

As these late autumn days grow shorter, it is important to heed the light, as did Elizabeth Bathurst, a young Quaker woman of the 1600s who lived only thirty years because of her weak health. Her father, Charles, wrote of her "...But that great weakness of body, the Lord was pleased to supply with large endowments of mind, her memory very great, her understanding very ripe." She wrote: "The Seed, or Grace of God, is small in its first Appearance, even as the Morning Light; but as it is given Heed to, and obeyed, it will increase in Brightness, till it shine in the Soul, like the Sun in the Firmament at its Noon-day Height."

Our first hymn is #237 from the Green book, "When In Our Music God is Glorified"

Our first reading is about music, Psalm 98: "Sing to the Lord a new song, for God has done marvelous things; God's right hand and God's holy arm have worked salvation. The Lord has made God's salvation known and revealed God's righteousness to the nations. God has remembered love and faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn— shout for joy before the Lord, the Sovereign. Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity."

Next we have two more readings from early Quaker women: Margaret Fell, the wife of George Fox, wrote, "The truth is one and the same always; and though ages and generations pass away, and one generation goes and another comes, yet the Word, and

Power, and Spirit of the living God endures forever, and is the same and never changes. And so, reader, cleave to the blessed Light and Truth of the living God, that He hath placed in thy heart, and believe in it, and hearken to it, and obey it, and it will lead thee in the path that we have gone, and then thou wilt see, and feel, and understand what we have gone through; and thou wilt come to be a witness of the living God and his Truth, which will be peace and comfort to thy soul. The Lord God Almighty open thy heart and enlighten the eye of thy understanding, that thou mayest come to have unity with all the saints in light.”

Elizabeth Fry wrote: “I look not to myself, but to that within me, that has to my admiration proved to be my present help, and enabled me to do what I believe of myself I could not have done.”

Our second hymn is #21 in the Green book “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past”

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—May we all find within ourselves the strength and truth, the power of Spirit that more than enables action, but also provides the deepest respite and the greatest calm. Let our hearts beat as one, in the harmony of a common sense of the Sacred, in the community of those who know and share Light. We hope it may be that the steady rhythm of that music of the Divine may break forth, or may simply keep our souls in tune, accompanied. However wide or far this earth and our bodies may take us, keep us in touch with that one common inner space, that inner peace, that Light that keeps us all upon the way. Let inner Music play, let inner Light shine, be thou our guide. Amen.

Our next hymn is #136 in green “This Still Room”.

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear friends—Corazon Aquino, a devout Catholic who had so many troubles and unexpected turns in her life as she became the leader of people power in the Philippines once wrote, “Keep inviolate an area of light and peace within you.” While the inner Light all people have, including each one of us, is always there, is always present, it is sometimes hard to experience it, to see it clearly, through too much clutter and noise.

There are various sides to the problem of having things in the way that block the Light. The clutter can be our own choices not to live simply, either in the way of actual things, possessions and gadgets and collections, or in events and obligations and commitments. Then there is fear, anxiety, shame. We end up not looking within because we have allowed so much of the outside to occupy our personal time and attention. But there is also clutter that can obscure the Light available to us from others because of our own assumptions or inattention or interactions with them that don't make space for their Light to reach us. And yet, each moment, and each interaction, is bathed in Light, is ready to be experienced. We don't have to do something, or change something first in order to make that happen. The adjustment, the orientation to the Light, is a calming breath, a refocused eye. It is that pause. Our first hymn references the moment cited in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus and the disciples stopped to sing together a hymn before they left the upper room for the Mount of Olives. I have always loved that short reference that yes, at one time Jesus was singing.

That is why it is so good to sit here with you now, in this still room where the world that time and sense have known falls off and leaves us God alone, as Whittier wrote in the last hymn we sang. We allow That Within to come forward, even when we have our doubts that there is much we can add or say. It does not need to come forward with words or vocal testimony, it can come forward in the connected silence, in the inspiration of others, in the sacred

rest of a calm and warm space with others of like Spirit. Many of you also share regularly that the Divine speaks to you as the earth itself sings in nature, in the way the rivers clap their hands, and the mountains sing together for joy in the psalm. The lake, and the forest, and the trees, and the garden all make way for the Light.

It can be a matter of practice, of regular habit of the sacred as well as of sudden revelation. We wait patiently, but going far beyond the self. As Elizabeth Fry observed in our reading this morning, “I look not to myself, but to that within me, that has to my admiration proved to be my present help, and enabled me to do what I believe of myself I could not have done.” The way we clear for the Light to reach us here in Meeting, or on a hike, or listening to or making music can, and maybe should, be surprising to us. That God is with us can be surprising to us. You are worthy—it is no surprise. This month began with all saints day—we and all we hold in love and Light and those who light our path are all saints.

For those who like to follow or read about or learn Quaker history, there are always those who come away feeling that modern Friends somehow don't have the same fullness of spirit, the same zeal and power in testimony. Margaret Fell Fox says to us that it is not true that the Spirit has faded or will fade. As we read this morning, she wrote, “And so, reader, cleave to the blessed Light and Truth of the living God, that He hath placed in thy heart, and believe in it, and hearken to it, and obey it, and it will lead thee in the path that we have gone, and then thou wilt see, and feel, and understand what we have gone through; and thou wilt come to be a witness of the living God and his Truth, which will be peace and comfort to thy soul.” That Light and our faithful lives are needed now in a time and a world that increasingly lacks grounding. Truth and morality seem to be relative and a matter of perspective to many people, rather than clear and positive and eternal. Yesterday I brought my students from the seminar I teach on the underground railroad to the Howland Stone Store, the Tubman home, the Seward House,

and a few less known sites in our area. In each case, what became obvious was that all of these people were clear, were grounded, knew truth and morality and professed it publicly in their words and lives. They also knew and supported each other.

Last week I was away attending the annual meeting of the Friends Committee on National Legislation, meeting with representative Katko and the staff of Senators Gillibrand and Schumer. I was also worshipping with a national assembly of Quakers of varied practice and teaching, all knowing “The World We Seek”. That body is now dramatically younger than it was just ten years ago. I spoke with several young adults who feel that the official group called young adults needs two groups now, of those 22 and under and those 23 to 30. The old “35 and under” or even “40 and under” in which I was a young adult no longer works as the Quaker idea of young adult in FCNL. There is a thirst for grounding.

The world needs us Friends, as much as the Light needs us, and we ourselves need the Light and we also need to attend to the world. Keep space in your heart for that, space in your prayers, space for each other, and these timeless moments. How gloriously Love can bind us and God can find us. Do not be afraid, do not give in to despair. Be open. Keep inviolate an area of light and peace within you. The Word and Power and Spirit of the living God endures forever, and is the same, and never changes. It is in every one of us.

Our closing hymn is #332 in the Green, “God be With You”

Closing: Caroline Stephen, a British Quaker woman of the 19th century wrote, “But in the central innermost region of our minds there shines one pure ray of direct Light from the very Throne of God; one ray which belongs to each one individually; which is for that one supreme and apart; the ray which shining from the heavenward side of conscience, and so enlightening and purifying it, must of necessity dominate the whole being.”