

Joan and I were walking out of a store this past week and saw a mother we knew whose son graduated from high school and is getting ready to leave for college. She was at the store to buy him things for his dorm room, things mothers think their sons will use but won't, mostly cleaning supplies. We remembered when her son was little and used to ride his bicycle down to our house to play with our boys and when we mentioned that, she looked like she was going to cry. He's her first child to leave home and I could tell she dreaded the thought of his going. She said, "I'm going to miss him, but he needs to prepare himself for life."

I've been thinking of that phrase all week—*preparing himself for life*. We hear that expression a lot, usually said about young adults who've just graduated from high school and are going to college or training of some sort. Spencer is going to be a high-school senior this year and I've been telling him, "You must prepare yourself for life. You'll be graduating before you know it. You must decide what you want to do and prepare yourself for it. Prepare yourself for life." I was telling him this as if preparing ourselves for life is something we do in our late teens and early 20's. Then once we've learned a trade or vocation and prepared ourselves for life and gotten a job, we no longer have to prepare ourselves for anything.

And that simply isn't true. In fact, we should never be done preparing ourselves for life.

I bumped into a man this week who was upset with me. I've known him probably 20 years and he's been disappointed with me for 19 of those years. So he was chewing on me and several people were around and it was awkward and embarrassing to be treated rudely in front of others, so I started chewing on him, and we were going at it hammer and tongs and a nice Quaker lady who's quite adept at our peace testimony intervened and walked us toward the door out into the heat where it was too hot to argue, so we went our separate ways.

But I was all worked up and mad at this man, thinking of how he probably learned certain things early in life, but seems unwilling to consider whether what he was taught is still right, even though his views are hurtful to others. The world changed, our culture and knowledge changed, but he's just dug in and not prepared himself for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I was thinking about him and feeling self-righteous, when it occurred to me I had not been preparing myself for life, either. Because I had told myself that I had to learn to not be reactive when people challenged me.

I had told myself, “When people challenge you, just smile and thank them for their concern, and if what they say is helpful or true, then learn from it, and if isn’t helpful or true, then be gracious and go on and don’t get mad.” But I hadn’t been preparing myself for that, because the first time I was put to the test, I got mad right back. I hadn’t prepared myself for that eventuality. I just blew up, reacted emotionally, and missed a wonderful opportunity to talk calmly with someone about a very important matter. I had failed to prepare myself.

He had failed to educate himself and expand his understanding. And I had failed to discipline myself and respond with charity. We both missed an opportunity to learn. We both missed an opportunity to teach. We both missed an opportunity to grow. Because we both failed to prepare ourselves for the things life threw at us.

Is there something you need to learn to be better prepared for life? Something you need to learn to be more joyful in life? To be more productive and helpful in life? Our world is changing. Are you keeping up? Are you preparing yourself for life?

Remember what happened four years ago this month? The General Assembly of the International Astronomical Union held a convention in Prague and Pluto lost its job, demoted from a planet to a dwarf planet. Most of had been taught there were nine planets in our solar system, but the astronomers concluded Pluto was not a planet after all. I'm taking their word for it. They know more about planets than I do. If they had made a theological statement I might have questioned them, but I'll yield to them on matters of astronomy. So now we're down to eight planets.

I was speaking with a science teacher shortly afterwards who was very upset because it meant that in the few days he had before school began again he was going to have to learn about dwarf planets and rewrite his curriculum, instead of playing golf as he had planned.

“Why couldn't they have just left Pluto alone?” he grumbled.

Now there's a man who doesn't want to prepare himself for a new reality. We meet people like this all the time, who resent that the world has changed, or our knowledge and awareness of a particular subject has expanded, necessitating a change of mind or heart.

Friends, life has a way of throwing challenges and changes at us. Economic changes, spiritual challenges, the tests that come with aging, relational changes. Are we preparing ourselves for them?

This week, a federal judge ruled that the California law prohibiting same-gender marriage was unconstitutional. The case will now move forward to the Supreme Court. The judge had been appointed by President Reagan and the attorney arguing that the law was unconstitutional was Theodore Olson, the United States Solicitor General under President George W. Bush. They each concluded that to deny an entire group of adults the right to marry the persons they loved was a violation of the rights promised us by the equal protection clause in the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment of America's Constitution.

This is an example of our world changing as we've acquired new knowledge. Are we prepared for that? There'll be a variety of responses. Some folks are going to be angry, maybe even hateful. They want us to leave Pluto alone, figuratively speaking. Others are going to say, "I used to be against that, then I got to thinking how I would want my children or grandchildren treated if they were gay, and I'd want them to have the same chance for happiness as everyone else." And other folks, who began studying this issue years ago are going to be pleased we're living up to the Constitution's promise that all people are created equal, that we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. (The court isn't saying marriage will make gay people happy. It's simply saying gay people have the same right as everyone else to find out whether it will.)

Are we preparing ourselves for life in a changing world? There are examples of folks who are, right here in our Meeting. Frank and Phyllis Gladden are successful farmers because they've listened to agronomists, realized the advantage to be had in newfound knowledge, and prepared themselves for a changing world.

Ginger Arnold is a gifted clinical psychologist because she takes advantage of the most current research on abnormal human behavior in an effort to help her patients. Though I must confess I have been a bit uneasy ever since she approached me last month and said, "I would appreciate the opportunity to talk with you sometime."

The children in our meeting are preparing themselves for life because they are learning to listen and read and think.

All of these folks, and probably you too, have realized our preparation for life is never done. Now, not to brag, but we Quakers have a history of rising to the challenges a changing world presents. For we believe God calls us not only to appreciate certain enduring truths, but also to the discovery of new truths, fresh insights, and greater good. We believe this process of discovery, this search for meaning, is what it means to be friends with Jesus and children of God. Are you preparing yourself for life?