

March 8, 2015 Meeting For Worship
The Journey Through Lent is the Path of Transformation, of Broken-ness Made Whole.

Good Morning Friends. It is the Third Sunday of Lent. Winter has been long. And we are moving slowly but surely toward spring, and Easter. George and my boys are getting ready for the sap to finally run this week.

Last week, A.T. shared a beautiful message about God's Aliveness, God's voice still speaking, and the continuing revelation of communion and connection in all things. Today I will open our worship with A poem that speaks to that belonging in the family of things and offers an incarnational and ecological perspective on the Lenten path of repentance. As we worship together today I invite us to consider the journey of Lent a path of transformation and belonging, of brokenness made whole. So, for our Lenten, Wild Geese, by Mary Oliver.

*You do not have to be good. You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting --
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.*

Readings

Mark 1:15 “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Matthew 5:48 **Be perfect**, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Carl Jung: That I feed the hungry, that I forgive an insult, that I love my enemy in the name of Christ -- all these are undoubtedly great virtues. What I do unto the least of my brethren, that I do unto Christ. But what if I should discover that the least among them all, the poorest of all the beggars, the most impudent of all the offenders, the very enemy himself -- that these are within me, and that I myself stand in need of the alms of my own kindness -- that I myself am the enemy who must be loved -- what then?

I take to myself -- - Bill Johnston

I take to myself
my broken self:
my guilt, my peace,
my folly and joy,
my sickness, my health;
in laughter and agony,
hating and loving,
my fear and my birthing--
and I am made whole.

I take to myself
you, my neighbor,
cupping your life
within my hands:
your broken self
pure gift to me;
not burden, gift,
as mine to you--

and I am made whole.

I take to myself
you, broken Earth;
stripped and abused,
paved over and poisoned,
you mother so freely,
abundant in grace:
clasp in your mercy,
surprise into tears--
and I am made whole.

I take to myself
your broken self,
my dear, near God;
broken for broken,
for lost and for spent.
As fragmented love
and nectar of life,
you come, gentle God--
and I am made whole.

Prayer

God of Grace, God of Glory, on thy people pour thy power. We long to be centered in You, Holy One, Christ within, the All in the All. But somehow we are not of one mind... We reach for you with one hand and push you away with the other. We seek peace, we are desperate to feel peace within ourselves, to see that inward dwelling Light reach out into the world around us, to see Peace reflected back to us. We long for you, We long for Peace, for an end to the warring madness that makes us so divided, self against self, people against people, God against God. We open our hearts to you, that we may be made whole, that in you the divisions may be healed, that in You may be revealed a path of healing across all that divides our inner and outer worlds. Hold us now in this time, hold us with love, that feeling love we may turn with love toward ourselves, toward our neighbor, toward the Earth, toward the enemy wherever we find him, turning, turning toward until we come back in a circle to you, Oh God of Silence, of Grace, of Love.

Benediction

May there be kindness in your gaze, when you look within.

May you find a harmony between your soul and your life.

May the path of transformation, of turning toward God, open before you, one step at a time.

May we together make the road by walking.

May you behold a world that over and over again announces your place in the family of things.

Songs

1st: God of Grace and God of Glory, Blue 26

2nd: How Could Anyone

3rd: Let It Be

4th: Julian of Norwich

Message:

Our house is situated on the second highest hill in Tompkins County, and it can be a micro-climate: we get lake effect snow coming down from the north off of Cayuga Lake, and we often can get easily 6 more inches of snow than whatever has been predicted. We keep chickens for eggs, and they are in a coop which is about 150 feet from the back door. To get there we must walk over an open area where the wind has drifted the snow to at least four feet in some spots. Day after day this winter, twice a day, we have trekked through this wilderness outside our back door. Many days, and many times, we have travelled a path that was not there, until our footfalls revealed it, because the windblown snow has been covering over our tracks almost as we make them. The result of our daily trudging, over the daily wind-deposited snow, has been that there is a ridge, a tamped down path, which has become a bridge that gets covered over, daily, by the drifting snow. We have to carefully feel our way to the chicken coop over this narrow, hidden path, mostly going on memory and faith. If we slip, or take a step an inch or two to the side of the hidden path, that leg almost instantly sinks down through the snow on either side of the path, up to the hip.

So twice daily, this has been our walking meditation and it has felt something like a Lenten pilgrimage, like Mary Oliver's "walking a hundred miles through the desert on our knees, repenting." Somewhat grimly, we put on snowpants and boots and all the layers to go a hundred and fifty feet through the desert of snow, hauling the chicken bucket and water. It has seemed like a ritual enactment of what it is to walk through winter with faith toward spring, through Lent with faith toward Easter, through life, with faith toward God, our feet feeling *The Way As It Reveals Itself*, one step at a time.

These 40 days of Lent spiritually symbolize the 40 days that Jesus spent praying, fasting, and facing the temptations in the desert before his public ministry. Because I have struggled with temptation, because I am imperfect, because I have faced inner devils, I am drawn to the stories that show Jesus to be human. Like the story of Jesus' agony in the garden, the story of his time in the desert lifts up his human-ness, as one who struggles, one for whom the spiritual path is a decision, a practice, and a hard one, with deep and great cost. When Jesus is shown to wrestle

inner demons, like a lust for power or ego gratification, in the case of the temptation in the desert, or the wish to escape what is very hard in the agony in the garden, are there any of us who don't know what that is like? The fact of Jesus' humanity is deeply inspiring and comforting to me, because I am human. The story of what happens to Jesus at the end of Lent, in the breaking of His body by the imperial powers, and then, the story of Easter --the unbreakability of Spirit and Love -- this story invites us to consider the humanity of Jesus, and therefore our own humanity. Both Our broken-ness and our unbreakability, our completeness as part of the Body of God and our sins against that Body.

I know repentance and sin are loaded words and we don't use them much in Quaker meeting. So I hope you will permit me to offer my definition, for what it's worth. I believe that sin is a state of estrangement from God, from the Holy, from That Which Holds Us. Sin manifests in actions which convey fundamental ignorance of and disregard for the Web of Life and the Ground of Our Being. It is the tendency to act in ways – conscious and unconscious – that reflect a disconnect from That of God Alive in All of Creation. A person living with this disconnect, a people living with this disconnect will be capable of sinning against any part of Creation, including self, other people, and the more than human world. The story of the human endeavor is marked by this tragedy, this disconnect from God, played out again and again in the ways that we treat one another, and in the ways that we disrespect or ignore our connections and inter-relationship with All that Is. We have repeatedly wrought immeasurable suffering and savagery almost beyond the telling. In our tradition, the crucifixion becomes a metaphor for this. There is no downplaying the profundity of this suffering.

And yet. The story is still unfolding. Lent will be followed by Easter, winter by spring. dark is answered by light. the cross by the open tomb.

I am here, a convinced Quaker, because I have experienced the Indwelling Light. I am trying to set my life behind faith in That of God in all of Creation, and the practice of answering That of God in all of Creation. I do not claim to do this consistently or successfully, but I practice, with the part of Creation that is before me, and I see all of you engaging in the same practice. I have experienced the

Divine Presence here in this meeting among Friends. I have felt a sense of belonging to the One Body of the Living God, and have felt it in prayer, through music, on walks in the woods, at the ocean, through my children, my husband, sun sets and sunrises on our hill that are astounding, painting the sky with an exuberance of beauty that seems to sing. I have seen in this world beauty of a magnitude and exquisiteness that goes beyond bare essentials required for biological life support. Again and again Creation displays gratuitous, outrageous beauty, lavish generosity and plenty. As Psalm 104, the Ecological Psalm, reminded us last week, we are surrounded by a communion of beauty that appears to be its own ends and means. Another word for this might be Grace. I know this to be deeply true.

Though we be atoms in the very cells of the body of God, still, somehow here on Earth the Kingdom of God seems elusive. The peaceable kingdom is AT HAND, so close, but somehow just out of reach. I think for us as Quakers there is something about the Lenten journey that is about reconciling our mystical experience of the Sacred, of belonging to the Living God, with the answering awareness of broken-ness, of inner and outer alienation. that reconciliation of God to God, of self to self is the narrow path of Lenten repentance.

I chose to include and highlight the two short readings today from the Gospels of Mark and Matthew because they have these difficult words in them, words that are often associated with the journey of Lent, with time spent in the spiritual desert, with an ascetic beating into submission of the parts of ourselves we seek to change. those words are *repent, and be perfect*.

Both of these words were translated from the Greek, which was translated from the original Aramaic. I want to humbly offer that I think something has been lost in the translation. In Greek, the word that is translated into Repent is Metanoia. Metanoia means a transformative change of heart, an inner revolution, turning toward God. The word that is translated into Perfect is Teleios, which is not a straight shot to Perfect as we might understand it, like faultless or without blemish. A more nuanced translation is “nothing which belongs left out”, complete, intact, whole, undivided.

So I want to offer these passages again with these words translated in this way. with this different translation, **Mark 1:15** Can Be read: “The Time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at Hand. Turn toward God with a transformed heart. Allow this inner revolution to put your faith in the good news.” Many biblical scholars have different lenses for translating the Good News, or Gospel, but one that seems particularly rich for us is the good news is that we are in God, and God is in Us. Which leads wonderfully to **Matthew 5:48, *Be perfect...*** Rather than a command to be faultless, this can be read: ***Be Whole, as you are, complete, intact, undivided, just as in God, nothing which belongs is left out.***

Using those words in those passages invites a new sense of the depth of spiritual opportunity in the Lenten season. What if the opportunity before us is to meet the devil as Jesus did, to face our broken-ness, our sin, our estrangement from God, our shame, our inner demons, our ego, our lust for power, our fear? what if the inner revolution is a turning toward all those aspects of Self that we would rather condemn, banish, hate, leave out, scour away in grim penance? What if we are called to love the least among the lowly within us, to give alms to the beggar we find in our own hearts, to love the enemy who stalks and torments us, wherever we find him? What if Lent is not a call to stern and mirthless repentance as we might have understood it, but a call to belonging, to metanoia, to an transformative inward turning toward the least of these, toward the broken God, a reconciling of all the parts unto the whole, until we are made whole, and in our wholeness, take our place among the family of things.