ indeed has come, and is at work in our midst and is the answer ultimately to the world’s problems.

Let the world around you know that there is today indeed a Living Light that can free them from darkness and give them the hope and joy of new and everlasting life.

Let the nations of the world know that the people of God called Friends have arisen to the call of their Great Prophet, Lord and King and will not rest until the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and peace does reign.

Maranatha!

in different kinds of tongues are all apostles, are all prophets, are all teachers, do all work miracles, do all have gifts of healing, do all speak in tongues, do all interpret, but eagerly desire the greater gifts.

And I Corinthians 13, 1 - 8 and 14.1:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have prophetic powers and understand all ministries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I might boast, but do not have love I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. Pursue and strive for the spiritual gifts and especially that you may prophesy.

(The hymn ‘Diverse in Culture, Nation, Race’ was sung.)

We have just had an example of diversity in nation, culture and race with the reading of our scripture this morning. I need to give a big ditto and maybe this would make this talk a little shorter, a ditto to Marion, Bill, Lizz, Stephen and now also tomorrow María. I felt this week that we have been standing on holy ground, as we have been discussing the issue of our prophetic witness. Yesterday we heard the news of an earthquake in Peru and a landslide in Kenya - devastating. In those two countries, nothing will ever be the same, geologically, emotionally, structurally. I am hoping that in our hearts the same is true of a Triennial like this.

you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn't just a single part blown up into something huge, it is all the different, but similar, parts arranged and functioning together. If Friend foot said: 'I am not elegant like Friend hand, embellished with rings, I guess I don't belong to the body', would that make it so? If Friend ear said: 'I am not beautiful like Friend eye, limpid and expressive, I don't deserve a place on the head', would you want to remove it from the body? If the body was all Friend eye, how could it hear, if all Friend ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where God wanted it, but I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are - a part of an enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn't be a body but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place.

No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Friend eye telling Friend hand: 'get lost, I don't need you', or Friend head telling Friend foot 'you are fired, your job has been phased out'? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way - the lower part, the more basic it is, therefore the more necessary. You can live without an eye for instance, but not without a stomach. When it is a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes no difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honour just as it is without comparisons. If anything, you have more concern for the lower parts than the higher parts. If you had to choose, wouldn't you prefer good digestion to a full body or head of hair?

A reading from I Corinthians chapter 12 beginning with verse 27:

Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first all the apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles and also those having gifts of healing. Those able to help others, those with gifts of communication and those speaking

Lizz Roe, Britain Yearly Meeting, addressed the Triennial during worship on Tuesday, 14th August 2007 as follows:

Dear Friends, beloveds, what does the Lord ask of us? That we are the salt of the earth, that we would be a light unto the world, that we would be streams of living water, that we would feed God's people. Earth, light, water, nourishment - we are asked to tend God's garden, we are asked to tend God's community of heaven, we are asked to tend all God's people.

In getting ready for today, I have come to realise mine is a quiet voice, my form of prophetic witness is usually without words. I think it is often so that the truth is more easily shown than narrated. Having something to say today about finding the prophetic voice for our time is for me based on having endeavoured, with God's grace, to let my life speak. I am going to start by saying something about prophecy and prophets.

In my own experience, a prophetic life is one that is full of grace, grit, grief and growth. I think there are five parts to living this kind of life and each part needs to be absolutely grounded in God. The first part - seeking and expectant waiting, being ready to change; we can think of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, that pivotal movement of change, George Fox on Firbank Fell, Gandhi and Martin Luther King. The second part is discerning God's call, though it might be costly, challenging or unpopular. Think of the prophets, Samuel, Jonah (he had a bad time), Isaiah, or the disciples walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee who gave up friends and family and their own place. The third is being willing to use our gifts and acknowledge them. Being willing to live in the fullness of them with gladness and with joy and also with humility: Francis of Assisi, Elizabeth Fry, Caroline Fox, Nelson Mandela. These three stages are a kind of preparation for living a prophetic life.

The next two stages are really living up to the light, witnessing to God's call in the way that you are led: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Margaret Fell, James Naylor and John Woolman. This means to actually be a

prophet - but recognition by others might come a lot later, be rather half-hearted, or come not at all - and not to be concerned about that recognition, but to rest in the knowledge of a connection with God, of speaking the good news, of living it.

The last is remembering to nourish that witness and find balance in your life. Jesus celebrated at the wedding feast in Cana, he walked into the desert to be separate and to pray and be tested. He talked with his friends and he worked like the rest of us. This prophetic life is a life of discipline, devotion, divestment, discipleship and also, sometimes, of delight. Friends, are we ready to live like this? I believe that this is what God invites us to. If we live this kind of committed life it will be a life that is a countersign to the spirit of the age in which we live. There will be blessings and rewards but we should be under no illusions; there are times of great loneliness and prophets are singularly unpopular in their own communities, whether with friends or the place where you live. Prophets can die in the wilderness and their message can be lost.

So what does prophecy look like today? Prophets can be bracing, gritty, challenging, and what they have to say and do can make us uncomfortable. They may sound full of 'shoulds' and 'oughts' and guilts and sorrows. They might be loved and respected, but they may not be liked very much. But prophets can also be joyful, encouraging, hopeful. They can speak of God's love and live it amongst us. They can be a blessing to their community, affirm our choices and aspirations, feel easy and pleasurable to be around and bring us a deep sense of connection with the spirit at work in the world. These are holy people, saints perhaps. Maybe we call some people saints or describe their holiness so that we might feel less worried about failing to live as they do. As though it is their saintliness that has enabled them to live as they are doing rather than seeing that it is endeavouring to live up to the light that has led them to live a life we might call holy or blessed by God.

Ken Comfort, Northwest Yearly Meeting, addressed the Triennial during worship on Friday 17th August 2007 as follows:

Our first hymn is 'Holy Spirit, Come With Power'.

I am reading from II Corinthians 12:4:

God's various gifts are handed out everywhere, but they all originate in God's spirit. God's various ministries are carried out everywhere, but they all originate in God's spirit. God's various expressions of power are in action everywhere, but God Himself is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is. Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by this spirit and to all kinds of people the variety is wonderful: wise counsel, clear understanding, simple trust, healing the sick, miraculous acts, proclamation, distinguishing between spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues.

All these gifts have a common origin, but are handed out one by one, by the one spirit of God. God decides who gets what and when. You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts - limbs, organs, cells - but no matter how many parts you can name, you are still one body. It is exactly the same with Christ. By means of His one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We used to call our own shots independently, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which God has the final say in everything. This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptised. Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain, His Spirit, where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves - labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free, programmed or unprogrammed, liberal or evangelical - are no longer useful, we need something larger, more comprehensive. I want

and sitting there trying to meditate God's word - it is hard, we are used to eating! It is harder to pray - sometimes when we are in silent worship, some of us begin to snore! Sometimes when we are in the church, when somebody is preaching, some people are reading newspapers, some people are just thinking how they are going to check things on the internet, thinking of how they are going to look at the television set, thinking of what they are going to do, thinking of how they are going to create something. Now, what I am saying is this: he condemned the people who could speak of experience of Christ and God, but lived not in the life of Christ, people who could not lead the world after them. People who got the form of godliness, but denied the power of God, who inwardly ravened from the spirit, who persecuted those that operated in the power of God. He condemned these people. He regarded these people 'to be the wells without water, the clouds without rain and the trees without fruit.' Jude, 1:12. He saw that if you are a Christian and you are not preaching to another person to bring them to Christ, then that person is a cloud without water or a tree without fruits so you are not producing, instead you are just there. That is the way he described to them. After his message, some people examined themselves and some of those who found the character George Fox found in their lives repented and accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. When you accept to follow Jesus and approach him as your Saviour, you become His temple where He dwells. You should prove yourself to be the pillar and ground of Truth, part of a spiritual household of which Christ is the Head. Because He (Christ) is not the Head of a mixed multitude.

Friends, because of time, I would like to say that this is what God put on my heart to share with you; there are a lot of things that I would share with you if I had the opportunity, but because of time, let me say that is the message today and may God bless you.

Amongst Friends we have a tradition and theology as living as though the kingdom of heaven is at hand, of living like it's heaven on earth in holy obedience to that reality. Not just as though it might come as some unspecified time in the future, but is an experience of Christ already present amongst us. This means that holy obedience to God's call is open to us all if we stand in the way of it, if we listen.

This manner of living in holy obedience answers the question: 'what are Quakers for?' Just as early Friends were, so we are still all called to be ministers, priests and prophets, answering the call to heal the world. We might tell when we are getting it right by testing ourselves against the fruits of the spirit as listed in Galatians 5:22.

If our prophetic life is grounded in God then these fruits will be present: love, joy, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Paul obviously thought hard about this, he talks about it too in Colossians, 3:12 and there he speaks of compassion, humility, meekness, patience, and, something that is so important, forgiveness.

To me, living a prophetic life means not just being able to see the future and what it holds, it means being willing to see what is right here, right now and to see what is needed to answer the needs of now

In listening for God's call, in answering the needs of now, I have been challenged and I have been changed. My experience of endeavouring to live up to the light I have is that more has been given to me. I say that with humility and with gratitude and also with a clear understanding that I might just as easily have stoppered my ears and my heart and gone a different path. The word obedience comes from the Latin, which means to 'hear'. It has been a willingness to listen that has been crucial for me in finding and expressing a prophetic voice.

I do believe that we are all called to listen through the prophetic voice within ourselves and to mediate God's love to the world. That together we are called to be a countersign to what is happening in our world. Perhaps out of compassion for the planet, an understanding of the

human condition or maybe an urgent sense of willingness to act, to act on God's call.

There are many different ways of doing this: some of us are called to speak out, to build or demonstrate the alternative, to celebrate, pray and praise, to take symbolic or practical action or to hold to a vision of the kingdom come.

I have realised my kind of prophetic voice is one that is lived, danced and expressed with tenderness through action rather than through words. I am neither driven by fury at evil times nor forced on by anger or fear. Love has overcome these things. I have been angry and fear has whispered in my ears, it has closed my eyes and held me rooted to the spot. But I say again, love has overcome these things. I have a short rule to live by; it is adapted from Micah, 6:8: to act justly, to love tenderly, to walk humbly and to live joyfully. This is mainly about how I am led to be in the world rather than what I am led to say. It is my form of testimony, how I let my life speak.

Our testimony, our own form of prophetic voice will vary because we are each different, unique, precious, a child of God. What we feel led to witness about will be different too. What matters is that we pay attention to God's call and that we do it. It is not the thought that counts.

So far, I have mainly been speaking about finding the prophetic voice, more widely and in my own life. I am going to endeavour to convey to you four things now. I am going to try and find the words to invite you to hear what it is that I have been led to live about and what I witness to. I am going to share with you something that moves me to action and the form that this takes. I am also going to speak of antidotes to despair and grief and temptation.

We live, dear Friends, in an extraordinary time. We are greatly blessed to have an opportunity before us to listen to the ministry of both people and the planet. We have the chance to hear God's will for us and to live truly as though the kingdom of heaven were already here.

he have congratulated us, the representatives of what he initiated, or not?

As believers and followers of the Christian faith, we need a total transformation in our lives so that we can go to another level of faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. We, the Quakers of today, like our founder George Fox need to continue proclaiming the message of the Cross of Christ which lead to repentance of sin before God the Father. Just look at one of George Fox's letters that he sent to William Penn and analyse it. To the King, he said:

the principle of the Quakers is the Spirit of Christ who died for us and is risen for our justification and by the spirit of Christ we are led out of unrighteousness and ungodliness. It brings us to deny all plotting and contriving against the King or any man. And the Spirit of Christ brings us to deny all manner of ungodliness, as lying, theft, murder, adultery, fornication, and all uncleanness, debauchery, malice, hatred, deceit, cozening, cheating, brings us to seek the peace and good of all men and to live peacefully; and it leads us from such evil works and actions as the Magistrate's sword takes hold upon. Our desire and labour is that all who profess themselves Christians may walk in the Spirit of Christ, that they, through the Spirit may mortify the deeds of the flesh, and by the power of the Spirit cut down sin and evil in themselves.

(extracts from George Fox's letter to William Penn, *Journal of George Fox*, ed. J. Nickells, p. 699)

George Fox spent much of his time in prayer and fasting and lived a solitary kind of life. I wonder whether the Quakers of today do the same. It is hard to find a Quaker sitting somewhere actually fasting without eating, just going somewhere in the forest or in the mountain

concentrated on one thing - Friends are very good at contributing for the poor, contributing for the needy, where violence is at the forefront, but we have forgotten a very important thing - to bring many people into the family of Friends. George Fox spoke of what he received of Christ and acted by setting up the Kingdom of God in the hearts of men and women by preaching the word of Truth. In his testimony and ministry, he endeavoured to open Truth to the people's understanding and to base them upon Christ Jesus the Light of the World. He didn't keep silent and converted many to Quakerism - he spoke the Word. He preached, he went in many places, he preached and the people understood him and he changed the world because he was speaking, he was not silent.

As followers of Christ in this movement, we need to keep the legacy of our founder. We all need to examine our hearts by asking ourselves one simple question: are we still in the business of promoting the vision George Fox received from the Lord or have we deviated from the foundation? The Apostle Paul says:

for we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field. You are God's building. According to the grace of God, which was given to me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it for no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (I Corinthians 3:9-11)

This question still stands: how are we building on this foundation that George Fox laid by the grace of God? If George Fox was to turn around and come back to life, would he have congratulated us as true representatives of what he initiated or not? That is a question - it's a very challenging question, Friends, that each one of us should have to contemplate on. Let me repeat it - the question still stands: how are we building on this foundation that George Fox laid by the grace of God? If George Fox was to turn around and come back to life, would

Across the globe, communities, individuals and ecologies are all in crisis. We have the chance to recognise and connect these in a new and different way. We have the opportunity to acknowledge our place and our current role in this crisis and to respond. We are all invited to listen to God's will for us, to respond in love and to reconnect to ourselves, to one another and to the earth, which is our home.

The threats posed by climate change are not a future theoretical possibility; for millions of people, for many people here, they are already a lived reality. Drought, food scarcity, violent conflict over dwindling resources, floods, forced migration and displacement, changes in weather patterns, altered biological relationships, all these are just some of the effects experienced now. In the future, we will see a global rise in temperature, sea level rise, increased loss of species diversity and mass population movements. Consequently there will also be increased levels of violent conflict over materials, territory and resources.

There are a number of responses open to us – ones I encounter amongst Friends include grief, despair, hopelessness, and sometimes apathy and denial or a sense that it is now too late to make the necessary changes in our own lives to have any meaningful impact on levels of carbon emissions. In the latter part of the 20th century Friends were moved to witness against nuclear weapons. In many ways this was simpler to tackle. We petitioned governments, or 'them out there', to act.

Climate change is different. The science is complex, there is a wealth of misleading and inaccurate information and propaganda and we are all implicated, responsible and required to change. In the rich northern hemisphere we are in the midst of living out an entitlement theology that has developed strongly over the last 100 years. Many of us seem to worship in shopping malls, and many of us regard what we buy and consume as a primary source of status, happiness, self-expression, identity and fulfilment.

In the industrialised world it is hard to give up this sense of entitlement – we may think of it in terms of stewarding, sharing, or using the gifts

of God's creation. In the industrialising world it is hard not to want this level or form of consumption and the corresponding lifestyle it brings. This has all kinds of costs attached.

If we are to continue with this kind of consumption, then I believe that this level of production and consumption will have to be available to all, and those of us with the financial means should put our money where our mouths are. If we truly believe in equality then we in the global north should be willing to financially support sustainable technology and renewable fuel sources. Those of us who live in countries which have mostly exported industry to countries with low wage overheads, cheaper energy and raw materials, should invest in making sure that the environmental and social consequences are not unevenly borne.

If in the global north we want this kind of lifestyle we should pay the full costs and not expect to be subsidised by the health, well-being or lives of the poorest nations, nor the health, well being and life of the planet. I say 'if' about this kind of lifestyle and these sorts of levels of consumption because I think as Friends we know a different way. This is important because there are costs beyond the physical and material of this addiction to energy and material consumption.

In the northern hemisphere many are slaves to work that bring no satisfaction, perhaps because we are tied into cycles of credit, debt and mortgage repayments. We are slaves to our diaries and schedules with no room for the spirit or inspiration, where Meetings for Worship are scheduled for an hour on Sunday with 45 minutes of fellowship afterwards.

We may be absorbed by the false idols of status symbols - a car, different clothes, a house, different work - so much so that we can have the hope and happiness sucked out of us. We don't have time to recognise or celebrate what we already have and who we already are. We in the rich countries also export our addictive attitudes and behaviours around the world without a health warning, a warning that this kind of behaviour promotes happiness at neither personal, local nor global levels. We think we have it all, but what it has turned out to be is an

These are times for us to act and receive fresh insight in Truth. The Bible tells us very well and very clearly to go in the whole world and preach the whole Truth; it tells us to go in the world to preach in the name of the Son, the Father and the Holy Spirit. Friends, first be realistic - if we shall continue to keep quiet and not go out and preach the word, do you think Quakers will continue to exist in this world? That is the question. If we continue to keep quiet, the Quaker Church will not be in existence. If you continue to be in that kind of life, we don't see a Church ahead. This was happening in East Africa and the elders of the Church sat down and thought of how this Church should be revived, because they saw all the young men had left the Church and they said: 'what do we do?' They sat because they have good buildings, but you find there are only two people. The Church has some good objectives for people, so what did they say? 'Let us give freedom of worship, let us give freedom to the youth to express their gifts to the Church, to praise God.' That's what they are doing right now as we speak; the Church has reached out. As I speak, in Uganda, we have the church in Northern Uganda. As I speak, in many parts of Kenya now where the Quaker Church had not penetrated, it is there. If they sit and said that 'we are content with being quiet in the Church', then the Quaker Church in Uganda would have gone away some years back, but now we see it is expanding rapidly because they are worshipping in the open air. They are following the trend of the old Quakers, praise be to God.

We, the current Quakers, with Christ's mission must rise up as a prophetic voice from God to rescue those who are perishing and have lost hope in the world. This was the vision and the mission of George Fox, the founder of the Quaker movement in which we are all represented here today. That was his vision - to reach the unreached and to preach the Word. Other Quakers died because of the Truth; they spoke the Truth, people understood them and those who did not like the Truth killed them, but if they had kept quiet, nobody would have bothered with them. Do you hear what I am saying?

Now, this is a challenge to us, the current Quakers, to do the same - that we should hail the vision of the founder of this Church. We have

world, that is not the right notion for God - that is from the enemy. The work of the devil is to steal, kill and destroy. The work of the devil is to come into the Friends' church to begin to divide the people so they should not be united and the Church will eventually die off. That is his notion and this is his principle and this is one of his objectives - to destroy the Church, to divide and rule. These are times to act and compare truth with Truth and compare truth with lives. How do you compare truth with the Truth? I am a Christian. How does your Christianity reflect in the world according to the Bible? Let me give you one example: one time in Uganda some time back we had a man who was a so-called prophet, he had a congregation and he told them that God has communicated to him that the world is going to end and he told them to go and gather their belongings, eat whatever they want, bring some in the church and share together, and then they confined themselves in one house. The man brought petrol oil, he put it on the house and he lit the fire. All the people died. That was intentional. Those are the people I am talking about. Compare the truth and understanding if this is the right spirit from God. If you tell me of the end of the world, is this the right spirit from God? Have you read the Bible - what does the Bible say? These are times for us to act and receive fresh words in the Truth. Does the Church believe in deceptions such as these? We believe Jesus Christ as the Son of God, but if we say I don't believe in the Bible, what does it mean? If I say I believe I am a Quaker and I don't believe in the Bible, what does it mean? Ask yourself.

These are the things that God wants to be addressed in our 21st century. Whom do you believe, whom do you believe? We will come and be manipulated by satanic activities, and be tossed about if we don't believe in Truth. You must believe in Truth, but if you don't believe in Truth, a sorcerer will come around and tell you when you practice (sorcery) you shall get money, and you will follow him. Somebody who is a thief will tell you if you become an intentional thief you are going to be rich, and you go with them. What is that? Believe the Bible, you will find the Truth.

addiction to unsustainable and unhappy lifestyles. As we consume we should be under no illusion. We are also consumed by a world that is full of fakery and falsity.

Consequently, I believe that people in the northern hemisphere need to be supported in letting go and recovering from an addiction to energy and to oil. In our lives I believe we need a loving reminder of the alternatives. When we recall our testimonies - peace, equality, truth, simplicity, justice, integrity and community - when we use these as the touchstone for our activities and our lives, when we inhabit these so that we become them and they are not merely abstract concepts, then we may live truly in the promise of God's love. This is an inspiration to others and it is such consolation to know them truly.

I believe we need to show great compassion and kindness and forgiveness to one another and help free each other and ourselves from this addiction into the freedom of truly living like the community of heaven on earth. This is both the 'freedom from' and a 'freedom to'. It is the freedom promised by God. It should not be confused with licence. It is the freedom to accept and live up to the responsibilities laid upon us, to be willing to take up difficult and challenging roles, and even be unpopular.

It is true liberty to give service to something greater than worldly concerns and power. It means living in such a way that those we meet can see what this liberty has wrought in our lives. God is the blacksmith of our hearts who breaks the chains that have made us slaves and fettered us. Living in the fullness of grace, all things become possible. I now understand the words of the hymn: 'Our ordered lives confess the beauty of thy peace'. Lives lived under God's ordering are at peace. We have been reconciled to God's way.

When I endeavour to go my own way I struggle; when I go God's way that struggle ceases. In my own life I try to show what such liberty is like. Over the last 25 years, I have paid attention to different aspects of my life that contribute to climate change and, with God's help, my life has been transformed. I have been led to a place where I have

committed myself to living a more sustainable life: more sustainable for the planet, more sustainable for communities and more sustainable personally too. A sustainable life reconnects us to each other, to ourselves, to the planet and to God. What I am going to describe is particular to my context, living in Britain. If I lived elsewhere and had been so led my witness to sustainability would be different.

My testimony to the integrity of creation means not driving a car. I never learned. I gave up flying six years ago. It meant I had to change jobs and the work that I could do, and that there are some parts of my family across the globe I may never see again in person. I became a vegetarian when I was fourteen, I gave up dairy and eggs five years ago and I now use no animal products at all. I have moved house this year to be close to work so that I no longer have to commute by train and bus. This has meant letting go of the worshipping community that I love. I use renewable electricity in my home. Overall I use very little energy or water. I compost and recycle 99% of my rubbish. There is no such place as 'away', you can't throw 'away'. I grow some of my own food and I cook from scratch. I do lots of knitting and sewing; I make some of my own clothes. I don't own a television or a mobile phone or a microwave.

I am involved in my local community. My local MP (Member of Parliament) sometimes comes to tea and we correspond regularly. The movement in the United States which said 'what would Jesus do?' he says he has transformed into 'what would Quakers do!' I have worked at both the grass roots and at national policy level speaking truth to power and with love. This year, I have endeavoured to give up spending beyond utilities, food and travel. That has been a really hard learning. I have my own integrity gaps and weaknesses and this year has highlighted them.

I want to say again this has taken me 25 years to be able to live God's will for me as well as I am able. I continue to learn both obedience and joy. There are times of feeling truly that I am living as I am called to live, answering the design of my creation, and I don't do any of this with a heavy heart, I do it with hope. I don't do it with a frown on my

chosen to come into. Those who have chosen to live out Kingdom values will come into the fulfilment of God's end time purposes. All that God has prepared for them will fall into place and they will see the salvation of God's redemptive work on them. The Day of the Lord will be upon them. Those who have chosen to reject Kingdom values will come into the greatest trials, crisis and turmoil that men have ever seen. The onslaught of satanic forces will ruin their lives, families, ministries, businesses, health, relationships, and belongings. The days of evil will be upon them. Those who have chosen to do these things will be in that kind of life.

Those who act and choose to hear God's voice and walk in the present truth will move to the next level, they will shine in the dark places and have power to discern deception. They will not be caught in confusion. That was the oath of the founder of this church. His truth and his light shone all over the world and it brought some good impact on this earth. These are the times to hear from Him who speaks from above and not hear him who speaks in deception and lies through those who are not connected to God. That is what God is telling us: that we are not after division - but we are after peace and we are after love that comes from our hearts. These are times for us to act to tune our ears to hear the true shepherds and not listen to the voice of strangers. John, 10: 5-10 talks about Satan. The work of the thief is to steal, to kill and destroy. So when Satan comes in the church, when the mind of Satan enters somebody, that person comes to divide the church and to do evil things. Satan will come to instigate your life and your mind to do something which is contrary to what God wants from us. There are already many strangers within the institution of the church, expressing 'successful ministry' and gifting, but without God's presence and favour.

Friends, when I talk about this, I mean that there are some people who may come with a good notion (especially in Africa, I don't know about other countries). They may come and say, let us join this group. Now, let us talk of terrorists in the world. If somebody comes with such a notion in a Church to bring a vision to begin to teach the young people that if they join such a group, they shall destroy the whole

attention of His people so that prophets and prophecy may be restored to their rightful place in the life of the Church. The prophetic movement is gaining momentum as thousands of Christians seek answers to their questions about how God speaks to us through prophetic ministry and how we should respond to the prophetic word.

The gift of prophecy is like a river flowing, down which may come floating words of knowledge, wisdom and understanding of the present and the future things of God. All New Testament ministers need to become able ministers in the Holy Spirit to prove that they truly manifest the kind of ministry God intends for them. In the light of this application of Paul's words, all Christian ministers should be prophetic ministers and all saints should manifest prophetic ministry. This is one reason Paul demanded the Christians to preach gifts; according to our scriptures (I Corinthians 14:1) a prophet is one who brings God's word to his people in a given circumstance. Such a person acts as a mouthpiece for God, bringing direction to his people. He only speaks what God has spoken to him. However, all that a prophet speaks must be checked with the written Word of God and must be in agreement with it. A prophet is one of the five-fold ministries in the Church according to Ephesians 4:11, and like the other four ministries, he is to equip the saints for the work of ministry and edify the whole body of Christ through his ministry. True prophets are not self-serving. The first sign of a true prophet is that he will not use the gift selfishly, that is for personal gain. He will use this gift only on the direction of the Holy Spirit and the intention should be to serve others and not himself. He pours out into the lives of others that which God has endowed him with, according to Matthew 27:42. The prophet lives a sacrificial life. If you are a prophet you must be ready to live a sacrificial life. A true prophet is one who Paul, the Apostle, had in mind when he said: 'therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecution, in distresses for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, I am strong', according to Second Corinthians, 12:10.

Friends, when I talk of prophetic words and action, this is what I mean now. This is a decade of words and action for the nations of the world and the Church of Christ to walk into the destiny they have

face, but with joy. I don't wear a hair shirt. I see my life as an experiment in faith, of really endeavouring to live faith fully and that means for the most part it is a life that it is filled with grace and gratitude for what I have and what I am led to.

All of these small things I do are about demonstrating what it is possible to do; it is practical, it means I have a small carbon footprint – tiny by western standards –but it is also a symbolic life. It is a life I have been led to, a life freely answering God. It is such liberty.

It is not something I talk about a lot. This is probably the first time I have put it all together. In my head and my heart I hear a prophetic song and it is this I dance my life to. Grounded in worship and prayer I have been able to let my life speak truly and to live more faithfully and with spirit. It is this grounding in worship that is part of what helps all and any of us go against the tide and live adventurously.

There are other things that are antidotes to despair and grief and temptation. One of these is being part of a community of shared values; another is the giving and receiving of friendship and love. I rejoice in opportunities for celebration. Times of learning and unlearning are important too. Finally, I suggest that the opportunity to work together with others on something that is meaningful is also crucial to our spiritual and social well-being.

We can learn to be the change we wish to see in the world. These things can help sustain us when grief, gracelessness and hard grind threaten to overwhelm us. The prophetic life, dear Friends, is one that can have a profound impact on the world and those around us. Living like this will change us for the better too. Living in the fullness of God's grace and what we are called to, is a blessing both to us and to the world.

Dear Friends, beloveds, I believe we have hands, hearts and voices to speak of the continuing creation of the world. We have the capacity and the potential to be a prophetic song for this time. All we need to do is open ourselves to the prophetic call and then give voice to it joyfully.

Stephen Wamboka, Uganda Yearly Meeting, addressed the Triennial during worship on Thursday 16th August as follows:

I will read from I Corinthians 14:1:

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gifts of prophecy.

Good morning, Friends. Praise God. This morning I feel so delighted to stand before you to share with you the word of God. Before anything else takes off, I would like to invite all of you, and most especially African Friends, in joining me in singing the Kingala chorus (that is our native language mixed with English). So I invite all of you to stand up as we sing this song. The song says 'sing praises to God'.

Thank you for joining me in singing this wonderful chorus. When I sing such a chorus it reminds me of the greatness of God. When I see people waving before God the way we have been doing, I feel the presence of God is around. Before I say anything, I would like to bring greetings from Uganda Yearly Meeting. When we were coming here, they say: 'when you reach there in Dublin, convey our lovely greetings to them.'. How do you say about their greetings? In the evangelical church in which I pastor, Mutoto Church, they say: 'when you reach there, call our greetings to them'. How do you say about it?

I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to FWCC World Office to see that I am here, and more especially for us Africans who did not think of coming here because of visa problems. I would like to express my thanks again to our Africa Section, the leaders who also made sure that the communication is appropriate to each and every person who has managed to come here. I would like to express my thanks again to the Irish Friends who have made us to be the way we are here; we are happy because they are really expressing their love to us, we have not found any problem with them! Again, I would like to express my thanks to the international Friends who actually managed to pull out something from their pockets to enable Africans to attend this conference and may God bless you.

Friends, I am standing here to talk about prophecy: 'finding the prophetic voice for our time'. The scripture has been read: 'follow the way of love and preach your gifts, especially the gift of prophecy'. There is something that God put in my mind. I would like to tell you that when I received an invitation to come and speak here, it was not a mistake. I received an invitation to come and be the speaker in this Triennial in August from our Friend, Lee Taylor. I was very happy.

This made me to think about how God communicates. Some time back in early 1988 when I was working in Kenya as one of the pastors in a church I happened to be in my house; I was praying and I began to meditate and all of a sudden I began sleeping. God communicated to me, he showed me people - that I am standing before people, an international community, each one of them bearing the flag of their own countries. And here as I stand, I say that when I received that letter, I recalled that dream. So I would like to say that maybe I am here on a prophetic mission. The theme says: 'find the prophetic voice of God', so when I received the invitation, I said: 'maybe this is what God talked to me back in 1988'. Friends, I thought of this and how am I going to develop from this scripture that I have been given: I Corinthians, 14:1 – 'follow the way of love, spread your gifts'?

I looked at this and I saw that we were living in a world where there are many thing going on. We are aware, we are all aware, that the world we are living in has been impacted in so many ways. We have been impacted by the killer disease known as AIDS, by economies of the world, by communism, we have been impacted by religion and by politics and as a result of all this our lives will never be the same again. We are aware that things are different now, things have changed, but not in terms of God's will and His ways. Things have changed, but not in terms of God's commands or His desires. Things have changed, but not in terms of God's requirements and His regulations.

Now, looking at the biblical prophecy, this is a ministry that conveys the mind of God to the Church, sometimes through preaching which usually foretells God's plan. Its purpose is to edify, comfort and exhort God's people. Today God is bringing prophetic ministry to the