

“Love and Despair: Actions and Responses to Climate Breakdown.”  
One Day Gathering in Belfast on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> October.

Some reflections by Kate Fletcher, South Belfast Meeting

What a fantastic title, and what an amazing Gathering to be part of. As a member of South Belfast Meeting I felt we were privileged to host such an event, but much more, we are reminded of the necessity that we rise and act as individuals and as a community to face the challenges put before us by our speakers and fellow participants.

There is an excellent summary from Fran Brady, and transcripts of talks made by the inspiring and engaging speakers, Lindsey Fielder-Cook, John Barry and Lynn Finnegan. So this does not repeat what is already there, but is a personal reflection.

I like the title, because it moves us beyond what we should be doing in a practical sense (although we need to keep doing what we are doing, and much more). The gathering helped us to acknowledge our own despair at the situation of living at a time of a mass extinction event, largely caused by ourselves as a species- and particularly by those of us who live in the affluent West. I believe that it is despair and hopelessness that prevents many of us engaging with the issues, because they are too big, too scary, and we can't face them on our own. By starting to share and own this we were enabled to find strength from each other, and to start to face the real problems and existential crisis with which we are confronted.

Inaction is not an option. Business as usual is not an option. But neither is despair- whether it is the despair of hopelessness and powerlessness, or the despair of denial (which are of course linked). We owe it to our children, and the children of the world not to stay inactive through denial and despair. Megan Corrigan has addressed the issue of despair and hope in a wonderful article on the South Belfast website, and she echoes some of the sentiments looked at on Saturday. Do read it!

Lynne Finnegan referred to three stories of our time. Business as Usual, the Great Unravelling and the Great Turning. I believe that our only real option as Quakers is to be part of the Great Turning, which involves:

1. Halting our destructive actions,

2. Building alternative systems, and

3. changing our values.

Quaker values are at the heart of what is required to build a better world. Our testimonies of simplicity and sustainability invite us to question our right to own more stuff and to keep accumulating wealth and privilege. The other side of this 'coin' is the joy of working towards a fairer, more equal society which also lies at the centre of our Quaker message.

Quakers in the past and present have been alongside other reformers to turn the commonly accepted world view on its head. Quakers made a stand on slavery, both personally and politically, and have been involved in many other non violent struggles for justice. Let us embrace this one in the same way, and with the same sense of outrage, and the same yearning for Justice for all.

There were many inspirational quotes at the gathering. John Barry said "What if we are the people we've been waiting for?"

If we work and act as if we are in the early days of creating a new society, how fantastic that would feel. We are not alone, and can find strength in movements that have gone before, and in those who share our values and recognition that society has to change.

Another quote from James Baldwin, via John Barry.

"Not everything that is faced can be dealt with, but nothing can be dealt with that isn't faced"

Putting sustainability and climate justice, which is inextricably linked to social justice, at the heart of what we do here is a start of a journey, and I look forward to walking forward in Hope with Friends and comrades to be part of building a better tomorrow.

Kate Fletcher