

Integrity Curriculum
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Beacon Hill Friends Meeting
First Day School 2011-12

Lesson 2: The Cost of Truth

*** This is a "talky" lesson (not physically active). Bring doodling materials to give restless youngsters a diversion!*

Silent worship. Begin with silent worship 5-7 minutes. Use a candle or other object to focus minds. Display a prompting query that kids can use if they need something to think about: "How much is the truth really worth to me?"

"Integrity is the essential Quaker test and undergirds all the other testimonies of Friends." - Wilmer Cooper, Pendle Hill pamphlet on Integrity

Definitions of Integrity

1. The state of being complete, undiminished, free from damage or defect. E.g. the emperor maintained the integrity of the empire despite many attacks from invaders.
2. An unimpaired condition e.g. the integrity of the stone foundation remained, even though the wood house above it had rotted.
3. Adherence to a code of values. Respecting the truth. E.g. Young Quakers who attend First Day School turn into adults of great integrity.

Given those definitions, what might this mean?

"Jesus said, 'You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.'"
- John 8:32

We shall study Four Aspects of Integrity

- Truth telling
- Authenticity
- Loyalty to the Truth (conscience)
- Accountability to the group's sense of the Truth (corporate action)

I. Truth- telling

Quaker historical examples:

Historically, Quakers were known for truthfulness and honesty in their dealings with others. They believed there is a single standard for truth; truth is fixed and unchanging, and it does not vary from circumstance to circumstance. They tried to live as the Scriptures said:

“Above all things, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by earth, neither by any other oath. But let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay...” - James 5:12

This manifested in several ways:

Single price. Quaker merchants were unusual in 17th century England in selling things according to a single price. This set them apart from other shopkeepers who might alter their price depending on the client. Quaker shopkeepers could be trusted to charge the same price for everyone, and this helped them gain a lot of business and often, become very rich.

No oaths. When early Friends were arrested for their religious practices and brought before the judge, they often suffered further persecution and often imprisonment because they refused to take oaths swearing they would tell the truth. Even today, Quakers do not take oaths in a court of law. Why? To do so is to accept that there are two standards for truth, not one: one standard for the courtroom (where you have to tell the truth) and one for everyday life (where presumably you don't). Friends insisted that they told the truth in all circumstances and insisted that being required to swear to tell the truth in court implied that they might lie if they were not under oath. Even today, Quakers “affirm” the truth rather than “swear” to tell the truth in court.

Read the story below:

OUR WORD IS OUR KEEPER

THOMAS ELLWOOD, a Quaker in the 1600's, was sitting in the growing darkness of Newgate Prison in England, wondering whether the daylight was really gone and if it was time for him to get out the hammock in which he slept and prepare for bed.

"It is hard to know," he said to the man nearest to him, "whether it is more uncomfortable at night or in the daytime."

It was no wonder that he spoke so, for an English prison in 1662 was a very dreadful place. The floors were damp and dirty, even at noontime the room was a gloomy twilight, and today it was so crowded that

the prisoners could scarcely move about. They were all Quakers, sent to Newgate for refusing to take an oath. "The law requires you to swear that your statements are true!" had thundered the officers of the court. "Nay," the Quakers had replied, "a man's word, truthfully given, is as binding as any oath can be, and it is wrong to swear." So they had all been herded into Newgate to spend months of imprisonment for this offence.

"Thomas, thou art taller than I. Canst thou reach the hook yonder to fasten my hammock?" called out an older man.

"Yes, indeed," answered Thomas, "but why not hang it to the post in the middle of the room to-night, in the place where poor James has been. That will be in the middle row, and the air may be better."

"James was a delicate man," replied the other as he acted on Thomas' advice; "it is not surprising that he died in this vile atmosphere, even though we gave him the best place that we could."

Everyone felt very much depressed by the death of this prisoner, and as they began to put up their hammocks, which had to be hung in all directions across the room, and one above the other until they were three rows high, the Friends still talked of him.

Suddenly there was a great noise of voices and tramping of feet outside. A key grated in the lock, and a torch threw a blinding light into the room as the turnkey opened the door and shouted, "Hold, hold! here is the coroner's inquest come to see you!"

A jury had come to inquire the reason for the death of the man. There was scarcely room for them to come in, so they crowded at the door. At last the foreman exclaimed, "What a sight is here! We need not now question how this man came by his death: we may rather wonder that they all are not dead, for this place is enough to breed an infection among them!"

The jury withdrew, and the Quakers thought no more of the affair until the next day. Then a sheriff came and explained that he wished that he could set them all free; but as that was not in his power, he would send a number of them to the old Bridewell Prison, which was less crowded. "This," he said, "will be more comfortable for you, and your removal will give more room to those left behind."

And now a very strange thing happened. The porter, who should have escorted them from one prison to the other, told them that as they knew the way to Bridewell, and as he could trust them, they might as well go there alone, provided they were in before bedtime! So Thomas Ellwood and some thirty more of the Friends made up their packs of clothing, and taking their bundles on their shoulders, walked two and two abreast from Newgate to old Bridewell. Some staggered slightly as from weakness, others stepped firmly as though their feet welcomed the good earth once more. The faces of all were pale from the confinement of the prison. They looked about them calmly, and often smiled to see the blue sky and smell the fresh air. It was the middle of the afternoon and the street was full of people. Shop-keepers stared from their doors and passers-by stopped the little procession to ask who they were and where they were going. They said that they were prisoners, going from one prison to another.

"What!" exclaimed the townsmen. "Without a keeper? Why don't you go home? This is your opportunity!" "No," Thomas Ellwood answered proudly, "for our word, which we have given, is our keeper."

Discussion:

- What does it cost you to tell the truth?
- What does it cost you to *not* tell the truth?
- Put yourself in Thomas' mind, try to view Truth as he did. How do you think he felt as he made his hammock that night in the new prison?

(write down responses)

"If you tell the truth, then you don't have to remember anything." – Mark Twain

Next time: shades of gray: partial truths.

