

**SLD07.22.07 16<sup>th</sup> Ordinary**  
**Emory Presbyterian Church**  
**Matthew 5:14-16, Proverbs 20:27**  
**Jill Oglesby Evans**

**“Rufus Jones – Militant Pacifist and Weighty Friend”**

In a sermon entitled “Lighted Lives,” Rufus Jones asked, “Who knows how the kindling flame of life and power leaps from one life to another? What is the magic quality in a person which instantly awakens faith? You listen to a hundred persons unmoved and unchanged: you hear a few quiet words from (one) with the kindling torch and suddenly you discover what life means for you forevermore, and become forthwith another person – carrying perhaps your own torch.”<sup>1</sup>

*How* a person of faith becomes enflamed with direction and purpose may have remained a mystery to Jones, yet there was never any question in his mind but that this is what could, would and should happen within the hearts of true disciples of Jesus Christ. For the “kindling flame of life and power” is the indwelling light of Christ, available to, indeed present in, all human hearts. “The human spirit is the lamp of the Lord,” says the writer of Proverbs. Or, the way Jones’ Bible said it, “the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord;” the heart is a candle of *God’s* lighting.

Remarked Jones, “There is something in (our) inmost being that can be kindled and struck into flame by God, and as we feed the flame with our lives, we become revealing places for God, a flame of God’s life.” The light from this flame is both the Inner Light, or, “that of God in everyone,” as Quakers are so fond of saying, and the light that Jesus tells us to shine before others so they might see our good works and give glory to our God in heaven. “The inner light,” “the light within,” the inward Christ,”

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<sup>1</sup> “Lighted Lives,” Rufus Jones, [www.qhpress.org/quakerpages/qhoa/rmill.htm](http://www.qhpress.org/quakerpages/qhoa/rmill.htm), p.1

“the spirit of Christ within,” are all ways of describing God’s free Spirit in immediate relationship with the heart of every human being, as well as the actions that proceed from it. “For no one,” as Jesus says, “after lighting a lamp, puts it under the bushel basket.”

Light and action, flame and purpose, inward Christ and outward witness, these were important concepts for this morning’s “saint,” Rufus Jones - American writer, editor, historian and college professor, and one of the most influential Quakers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For our visitors, we’re in the middle of a summer sermon series on powerful Christian witnesses of our past and present, which, for short hand, we call “saints.” As Christians of the reformed tradition, we do not worship these “saints,” nor even regard them as especially holy. But we *do* regard each year them with attention, and admiration, and inspiration, and appreciation for the testimony of their lives that the gospel, can, indeed, be lived.

And as I said, this morning’s witness is Rufus Jones, early 20<sup>th</sup> century scholar, and Quaker preacher, teacher and activist for peace. For those of you not familiar with Quakerism, allow me to offer a brief overview:

Quakerism is a Christian sect founded in 17<sup>th</sup> century England by persons dissatisfied with existing denominations (including, or maybe even especially the dour and rigid Presbyterians.) The official name for Quakers is The Religious Society of Friends.<sup>2</sup> The man traditionally credited as the founder, or certainly the most important early figure, of the Society of Friends is George Fox. Indeed, the name “Quaker” is linked to a story found in Fox’s journal, about the time in 1650 when Fox was brought before Justice Bennet of Derby on a charge of blasphemy. Wrote Fox, “Bennet called

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<sup>2</sup> “Religious Society of Friends,” Wikipedia, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quaker, p.1

us Quakers because we bid them tremble at the world of God.” Thus did the judge’s sardonic remark become a nickname that even Friends use for themselves.<sup>3</sup>

A historic “peace” church, that is, dedicated to pacifism, Quakers tend toward little hierarchical structure, and silent, unstructured worship. Because they believe that the “Inner Light of Christ” is present in all persons, anyone at a Quaker meeting (which is what they call their worship – a meeting) is welcome to break the communal silence in order to testify to the movement of the Spirit within them. Although there are Quaker sub-sects that have preachers, most meetings, including the one here in Atlanta to which Christopher has gone most of his life, are comprised of some combination of silence and the spoken testimony of whoever feels moved to share.

Although Quakerism emphasizes the direct accessibility and personal experience of God over logic and reasoned theology, it differs from other mystical religions in at least two important ways. First, Quaker mysticism is primarily group-oriented rather than focused on the individual – members of a meeting are meant to listen *together* for the movement of the Spirit of God. Secondly, Quaker mysticism also includes a strong emphasis on an outwardly-directed witness. Rather than seeking withdrawal from the world, the true Quaker mystic is expected to translate his or her inward experience of God into action.<sup>4</sup> This is why Quakers have been known throughout their history as social activists. As Isaac Penington wrote in 1670, “It is not enough to hear of Christ, or read of Christ, but this is the thing – to feel him my root, my life, my foundation....”<sup>5</sup> And thus feeling him, to *act*. Or, as James asks in the passage Libba just read, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works?”

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid p. 12

<sup>4</sup> Ibid p.3

<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia, p. 3.

Mind you, the writer of James, with his concern about salvation and works righteousness, was no Quaker, (or Presbyterian, either, for that matter.) But as to the matter of whether faith should *issue* in good works, now on *that* all Quakers, and Presbyterians would surely agree. Not in order to *earn* the salvation, of course – for that is already freely offered through Christ Jesus - but rather to *respond* to it, to celebrate it, to make it manifest as a way of ushering in the Kingdom of God. With that end in mind, Quakers, in particular, have historically gone further than most Christian sects toward implementing Jesus' teachings in daily and societal life.

So it was into a radical, mystical, egalitarian, activist Christian sect of peacemakers that Rufus Jones was born in 1863 in South China, Maine. Seeking degrees from Haverford College and Harvard University, Jones became a professor of philosophy and psychology at Haverford from 1893 until his retirement. He also taught, wrote and lectured voluminously on the topics of both Quakerism and pacifism. But true to his tradition, just writing and talking about his faith was not enough. Jones wanted to act in the world out of the flame of Christ kindled in him, which, like all spiritual ventures, involves risk and danger, vision and creative, road-making work, and a far more mature discipleship than mere obedience to commands.

In particular, Jones was gripped by his tradition's unswerving commitment to pacifism. Quakers believe that war in all its forms is incompatible with Christianity, and seek to promote peaceful methods for the settlement of all differences between nations and between persons.<sup>6</sup> Acting on his own conscience on April 30, 1917, less than one month after the United States entered World War I, Jones, together with a consortium of American Yearly Meetings founded the American Friends Service Committee, or AFSC,

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<sup>6</sup> "Essential Truths" by Rufus Jones and James Woods, [www.quakerinfo.com/esstruth.shtml](http://www.quakerinfo.com/esstruth.shtml), p.2

an organization designed to provide young Quakers and other conscientious objectors an opportunity to serve their country in meaningful ways other than participating in violence and fighting. “We are united in expressing our love for our country and our desire to serve her loyally,” read the minutes of that historic meeting. “We offer our services to the government of the United States in any constructive work in which we can conscientiously engage.” Not only did the American Friends Service Committee draw many, many young men and women to serve their country, Jones succeeded in persuading the United States government that overseas service with the AFSC should count as an alternative to American military service.

In its first year, the AFSC sent young men and women to France where they worked in cooperation with British Friends to feed and care for refugee children, founded a maternity hospital, repaired and rebuilt homes, and provided returning refugees with the necessities to restart their lives.<sup>7</sup>

After the war ended in 1918, the AFSC’s work spread to Russia, where workers helped victims of famine and disease; to Poland and Serbia, where they established an orphanage, to Germany and Austria, where they fed hungry children.

The 1930’s brought new challenges. During those turbulent years, Quaker workers provided relief for children on both sides of the Spanish civil war; fed refugees in occupied France; and helped victims of the London Blitz. They helped refugees escape from Hitler’s Germany; indeed, were one of the few non-Jewish organizations to help Jewish victims of the Nazis. Jones himself went to Germany in 1938 to obtain cooperation from the Gestapo.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> American Friends Service Committee Website, [www.afsc.org/about/history.htm](http://www.afsc.org/about/history.htm) p.1.

<sup>8</sup> Rufus Jones, “Biography”, [www.biography.com/search/article.do?id=9357579](http://www.biography.com/search/article.do?id=9357579), p.1.

In addition during World War II, thanks to Jones' contacts, American Quakers in cooperation with the British Friends Council, were sent to fronts in India, China and Japan. And here is where Rufus Jones' initiative and influence becomes of more personal interest and importance to me. For my son's grandfather, Christopher Evans, after whom my Christopher is named, is a birthright Philadelphia Quaker who served for six years during and after World War II with the British Friends Ambulance Unit in China. In fact, it was there, in Shanghai, that he met his bride, the lovely, sharp, and feisty Pi Sha, or Evening Cloud, who would become Nancy Evans, my former beloved mother-in-law, and my son's grandmother.

"Nai Nai" and "Yeh Yeh," we call them, Chinese for grandmother and grandfather on the father's side. Mrs. Evans is now deceased, but Mr. Evans still occasionally gathers with his "China crowd" to remember those challenging, dysentery-ridden days of transporting medical supplies via "charcoal-burner trucks" on pot-holed, tenuous roads to supply casualty stations and military and mission hospitals.<sup>9</sup>

So valuable and meaningful was its overseas work during the two World Wars that in 1947, the American Friends Service Committee, along with the British Friends Service Council, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of 300 years of Quaker efforts to heal rifts and oppose war. In his presentation speech, Gunnar Jahn, chair of the Nobel Committee, noted that "Quakers have shown us that it is possible to carry into action something which is deeply rooted in the minds of many: sympathy with others; the desire to help others...without regard to nationality or race; feelings which, when carried into deeds, must provide the foundations of a lasting peace."

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<sup>9</sup> "China Days; First and Last Times," Tony Reynolds, [www.sacu.org/fao.html](http://www.sacu.org/fao.html)

In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize, Henry Cadbury, then chair of the AFSC board, stressed the role of the ordinary individual, saying, “common folks, . . . just simple plain men and women like (you and me) – if (we) devote ourselves to resolute insistence on Goodwill in place of force . . . can do something to build a better, peaceful world.”<sup>10</sup> In their response, the British Friends remarked that, “in every human soul there is a witness for God which can be appealed to and which, with God’s grace, can be reached and made active.”<sup>11</sup>

Continuing its practical expression of their faith, the American Friends sent Quakers to India where they helped resettle refugees who had lost their homes during the partition of the subcontinent. The next year, when the State of Israel was created, Quakers helped displaced Arab refugees on the Gaza Strip. Many wars and interventions followed – programs of child care and prosthetics for war-injured Vietnamese civilians, relief for civilians on both sides of the Nigerian-Biafran War, an aggressive “Wage Peace Campaign” website and initiative addressing the war in Iraq.<sup>12</sup>

Other organizations growing out of Quakers’ concerns include the “Don’t Make a Wave Committee,” the precursor to Greenpeace; the global poverty-tackling organization, Oxfam, and the world-wide human rights advocate, Amnesty International. The AFSC also has a long history in the United States of addressing injustice against Native Americans, African Americans, immigrants, migrant workers, prisoners and the poor.

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<sup>10</sup> “Nobel Peace Prize,” [www.afsc.org/about/nobel/default.htm](http://www.afsc.org/about/nobel/default.htm).

<sup>11</sup> Friends Service Council, “History of Organization,” [nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1947/friends-council-history.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1947/friends-council-history.html)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.afsc.org/iraq/>

“There is something in (our) inmost being that can be kindled and struck into flame by God,” said Rufus Jones, “and as we feed the flame with our lives, we become revealing places for God, a flame of God’s life.”

Quakers call Jones a “Weighty Friend,” a moniker reserved for those respected for their experience, ability and ministry; for those who lived a “lighted life.” Certainly the kindled torch that Jones carried enflamed the hearts and actions of many, many others.

The story is told that during WWI, when Jones initiated an aid program for England in which he persuaded city governments to divide uncultivated public land into parcels and lend them to the unemployed to grow vegetables to feed their families and earn a modest income, he came across one hardworking fellow who had thrown himself with a vengeance into the task of clearing the untilled land. Remarked Jones to the fellow, “What a wonderful work you and God have done together!”

“Yes,” replied the man. “But you should have seen it when God had it all to himself!”<sup>13</sup>

If “the human spirit is the lamp of the Lord,” if the heart is a candle of God’s lighting, if the light of Christ is the “kindling flame of life and power” in all persons, what torch are you or I lit to carry? What wonderful work do you suppose God cannot do...without us?

To the glory of God. Amen.

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<sup>13</sup> “Rufus Jones,” by Rutagengwa Claude Shema, [www.author-me.com/fict07/rufusjones.htm](http://www.author-me.com/fict07/rufusjones.htm)