Good morning, Friends.

My name is Donne Hayden, and I am guest speaker today while Jim Newby, Minister here at Cincinnati Friends, takes a much-needed vacation.

Most of the time when Quakers speak of the Light, as in the Light of Christ, the Light Christ brought to the world, the Holy Spirit ~ the Light, it is as a comforting, healing, guiding Presence. But the Light is what it needs to be, and sometimes, the Light is dis-comforting. Here is Margaret Fell, founding mother of Quakerism, on that quality of the Light.

"Now, Friends, deal plainly with yourselves, and let the eternal Light search you, and try you, for the good of your souls. For this will deal plainly with you. It will rip you up, and lay you open, and make all manifest which lodges in you; the secret subtlety of the enemy of your souls, this eternal searcher and trier will make manifest. Therefore all to this come, and by this be searched, and judged, and led and guided. For to this you must stand or fall."

In the past few months, the Light has been searching out and making manifest on a national scale the broken system of racism, swollen to bursting with injustice and oppression. Like many of you, I have been forced to think about racism and the systemic violence that accompanies it and to question if I have a part in all this.

My first impulse to the George Floyd killing was to go across the street and down a few houses to the home of a black family I’ve never met or spoken to, and leave a note or flowers or some gift on their porch. My daughter thought that might be a little strange.

In the end, I did not go weeping to my black neighbors’ house and leave a love note, in part because within a day or so, I began to read articles like “I Don’t Want Love Texts from My White Friends,” in which black people said, in the middle of their own grief and anger over yet another police killing of a black man, that they were being overwhelmed with expressions of affection from white friends, along with questions like, “What can I do?” Black people felt a subtle if unspoken expectation to make the white friend feel better. Here’s a succinct example from a black woman on Twitter. She wrote: “black women: we are sad, frustrated, hurt, exhausted--. White women: okay, so what I’m hearing is you’re mad at me.” First of all, black people were saying, educate yourselves ~ please don’t ask us to do that for you. And don’t make this about you and your feelings. Listen to us. Listen to our experience. Learn from it and help make it change.
Clearly, something must be done and done by people, like me, who claim to not be racists. At the suggestion of a friend, I began reading the book *White Fragility*. At the outset, I had all the symptoms of that disorder: denial, indignance, defensiveness, even anger at the idea that I could be part of the racist problem.

Here, let me be a typical liberal white person with you:

I can honestly and sincerely declare that I am not prejudiced; I am not biased; I wish no harm to anyone because of their skin color or any other attribute. I insist that I am a person of compassion and kindness who would not intentionally discriminate against a person of color.

Within the first two chapters of *White Fragility*, I understood that in spite of my personal attitudes, I live in a racist system structured by and for people like me, and because I thrive in this system, I am thus a part of it, and racist. Living in a Communist society, accepting its values and willingly benefitting from it would make me a communist, would it not? Near the end of the first chapter, the author says: “To interrupt white fragility, we need to build our capacity to sustain the discomfort of not knowing, the discomfort of being racially unmoored, the discomfort of racial humility.” Racial humility.

Humility. A good Quaker value. A good Christian value. A value shared by most if not all religious and spiritual traditions.

This reminded me of a passage from a little book titled *QuakerPsalms: A Book of Devotions*, in which selections from George Fox’s *Journal* are formatted as psalms or poems. *QuakerPsalm 2* comes from Fox’s account of a vision he had.

> I saw it was fallen men and women
> Who get up into scriptures and find fault,
> Who cry out against Cain, Esau, and Judas,
> And other wicked men of former times,
> But do not see the nature of Cain, of
> Esau, of Judas in themselves. These say
> It is they, they, they, that were bad people.

> But when we come, by the Light and Spirit
> Of Truth, to see into ourselves, then we
> Come to say “I, I, I, I myself have
> Been Ishmael, Esau! I have closed my eyes,
> Stopped my ears, hardened my heart! I was
> Dull of hearing. I hated the Light. I rebelled
> Against it. I quenched the Spirit

> And vexed and grieved it.

...
I resisted the Holy Spirit.
I got the form of Godliness, but turned
Against the power. I, the ravening wolf,
The well without water, tree without fruit.
It is I, Lord, who have done these things.”

This sounds very dramatic, I know, with its references to Cain of the murdering spirit, Esau of the brutish spirit, and Judas of the betraying spirit. And the “fallen men and women,” who are hypocrites using scripture to judge others. I don’t linger in these lines except to acknowledge my own sometimes harsh, angry or judgmental impulses. The kernel of truth here that stops me and speaks to my condition, is in the lines: “I have closed my eyes, stopped my ears, hardened my heart.” I have lived my rather long lifetime in a racist society, amid great injustice and suffering that I chose not to see, hear, or deal with. I have lived my safe, peaceful life and been grateful for it, not for a moment considering that I have this life in large part because I am white. Of course I’ve been aware that many people in my country live in fear and poverty, but that awareness barely touched my day-to-day life. For black people, I and those like me have been the well without water, the tree without fruit, and some of us have been the ravening wolf.

What can I do? What can kind, compassionate white people do? Let us unstop our ears, open our eyes, soften our hearts. Listen to black people, indigenous people, and people of color (there’s an acronym for this: BIPOC). Learn and get educated about racism.

A plethora of resources is available right now and many of you may know more than I do. One that speaks to me is a 9-week on-line course that I have registered for, “Radical Acting in Faith for White People,” from the American Friends Service Committee. Here is the course description: “Engage in deep, embodied learning and practice with other white people of faith working to end white supremacy. We will build the skills to show up fully, follow BIPOC leadership, speak effectively, and engage in direct action.” I hope by the end of 9 weeks, I will know what I can do.

We must be open to the leading of the Light and move forward toward change. We cannot change what we will not see, hear, or talk about. We must no longer turn our eyes away from injustice, nor let racism be hidden in our silence. I hear Margaret Fell saying to us,

Therefore all to the Light come, and by the Light be searched, and judged, and led and guided. For by this we must stand or fall.