

## **The Fellowship of Light**

A Message by James R. Newby

Text: Matthew 5:13-16

Today is known as “Mother’s Day,” or what our Young Friends call, “Old Friends Day.” It has been designated by our culture as a day of celebrating Mothers and Family.

As I reflected on today’s message, I thought about the family and home in which I was reared. It could be called a stereotypical “Leave it to Beaver” *Christian/Quaker Home*, but it was also a somewhat *dysfunctional home*. I had loving parents, but they were not without their faults and imperfections. As my siblings will tell you, I was the favorite of three children, a mantel I proudly wore while at home, but I can now see just how unfair such a mantel was.

Our evening dinner times together were always difficult for me. When we speak of the ideal home, having dinner together as families is always emphasized as a way to bring families together. Every episode of “Leave it to Beaver” showed the family eating dinner together. For me, such dinner times were to be *endured*, and I always tried to get through them as quickly as possible! The conversation was rarely pleasant. I was always being “drilled”

by my father about my day in school, and these dinners usually involved the airing of frustrations between my mother and father. I found that if I could keep everyone laughing through dinner by telling jokes and doing my John F. Kennedy impersonation, it was bearable. Being the family comedian was a way of keeping the peace between my mother and father.

The family, however it is defined, is the basic unit of our civilized society, and it should be the first place where we learn the values on which we build our lives. Even with the dysfunction, it was in my family that I learned the values by which I try to live.

When Jesus told his disciples that they are the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world,” it must have sounded strange. Here was this cadre of misfits being told by Jesus that they are to become a fellowship of light to the world! How was this to be? They certainly had no worldly power to generate the kind of energy that it would take to become such a light. All that they had was *one another*, and the promise of Jesus that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He will be with them. The task of being the “light of the world” must have seemed impossible when first proposed by Jesus, and yet the challenge was taken seriously by those He called.

As Quakers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we stand in the tradition of the salt and light about which Jesus was speaking. We are called *to let our lights shine*. As ill-equipped as we may feel, and as dysfunctional as each of us is, we are called to be *generators of light*. And the genesis of such light begins within those places where we are being reared...our families.

Where do we begin the venture of being a fellowship of light to the world?

I believe that a fellowship of light begins with *spiritual nurture*. Although difficult, the most important thing that we should be doing within our families is *to nurture one another spiritually*. It should be the place where we help one another live the Quaker Testimonies of *Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Stewardship*. It should be the place where we learn to love one another, and where we learn to be careful not to wound one another's hearts. It is the place where we learn that every black, brown and white man and every black, brown and white woman, every victim of abuse, every abandoned child, every lonely senior, every intellectually and physically challenged person, every single person, every gay, transgender person, every prisoner, every homeless person, every immigrant, documented or undocumented, everyone we love and everyone we fear, are *the image of God in our midst*.

**I have often wondered how families who do not have a values and faith base operate in a world filled with one personal or social crisis after another. It must be emotionally paralyzing. Nurturing our spiritual selves within the family context, whatever that family may look like, will help us through life's most difficult experiences.**

**“You are the light of the world...” These are heady words for each of us, and yet together, in our families and the various communities in which we interact, I believe that we can generate the light that can make a difference in a hurting world. The fellowship of light is a fellowship that is open, honest and real. It is a fellowship where we learn to love and care for one another. It is a center of spiritual growth where the spiritual nurture of one another is our first priority. If God is truly revealed in the life of Jesus, then the most important thing to God is the creation of these centers of loving fellowship, which in turn infect the world. Such centers of love have never been more needed than right now.**