

Epiphany and Resolution—Message for 4 January 2015

Greeting: In the coldest hours, light returns. Jean Toomer, the Harlem Renaissance writer and Philadelphia Quaker wrote in 1947: “To love and be loved is a universal human urge. Is it any wonder, then, that we are moved to seek God’s love?...It is to this divine love that we are called. This is the high promise of life. We are called away from indifference, from meanness, malice, prejudice, and hate. We are called above the earthly loves that come and go and are unsure. We are called into the deep enduring love of God, and others, and all creation.

Worship is a door into that love. Once we have entered it, our every act is a prayer, our whole life a continuous worship.”

Hymn 1 from the green book number 40, “Dark of Winter”

From Bertrand Russell in “Our Knowledge of the External World”: The importance of time is practical rather than theoretical, rather in relation to our desires than in relation to truth. A truer image of the world, I think, is obtained by picturing things as entering into the stream of time from an eternal world outside than from a view that regards time as the devouring tyrant of all that is. Both in thought and in feeling, to realize the unimportance of time is the gate of wisdom.

From Luke 8: As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, and she had spent all she had on doctors but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped.

“Who touched me?” Jesus asked.

When they all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you.”

But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

We opened with a hymn on the soothing calm of darkness and the eternal in winter and our second hymn recognizes today's celebration of Epiphany as "Brightest and Best", no. 68 in blue

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—As we daily reach for the hem of the garment, to be enfolded, enwrapped and healed, let us share the comfort we find as a loving community, and know the eternal in the everyday. Let the resolutions of the New Year find both comfort in darkness and truth in the Light. Whether by soothing darkness or brilliant light, a hemorrhaging woman or three great kings, let us know that to realize the unimportance of time is the gate of wisdom. Fill our hearts with love, with light, with laughter. Amen

Hymn 3 is "Lady of the Seasons' Laughter" 241 in the green.

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other, to nurture each other with lessons and play in community.

Message:

Dear Friends—I remember as a child thinking it was sort of cool that my grandfather grew up saying "thee" and "thou", and still did from time to time with us. But then I remember my horror at learning that he also grew up as a good Quaker

without celebrating Christmas. Though I was attracted to my father's family's Quaker faith early in life, my devotion was not so strong as to fail to be grateful for my mother's Lutheran family and all that a German household devoted to the celebration of Christmas. The Quaker testimonies that the Christ child is born every day, that salvation comes every day, that the light is eternal and so every day is Christmas and every day is Easter is all nice and consistent and true and everlasting, and yet we are in time and of the world, and so we also mark the dates and join the fun. Thank God!

New Year sort of feels the same way, a somewhat arbitrary date—especially in our culture where we have rather publicly nowadays in the US a Chinese New Year and a Jewish New Year on varied dates. Still, one association the common US calendar and liturgical calendar makes that I appreciate is Epiphany and the New Year.

Having an epiphany is when everything is made new. In everyday language, when people talk of having an epiphany, they usually mean a sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something, an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure, an intuitive grasp of reality through something usually simple and striking. It is that unscheduled new year, when we are made new or renewed, when insight or light comes to us, when things become untangled or resolved. So that kind of epiphany, that kind of new year, also involves resolutions—coming to peace, coming to understanding, time changes for us in those moments—there is a before and an after.

The Inner Light, that inner Guide, is a source of epiphany, it is the place of resolutions, it can make each day, each hour, each moment, each age, new. It is that wellspring of the eternal,

outside time where we can realize Bertrand Russell's unimportance of time as the gate to wisdom. And yet, we also live within time. And so, as we celebrate new years, let us make resolutions, let us look for, and be available to, and provide resolutions to dilemmas, to crises and problems, to cares and worries. In the dark of winter, in the brightest and best, in the seasons' laughter, let us have epiphanies--of the heart.

It is not the setting of goals that brings the kind of resolutions I'm talking about here, nor the dos and don'ts we might try to make ourselves follow as rules or marks of achievement or failure. It is looking deeply at life as it unfolds, it is letting the pieces fall into place, having the Spirit close by to discern and understand, to speak and to support those around us. I once said in this meeting that we are advised to let our lives speak, not to make our lives speak. We follow the promptings of our hearts without knowing the literal outcomes in terms of events or episodes or accomplishments. So the resolution is being at one with the Spirit, and our resolve should be about our manner of living, our day-to-day living process, and things will come in time, as they do, while eternity is always there.

In the Bible story of Epiphany, the Kings, the Magi, come with gifts—they are not empty-handed pagans. They are the Gentiles, and they practice magic, but they are also seekers. They are willing to go on the unexpected journey of life, to see that great light, that epiphany star, and it changes their course, it makes everything new, it puts them on a path of light. Time and distance do not matter, because they are resolved to complete the journey—they will seek the resolution of the mystery. There are the synchronicities, the overlaps, where in my childhood there were the things about which both the Quakers and the Lutherans were right, just as Gabriel and the angels, along with astrologers, knew that the Christ, that

Christa was born, they knew where to find the True Light. We also know. When we seek the Light or hold people or situations in the Light, we should remember to bring our gifts.

Just as the woman who touched the edge of Christ's cloak knew the power there, the power to heal. We do not need to have a full grasp to reach resolution, but we do need to share what we find. Her seeking becomes more meaningful, becomes a source of light to others, when it is shared. Just as Jesus in the Gospel has her reveal herself, so we know that in order to make it more likely that we will fulfill our New Year's resolutions we should share them, become accountable to each other. But perhaps more so, we can become accountable to each other about those things that need to be resolved.

But in the story, we also have the Christ within and sometimes it is our Light, the edge of our raiment that will heal. I think we all have probably had the experience of being touched, by a person or a situation. We feel that power from our hearts go out to others—who touched me? Be generous with your light. Let your life speak. Walk in the pressing crowd. During our journey within time, there is also that glimpse, that enduring truth that is outside time. Let us seek epiphany, that insight that makes all things new, that starts our new year.

The healthiest people have dual citizenship: they live in both worlds. When they are saddened that some prized and precious time is passing by, they are also comforted by knowing that the richness of human experience is timeless. All that of the spirit lives on in the inner world—not lost, not wasted, not past. The gifts that we bear on our journey within time are presented to outside time, to the everlasting, when and where time is resolved. In the soul, in the Spirit, in the Light, there is only the eternal present. It is ever the new year.

Closing Hymn: number 250 green "Julian of Norwich"

Closing: As Jean Toomer, the Harlem Renaissance writer and Philadelphia Quaker wrote in 1947: "To love and be loved is a universal human urge. Is it any wonder, then, that we are moved to seek God's love?...It is to this divine love that we are called. This is the high promise of life. We are called away from indifference, from meanness, malice, prejudice, and hate. We are called above the earthly loves that come and go and are unsure. We are called into the deep enduring love of God, and others, and all creation. Worship is a door into that love. Once we have entered it, our every act is a prayer, our whole life a continuous worship." In the coldest hours, light returns. Reach for the hem of the garment. Seek resolution.

Thanks/Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude