Costing not less than everything: sustainability and spirituality in challenging times

The 2011 Swarthmore Lecture, given on Monday 1 August 2011, at Yearly Meeting Gathering at Canterbury

Pam Lunn

Text of the spoken lecture

My title for this lecture as well as for the book that accompanies it is ***Costing not less than everything: sustainability and spirituality in challenging times***. During this lecture I'll follow the shape of the chapters in the book: Only one Earth; What kind of community? What does a good life look like? How long is "sustainable"? We are all crew; The time is now.

So I start with that fundamental truth, that we have only one Earth.

(Image: NASA 1968)

This image from the 1968 Apollo 8 moon mission shows a gibbous Earth hanging low in the sky above a barren moon surface It's known as *Earthrise*. In 1980 the astronomer Carl Sagan gave it the caption: 'The home planet of an emerging technical civilization struggling to avoid self-destruction.'

This was the first of the famous photographs of Earth from space but arguably the most influential image to come out of the whole American space program was the one sent back by Apollo 17 four years later.

(Image: NASA 1972)

This image shows the whole disc of Earth, with the oceans either side of the African continent, and a swirl of white cloud above. It's known as the 'Blue Marble' and came to be the most widely reproduced image in all history. It was used by environmental campaigning groups, by commercial organisations, in advertisements, on book covers and on stickers, postcards, and more. This view of the world alone in the blackness of space touched something deep in many, many people.

The photograph was widely sold as a postcard with a one-word caption, 'Home'; and on another one with the words, 'Love Your Mother'.

The power of such an image, the idea that it would foster if it ever became available, had been predicted as far back as 1950. That idea was, in essence, about the unity of Earth and of life on Earth.

'Blue Marble' was the most used but it was the *Earthrise* image, the first one we ever saw, that Al Gore credited with starting the whole modern environmental movement. It's estimated that about two billion people (a bit more than half the population of the world at that time) watched the live TV transmissions of that first moon shot on Christmas Eve 1968.

And the sequence of events that followed bear out Al Gore's suggestion: Friends of the Earth was founded in 1969; the first 'Earth Day' in the USA was in 1970; Greenpeace was founded in 1971; along with many other less well-known initiatives all around the world.

The decade-long Apollo programme was the largest and most expensive undertaking in the whole of human history that wasn't about waging war. Looking back now, the lessons and emotions of that time flow into our current concerns about climate change and other environmental threats that have magnified since then.

Recalling what was stirred in many people including those professed as non-religious we need to take with utter seriousness the place of theology religion and spirituality as necessary to our human response to the challenges now facing us. People of faith, of all faiths, have a crucial role to play.

Our sense of the oneness of Earth can now be reinforced by developments that have occurred in the time since those space missions, in another area of science altogether: genetics. The study of something called mitochondrial DNA shows that the genetic heritage of humanity retains only one female lineage surviving from our earliest ancestors to us now.

There is only one Earth, and only one family; we are indeed all cousins. And we might look to cultures other than our own, where family relationships are reckoned differently, and where relations whom we call 'cousins' would be viewed as brothers and sisters. We are all truly one family, we are all truly brothers and sisters, not only ideologically or spiritually but also biologically; in our flesh and in our bones we are family.

Of course further back than humanity we're kin to all life on Earth through the process of evolution. It really is the case that there is a tree of life; one tree, not a forest. We're deeply connected to the whole chain of living beings even down to the level of our biochemistry.

As Friends we would perhaps look first to our spirituality as a response to the majestic scale of what confronts us, but we shouldn't underestimate the place of theology in creating frameworks of meaning and purpose that can inspire and move us to action. A significant consequence of a theistic religion is the sense of human dependence: we didn't make this Earth, we don't sustain it, we don't own it.

So this brings us to the issue of community. What we somehow have to rediscover, we as the whole human community, is that the Earth is not ours to dispose of as we wish. Even if people can't subscribe to a belief that 'the Earth is the Lord's' there are other ways of seeing that we're not the owners. We're merely tenants passing through, with the responsibility of a full repairing lease on the premises and borrowing everything we use. We're the current stewards of the Earth and we urgently, very urgently, need to start being good stewards.

There's a saying that we don't inherit the Earth from our ancestors but rather we borrow it from our children, and their children's children. We're currently borrowing more than can we can pay back, and it's not only about our carbon emissions. 'Earth Overshoot Day' is the point in the year when we've used up as much of the Earth's total resources as the Earth itself can regenerate in a year. Since the late 1980s We've been going into eco-deficit each year progressively degrading the whole environment, with the overshoot day arriving a little earlier each year.

In 2010 the moment of overshoot was estimated to be on 21 August. The final calculations for 2011 aren't yet available* but it looks as though it might be a little later this year, a tiny shred of hope generated by the global economic downturn and reinforcing what we know: that the fundamental problem is our ever-increasing consumption

The sense of one vast human community (6.7 billion now compared with about 4 billion during the Apollo missions) may act as a focal point or motivator for some people but for most of us our actual sense of community is much closer to home. As the effects of climate change and peak oil start to impact significantly on our own, local, lives we'll need to rely much more on our immediate community. And indeed starting to do that now, before we're forced to, is one of the ways of reducing carbon emissions caused by the transportation of both goods and people. It also gets us used to new ways of doing things. It's good practice.

For an increasing number of people there's a deep sense of recognition that a 'good life' 'good' in material, ethical and spiritual ways is very far removed from the average western lifestyle and, fundamentally, that such a life has some kind of community at its core. Such a community, enabling real belonging, has to be based on reserves of trust, mutuality and unselfishness; trust that one isn't alone, trust that there are others who'll help to make life possible. In our individualised materialistic Western lives those are qualities fast fading from the norms of everyday life.

One thing we do know is that creating and living in community isn't easy. For instance in *The Rule of St Benedict* Chapter 70 is titled, 'That no one presume to strike another unlawfully'. It's always instructive to note what's forbidden by any institution, whether religious or secular. The fact that someone has taken the trouble to forbid something is a sure sign that it's happening and perhaps often!

Of course 'community' isn't limited to intentional residential community. In the religious context there's a long history of the local church congregation being 'community' for its members in many ways including, at its best, spiritual nurture, practical help, human fellowship and common purpose. And for much of Quaker history this has been a significant dimension to the life and organisation of the

Society of Friends. Indeed in *Quaker Faith and Practice* Chapter 10 is titled, 'Belonging to a Quaker Meeting' and its first sub-heading is 'Our Community', a section containing 20 extracts.

The fact that the next sub-heading is 'Conflict within the Meeting' tells us something else important about community, as does the fact that this section has only four entries: it's not a matter that we find easy to deal with. This isn't so much about a need for 'conflict resolution' as about finding together the deep grounding of our commonality, something deeper than mere 'agreement'.

In many of our local Quaker meetings today there's concern about the 'meeting as community' and how that sense may be fostered. Newcomers among us often speak of finding Friends as a kind of 'coming home' and it's vital that we foster our capacity to welcome and include those who seek us out, as well as finding ways to make ourselves more accessible to those who might have assumed that our way isn't for them. But one of the dilemmas about being welcoming to newcomers, and about 'being community' for and with each other in our local meetings, is finding the right balance between separateness and togetherness. Quakers as a group, for many reasons, have a higher proportion of introverts than is the case in the surrounding society. So a particular challenge for us, and perhaps therefore a gift we may be able to offer to others, is how to create community that works for introverts.

As Friends we may find that the fruits of our explorations into creating and sustaining community in our meetings can become a resource for others in our local areas, as we discover together how to move towards a lower-carbon way of living. Some of our Quaker processes and practices are so familiar to us, so taken-for-granted, that we can forget how precious, powerful and significant they are. If we're true to our Quaker principles and practices, true to our leadings, and to what we're capable of being at our best, then we have a gift that we can offer to the wider world in this era of growing need.

While there are some Friends involved in creating forms of intentional community, living together in some form of shared housing, for the vast majority of us our community will be forged from the locality where we happen to find ourselves living. And community does have to be *created* – it doesn't just happen by virtue of living in close proximity with one another. Much of Transition Town activity, for instance, while being stimulated by the challenges of peak oil, climate change and energy descent, is actually directed to the re-creation of local community in terms of both practical activities together and enhanced relationships. And, of course, it's often the case that undertaking a significant task together is a deeply effective way of building community relationships.

We also need to start thinking about what kind of national community we want to be here in Britain. The current best estimates of how a warming climate will affect these islands suggest that we'll fare relatively well compared to many other parts of the world. We'll be neither drowned nor drought-stricken. This will make us, along with some other particular places, one of the attractive destinations for the slow but inexorable stream of climate refugees from all over the globe; we'll become one of the 'lifeboats'. But we're already a crowded island. If we had to be self-sufficient because of disrupted international trade we don't have enough land and fishing

grounds to feed our present population, let alone a vastly increased one. Friends have a history of concern for refugees and asylum-seekers. That concern, projected forwards, implies that we should start now to prepare a response to the popular and political voices that will certainly be raised in antagonism to the needs of those beyond our shores.

This will be a very difficult dilemma. Do we turn people away in order to preserve the life and health of those already here? Or do we take people in and, if the latter, how do we feed a growing population on a small land-mass? If we take in some people but not all, how do we make those decisions? While these problems aren't yet pressing upon us, we need to start now, in this relatively peaceful and non-urgent time, to think long-term about this aspect of our future. As Friends we need to have confidence in our history on these matters in our ability to influence and to 'speak truth to power'.

Considering the aspirations of any form of intentional community, or enhanced local neighbourhood, can tell us something about our dreams for the kind of life we'd like to be living: what does a 'good life' look like?

Our cultural roots offer many prescriptions for what the 'good life' might consist of and some of them resonate with current ecological concerns. Some three and a half thousand years ago, for instance, Moses gave the Israelites what we now call the Ten Commandments. In our 21st century times of environmental awareness, not 'coveting our neighbour's goods' takes on a modern twist as a commandment against consumerism. Our Quaker testimony to simplicity can lull us into thinking that we know all about this but, living in a rich country, our calibration of what 'simple' consists of is a very, very long way from the global average. If we're to be truthful in our witness to simplicity we have a long way to go.

We've become accustomed to thinking about 'peak oil' and our 'carbon footprints' but these are only a beginning. Our next focus should be on 'peak water' and our 'water footprints'. Beyond water, 'peak wood', 'peak food', 'peak phosphate' and 'peak soil' all require our attention. Reduced availability of fossil fuels, water and good land all impact on food production. 'Food insecurity' is something we'll be hearing about with greater frequency and urgency.

The concept of eco-justice hasn't yet made its way into the mainstream public conversation about the environment and Friends may need to consider how our voice should be raised on that concern. Every reduction or saving of resources that we undertake here is an act of solidarity with the poorest people in the developing world, whose lives are already being worsened by climate impacts. The dimension of what we might term 'generational justice' has barely been heard yet. This is a theme I'll return to later, but suffice it to say here that those of us born in the industrialised world in the middle portion of the twentieth century have, as a generational and geographical cohort, lived with more than our fair share of even the rich world's resources.

There are other areas where Friends have a track-record of concern and action from which we could bring time-honoured concepts to bear upon the current environmental situation. For instance, arising out of our long-standing concern and

work in the field of criminal justice can we bring models of restorative justice into the climate debate? In this case the ‘victims’ are both the environment itself and poor people in the parts of the world already most devastated by the effects of climate change. The tragedy currently unfolding in the Horn of Africa is a warning on many levels: climate, politics (both local and global), economics and armed conflict. What might restorative climate justice look like on a global scale?

Another example would be Responsibility to Protect (known as ‘R2P’) which was discussed by Paul Lacey in the 2010 Swarthmore Lecture. R2P currently focuses on preventing and halting four crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. Building on our history of support for and work with the United Nations we might initiate a movement to add to this list, crimes against the environment.

The changes required of all of us, the demands that will be made on humanity over the next 30 to 50 years, are enormous. A few people and communities have started to grasp the magnitude of this but collectively, as nations, as political entities, we haven’t even taken the first step. Beyond recycling, beyond changing our light bulbs, beyond ‘doing our bit’, lies the biggest challenge of humanity’s entire history. This isn’t about guilt and isn’t a matter for self-laceration. It requires intelligence, imagination, and cooperation from everyone.

For those of us starting from a faith commitment it requires re-orientation to the inward springs that nourish outer action. For Friends specifically we must revitalise what ‘testimony’ really means: a powerful outflowing from the depths of our spiritual experience, because we are impelled, because we can do no other.

How do we become the change we want to see? How do we motivate ourselves and others to do what we know is needed? How do we as a community of Friends, as a religious bodybecome beacons, ‘patterns and examples’? Alongside members of other religious groupswe have deeply held views about the nature of human beings. We also believe that the best can be elicited from people given love and the right circumstances. We need to be more bold in our beliefs in the face of what can often seem to be an indifferent and cynical world. If our ‘good life’ flows out of our love of life, our compassion, our joy, then it will also touch others. If we love the Earth, we reduce our consumption and our waste because it’s truly a joyful thing to do and not a grim, guilty necessity. A good life can’t be for ourselves alone but flows out of a love that embraces the whole of life on Earth past, present and imagined future.

Which brings us of course to ‘sustainability’. How long is “sustainable”?

Cosmologist Brian Swimme said this,

> “It’s really simple. Here’s the whole story in one line. This is the greatest discovery of the scientific enterprise: You take hydrogen gas and you leave it alone and it turns into rosebushes giraffes and humans.”

The point is that you leave it alone for a very, very, very long time. We have great difficulty imagining even much shorter time-spans than this. If the human habitation

on this Earth is to become sustainable in reality we have to use our imaginations and expand our time horizons.
We have to believe, *really* believe, that the far distant future will be real, and act in such a way that it will remain broadly bio-friendly (and not just deceptively people-friendly in the short term).

Some years ago, as the millennium approached, there was a public consultation in Britain to discover what people felt would be appropriate commemorative projects, and there was an overwhelming surge of public support for tree planting. To plant a tree is to believe in a future, maybe 100, maybe 1000 years hence. To plant a tree is to be hopeful, not in the sense of casual optimism but hope as an act of will, a choice to take a certain attitude to the future. And trees can tell us something about that vexed term 'sustainability'. It's an abstract word, difficult to get a grip on in ways that make it mean something real to us. But it's actually quite simple: if we all carry on doing what we're doing now, forever, will that work? Of course it won't, but to make 'forever' real to us we need to enlarge our sense of time and trees help us to begin to do that. The oldest trees we know of are more than 3000 years old; they date back to the Iron Age. We need such images to help us comprehend these long timescales, because tangible images of the long past may help us imagine a long future.

And as we take that long look into the future we start of course from where we are now, a physical and social world that has already been deeply shaped by the forces of industrialisation, mechanisation, mass production and consumption; but also a social world in which the real costs of this are only now becoming truly understood. Early Friends believed they were living in the 'end times', that the Second Coming would occur in their lifetimes and so everything about how to live, about choices and priorities, was shaped by this. As time went by and it became clear that this wasn't happening there began a slow adaptation to living in the 'meantime'. As an old cartoon has it: 'The end is *not* near you must learn to cope!'

The present environmental crisis is often portrayed in apocalyptic terms: is humanity facing another kind of 'end time'? What kind of spiritual response is required of us? I think we need a combination of 'now' and 'forever', like the old country saying, 'Live your life as if you'll die tomorrow; farm your land as if you'll live forever.'

The greatest barrier to making effective change in our behaviour towards a more sustainable way of living is the hugely powerful force of habit, the extraordinary proportion of our lives that are run by our 'autopilot'. Buddhism teaches that our habitual way of existing is like being 'asleep' and we need to 'wake up'. The way to do this is the practice of mindfulness, together with the cultivation of compassion. If you seek to practise mindfulness or awareness, then everything every action, every moment, every situation may be regarded as an occasion of practice.

Given that our governments aren't taking sufficient action sufficiently quickly on climate change, and given a worsening global economic environment, we're all going to face failures of our infrastructure and interruptions to our normal supplies of energy, food, goods and services. So when temporary glitches cause this to happen now, treat it as practice – that's in the usual sense of a rehearsal (get used to the idea, get used to handling it and being resourceful), and as a personal mental discipline leading to equanimity in the face of irritations or worse. Treat *everything* as

practice. For all the changes ahead of us we need to be prepared, we need to be practised and the practice we need is spiritual, psychological, emotional and very, very practical.

Marshall McLuhan is reported to have said, “There are no passengers on Spaceship Earth. We’re all crew.” In the current environmental crisis, and I don’t say ‘coming crisis’ because it’s already with us, there’s no space for passengers; we all have to take responsibility. And if we’re all crew, then we all need to be well-informed and ‘trained’; just as, among unprogrammed Friends, our commitment to the priesthood of all believers means that we each have to offer gifts, talents, ministry in many forms, leadership and seriousness of purpose.

So what’s needed to turn ‘passengers’ into ‘crew’? There’s substantial field of research into human behaviour in emergencies that goes under the name of ‘bystander intervention’ or ‘bystander apathy’. If I’m a bystander to some emergency event, I have to make a series of decisions about whether or not I’ll step forward to intervene. First, I have to notice that something is happening and then interpret it as needing intervention. I have to decide if I feel I have a responsibility to act; if so what form should that take – should I try to help directly or call the emergency services?

This research applies to perceived emergencies and although the current environmental crisis actually is an emergency, it’s what one writer calls a ‘long emergency’, which makes it hard for most people to perceive it as such.

But let’s bring this field of research specifically to the subject of climate change and apply the five steps in the ‘bystander’ process:

- notice that climate change is a problem
- interpret this as a situation in which something needs doing
- assume personal responsibility for doing something
- choose what to do
- implement that

It’s clear that climate change is a problem – it’s already been noticed! And it’s clear that something must be done. These are the easy steps. The critical third step is that we, each and all of us, take responsibility for doing something. There are many, many reasons for *not* doing something, whereas the one valid reason *for* doing something is that it’s the right thing to do. And one of the common factors found among the bystanders who intervened, who assumed responsibility in the situation they found themselves in, was a strong belief that what you do or fail to do does actually make a difference. It matters what choices we make.

Perhaps even more pointed in our current situation is James Hansen’s advice. Hansen, a senior scientist in NASA, was the person who first said that the ice caps would respond quickly to global warming and he was right. His stark message in his most recent book may be summed up as this: the situation is worse than we’re being told; your governments are lying to you; nothing is being done; you can’t compromise with nature and the laws of physics; consequently, it’s up to you – civil resistance may be the only way forward.

If it's 'up to us' what might this mean in practice? To start with it's all those things we already know about but may not yet have fully implemented in our own lives: insulate our houses; use less gas and electricity; reduce our travelling; change our means of travel; eat less meat (or none at all); reduce all consumption and waste; re-use, repair and recycle everything we can; shop less and shop local; reduce food miles; grow your own; compost food waste; buy without packaging; cook fresh food from scratch instead of buying processed food . . . and so on, and so on, and so on.

Many of us are already doing some of this, some of the time. We *all* need to do *all* of it *all* of the time consistently and reliably, forever. These are all decisions we can make individually or by household. Beyond that, things start to get a bit more difficult. Beyond our private lives, how about tackling the carbon emissions of the places where we work? This might involve us in difficult conversations with management; if we are 'the management' then it might involve us in difficult conversations with trustees or shareholders; if we are the trustees or shareholders then it's time we faced the fact that increased costs or reduced profits in the short term are not an argument for doing nothing.

And then there's our local area, the place where we live and the local government structures there. Have we got Transition Town activity already happening? If so, are we involved? If not, can we help to start it? Would it help to think of ourselves as 'Transition Quakers' or 'Transition Friends'? Do we know what our local councillors are doing, or not doing, about sustainability? Might a few more of us be called to take our Quaker values into the public, political arena and stand for election? What about our constituency MPs? We can start holding public figures to account. We can do all of this before we get anywhere near James Hansen's advised position of 'civil resistance' – though we might find ourselves called to that at some point.

These are all the basic minimal things that every responsible citizen needs to do, whether or not they have any religious underpinning. For those of us who profess a faith how can we countenance doing less? Some scientists are saying that it's already too late to stop runaway climate change. Others are saying that we still have a small and rapidly narrowing window in which to act. Either way how we choose to live together will be crucial.

The critical stage in the process of becoming a 'bystander who intervenes' (turning 'passenger' into 'crew') is the step of 'taking responsibility'. What can help and enable that? So now we come to the implications of all this for us as Friends. The time is now.

I've already mentioned a number of campaigns and movements to which we might appropriately lend our voice and energy, but I have in mind something more fundamental than that. 'Action' in our Quaker context is 'testimony', faith in action, witness in the world, Spirit-led ways of living because we can do no other. The point is to 'bring in the Kingdom' (or 'the republic of heaven'), to engage in *tikkun olam*, a Hebrew phrase meaning 'repairing the world'.

For me the central and underlying question for us as Quakers is this: are we content to be merely a support group for people on their individual spiritual journeys or are we able to rediscover a solidarity as a people of God? The latter would of course

include elements of the former, but would be something much larger and deeper, much more demanding, much more daunting and challenging, much more exciting and far-reaching. I believe we're called at this time to rediscover what this would mean and I offer three pointers: spiritual discipline, community and action.

First, the rediscovery of the importance of **spiritual discipline** (or maybe discovery for the first time). This matters both for its own sake (for God's sake) and as preparation for the times ahead of us. The point of a spiritual discipline lies in what the Buddhists call it: practice. It's practice in the same sense as playing your scales and doing your five-finger exercises if you're a pianist. It's not exciting, mostly it's not interesting but you do it regularly and faithfully because without it you can't do what you deeply and truly desire to do. Spiritual discipline is five-finger exercises for the soul. It trains the mind and heart, the psyche and the emotions, so that when the going is tough, when the ordinary comforts aren't available, when the demands on us seem to be greater than our capacity, we have something that we discover we can rely upon. We can't start to create this resilience when things are already difficult any more than we could run a marathon tomorrow morning if we only started training this afternoon.

What distinguishes any practice as a 'spiritual discipline' is that it takes a particular aspect of your life and turns it constantly towards the Spirit. There are many forms of such discipline: traditional prayer and reflective reading of the bible or other texts; mindfulness meditation; various body-disciplines such as yoga, Tai Chi or Chi Gong; journal-writing, painting or other art work; walking, gardening or various types of handwork undertaken mindfully; and many others. It can also be faithfully visiting an elderly neighbour or undertaking some other form of practical service.

Turning any of these activities into a spiritual discipline involves first *intention* – that we approach them with that purpose and desire; second *mindfulness* – that we actively seek to sustain a focussed and calm awareness of the present moment and turn away from distractions and scattered thoughts; third that we *practise regularly* so the habit of mindfulness will grow and start to spread out into more and more of our daily life. All such practices remove our individual egos from the centre of the stage. Similarly, we – humanity – need to find ways of moving our collective ego out of the way.

In addition to the three *characteristics* – intention, mindfulness, regular practice – there are three helpful *attitudes* for establishing a life-giving spiritual discipline. The *first* is a version of "pray as you can, not as you can't" – don't try to do something you think you 'ought' to do if it means setting yourself up to fail. This shouldn't be like taking out gym membership on 2 January and then giving up by the end of the month! *Second,* find something that works for your temperament abilities and daily pattern of life: be realistic. *Lastly*, consider finding a Spiritual Friend, a 'prayer buddy', a companion for your journey, so you can encourage and uphold each other.

Undertaken faithfully and sustained over time such practices attune our inner ear to the promptings of the Spirit so that when we're called, when our service is required, we will first of all hear the call and secondly will have the capacity to respond. This is all true for each of us as individuals. It's also the case for us as local communities of Friends and as a national or world Quaker community.

Which brings me to my **second** pointer: are we, and in what ways, willing to '**be community**' with and for each other? Being community means being willing to be accountable to each other in ways that early Friends were, and in ways that we find much more challenging in our 21st century individualistic culture. Being community, being accountable, means relinquishing some of our individual freedoms and the benefits to be gained from that can't become apparent to us until after we've taken that step.

And so to my **third** pointer, **action**. "Only a demanding common task builds community" says George Mcleod, founder of the Iona Community. The 'demanding task' facing the whole of humanity is quite clear even though our political leaders have repeatedly ducked it.
But what specifically might be our task as Quakers? Here is one possibility.

We know that it's imperative for both individuals and institutions to reduce their carbon emissions, and that this isn't a one-off operation but a progressive year-on-year-on-year reduction. Groups of people who work together to achieve this are known as low carbon communities. In most cases a low carbon community is a geographical group, perhaps a village, a street, a school or other institution, a business or other similar grouping. But let's consider the possibility of a dispersed low carbon community. Of course, I have in mind Britain Yearly Meeting. What would it mean for Quakers in Britain to be truly a low carbon community?

It would require a number of steps to be taken: that each of us as individual members of the Yearly Meeting commit ourselves honestly and practically to reducing our own carbon emissions progressively, by an agreed amount, year on year on year (the 10:10 Campaign would make that ten per cent – challenging but achievable); that each of our meetings and meeting houses does the same; that our gathering together for area meetings or other functions be held in a manner that reduces the carbon emissions of all that travelling; that Woodbrooke and Friends House, along with all the other Quaker-owned or Quaker-run organisations around the country also succeed in this reduction; and that we find low carbon methods of holding Yearly Meeting and Meeting for Sufferings.

This would require from us both **commitment** and **discipline**. Our **commitment** would have to be not only to carbon reduction but also to the corporate witness of Quakers in Britain. The **discipline** required would encompass our carbon-related behaviour as well as the mutual accountability of being part of a larger corporate body.

Friends have been most influential and effective in our witness when tested by external circumstances, when the world presents dilemmas that require the best of Quaker spiritual discipline, both individual and corporate. In Britain this was particularly manifest in the two world wars. Friends had a clear issue to confront, it required steadfastness and faithfulness to do so, and the public stance taken drew many people to seek out Friends for succour, spiritual nurture and practical support. For the generations alive now climate change is the testing issue of our times.

So this is potentially a moment in history when Quakers are needed: needed to be faithful to Quaker testimonies; needed to be visible, to be speaking out, to be offering leadership; needed to 'do the right thing' in the face of external pressing circumstances. To accomplish this we have to deepen our spiritual grounding, alone and together, not solely for inward exploration but for the future of human society. A further challenge will be to find the corporate will, the rediscovery of a depth of corporate discipline, to undertake this together wholly and fully, and not just as a matter of some individuals' personal choices.

But if we as Friends were to find our way truly to 'be the change', we would contribute to the necessary decarbonising of British society, we would offer a beacon of leadership to others lacking a community context and we would strengthen, deepen and revitalise the life of our Religious Society. Are we ready to undertake this? We are the people alive now, we are the people who know about the problem, who else do we imagine is going to do what needs to be done? We need a consciousness and a spirituality that creates in us joy, gratitude, determination, courage and humility. And we can't do this without spiritual practices and ways of living that will sustain and nourish us over the very long haul.

First we need to strengthen or remake the depth of our connectedness with the rest of creation, with the whole web of life. Remaking this heart-connection won't be without emotional cost. We may find ourselves needing to grieve the loss of species and habitats, the impoverishment of our environment and our inability to save everything.

The *second* thing we need to do to is to rebuild community, within our Meetings, within each of our local neighbourhoods and by integrating our Meetings more deeply and broadly within the geographic communities where they happen to be located. Building a community requires us all to participate, all to take responsibility. It's another version of us all being 'crew'. Community isn't something that other people create so that I, you, we can then become parasitical on it and reap the benefits. Community only happens when everyone takes part in creating it. If we want our local Quaker meetings to be more vibrant places then none of us can be a passenger. This view of 'community' fits so well with our ways of organising ourselves as a religious society, with no 'separated ministry', that we might hope we'd be 'naturally' good at this. But we need to practise, we need to get good at it, we need to make it habitual and we need to make it a vital part of our personal and corporate spirituality.

The *third* change we have to make is to find new ways of framing the issues, to reclaim as well as declaim a radical vision for the future. Here's one example of what I mean: in the film *The Age of Stupid*, about climate change, there's a short animation sequence http://vimeo.com/5743996 that illustrates the idea of 'contraction and convergence' – a dreadful abstract phrase that will never inspire anyone. The animation starts by showing the current global distribution of per capita carbon emissions represented as differently sized people: the USA is huge, Europe quite a lot smaller, China smaller still; India is very small and Africa is tiny.

The characters then walk forwards along the timeline, the smallest growing a little, the largest shrinking a lot until, at the year 2035, all the characters reach the same

size; and then as they walk forwards to 2065 they all shrink at the same rate. This is a powerful image, not only of carbon reduction but also of global equity, of eco-justice. Let's reclaim a powerful political word for this: levelling. The Diggers (often referred to as the 'true levellers') were the group with this genuinely radical vision. They were part of the same seventeenth century cauldron of religious and political ferment as gave rise to Quakerism and their leader, Gerrard Winstanley, was among London Quakers at certain times of his life. 'Levelling' is the Quaker testimony to equality given a political edge.

And *fourthly* we need to act. The particular action appropriate for each of us will vary with our circumstances and one of the significant circumstances for any of us is our life-stage.

To my own cohort, often tagged the 'post-war baby-boom generation', I want to say this: by accident of birth our generation has, in many ways, been given the best of what the modern world had to offer and subsequent generations won't have many of those benefits. As we stand at perhaps the summit of our working lives we stand simultaneously at the summit of industrialised society as we've known it. We benefited hugely from the massive industrial expansion that characterised the second half of the twentieth century and now we're beginning to know what that has cost the planet. Even if we escape the worst effects ourselves, our children and our grandchildren will not. So what are we going to do with our active years beyond paid employment? There's a lot of us, we changed the face of politics when we were young, we could do so again. I believe that we owe a debt of gratitude and have a responsibility to do what we can, not only as individuals but also collectively.

To young people, just embarking on the steps into adult life, I want to say this: as you look at the options ahead of you, in terms of education, life skills and future work, consider what will be the truly essential skills in the future that you'll need in the changed world that's coming. If you plan to go to university either study something practical, such as engineering, medicine or agriculture; or, if you want to study for pleasure, enrichment and interest, start preparing now to acquire additional skills which will be the ones you'll need to support yourself and contribute to the life of your community whatever that is. Everyone needs to learn how to grow food, how make, mend and fix things. Between us, as extended families, networks of friends and local groups and communities, we need to take back the hand-skills that the modern world has 'outsourced' to mass production on the other side of the world. Also take care to develop your 'soft skills' – facilitation, leadership, conflict-handling, and learning how to build community around you, wherever you are in your life.

To older people, perhaps feeling that you're starting to move beyond an exterior active life, remember that you have skills and knowledge that urgently need to be passed on to subsequent generations. Consider how you may be able to ensure that your experience does not die with you.

And to everyone else, the large adult group that sits between these 'bookend' life stages: start now to acquire these new skills and attitudes for yourselves and help ensure that your children and grandchildren realise how essential and significant they are. This applies equally of course to those of us who don't have our own

biological children and grandchildren. Just as we're all 'crew', we're all the 'parents' and 'grandparents' of humanity's next generations.
We're all the ancestors of tomorrow.

(Image: NASA 1990)

This picture, known as the Pale Blue Dot, was taken in 1990 by the spacecraft *Voyager 1.* As it was about to leave the Solar System for ever, its camera was turned around to take this picture of Earth across a vast expanse of space, roughly 4 billion miles. The image, reconstructed electronically from pixels, shows a tiny distant speck, in a black space streaked by faintly coloured bands. These are rays of light from the sun.

Carl Sagan said of this image:

> Look again at that dot. That's here, that's home, that's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering [. . .] on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam [. . .] There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world.

This is it, this is home, this is Earth, and it's the only one we have. Looking again the 'Blue Marble', the whole disc of the Earth, we know that one-planet living isn't just a nice campaigning slogan. We either achieve one-planet living or we all perish.

And this isn't only about the choices that each individual 'I' must make. It's also about us as the gathered body of Quakers, as the Religious Society of Friends in Britain and around the world.

It's also about us as a people of God, as a people of faith alongside all other peoples of faith.

It's also about us as the human community, all of us together, all of us part of the community of all living beings here on Earth.

* The information has since been published: see
http://woodbrookegoodlives.blogspot.com/2011/09/27-september-2011-today-is-earth.html

Permissions

Sources for the spoken lecture

Robin Dunbar, *The Human Story* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005)
James Hansen, *Storms of My Grandchildren: the truth about the coming climate catastrophe and our last chance to save humanity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009)
James Howard Kunstler, *The Long Emergency: surviving the converging catastrophes of the twenty-first century* (London: Atlantic, 2005)
Paul Lacey, *The Unequal World We Inhabit: Quaker responses to terrorism and fundamentalism (Swarthmore Lecture 2010)* (London: Quaker Books, 2010)
Robert Poole, *Earthrise: how man first saw the Earth* (London: Yale University Press, 2008)
Quaker faith and practice: The book of Christian Discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain (London: The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, 1995
Alice Roberts, *The Incredible Human Journey* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009)
Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (London: Macdonald Futura Publishers, 1980)
Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot: a vision of the human future in space* (New York: Random House, 1994)
The Rule of St. Benedict (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007)

http://www.1010global.org/uk
http://www.brianswimme.org
http://www.globalfootprint.org
http://www.waterfootprint.org

The Age of Stupid, DVD, 2009; http://www.spannerfilms.net/films/ageofstupid

Further reading

The book that accompanies the lecture is: Pam Lunn, *Costing not less than everything: sustainability and spirituality in challenging times*, (London: Quaker Books, 2011). It is available at www.quaker.org.uk/shop/swarthmore/2011

Pam Lunn writes a regular blog that focuses on these issues: http://woodbrookegoodlives.blogspot.com

See also www.woodbrooke.org.uk/GoodLives