

August 2, 2015
Stillness and Action

Musical Prelude

Greeting: Parker Palmer: "I must listen to my life telling me who I am."

First Hymn *'Mid All the Traffic of the Ways, Green 142*

Readings: Buckminster Fuller, Psalm 46:10, John 14:6-7

Second Hymn *Come, My Way, My Truth, My Life, Green 157*

Joys and Concerns

Musical Interlude

Prayer: I AM

Third Hymn *We're Gonna Do What the Spirit Say Do, Geen 259*

Message: The Way, the Truth, and the Life are a union of Being and Doing.

Silent Worship

Fourth Hymn *Be Still and Know I Am God, Green 182*

Benediction: Being the Way, the Truth, and the Life

Afterthoughts/Introductions/Announcements

Musical Postlude

Welcome

Parker Palmer wrote, “Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am.” Parker suggests that the “I AM” comes first, and then action follows. **Exodus 3:14** ¹⁴ *And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.* I wonder what that I AM might say to us in the stillness of worship and in the busy-ness of our daily lives. And I wonder if an essential quality of Being can be unified with our Doing. Let us listen today for the still small voice of I AM.

First Hymn *Mid All the Traffic of the Ways, Green 142*

Readings

Our first reading is a short statement from R. Buckminster Fuller, who lived from **July 12, 1895 – July 1, 1983** and was an American **philosopher, systems theorist, architect, and inventor**, who invented the geodesic dome. And he said, **“God, to me, it seems, is a verb, not a noun.”**

John 14:6 -7

⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

Psalm 46:10

¹⁰“Be still, and know that I am God!”

Second Hymn *Come, My Way, My Truth, My Life, Green 157*
Joys and Concerns

Prayer

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on us. Still us, Oh God Who Is. Cause us to stop, to be present, to wait for your still, small voice. Cause us to listen, to be quiet, to wait upon you, you who dwell beneath Life's surface, you who stir the deep waters, Thou Who Art in rocks and stones and soil of earth. Sacred Presence in the midst of our busy lives, help us to hear you through the noise and haste. Speak, "I AM" and let us hear, let us know in our very cells, Who We Are. Call us by name, call us your people, call us forward to be the way, the truth and the life. Let our actions rest in stillness, and let our stillness be alive, alive with the presence of the Holy. Oh Living God, let all that we are and all that we do be grounded in you.

Third Hymn *We're Gonna Do What the Spirit Say Do, Geen 259*

Message: The Way, the Truth and the Life are the union of Being and Doing.

Silent Worship

Fourth Hymn *Be Still and Know I Am God, Green 182*

Benediction

May we be present to what is alive in the silence, to what stirs in the stillness. May we listen to the heart of Being within us, telling us Who we Are.

May our doing arise from our being.

May the way, the truth and the life be what we are and what we do.

Message

One night recently, when the earth had been soaked with a hard rain, I went out after dark to lock in the chickens. I went with a flashlight, and as I stepped, with the circle of light in front of me, I saw that the ground was moving. The earth was alive with earthworms, which had come to the surface after the rain. Every step I took, carefully, shining my light, the worms would retract, as if being sucked back into the earth, creating a path for me with their retraction. I could hear small clicks and pops of suction as they slid away from me and down, back down, into the earth. I felt that each step I took seemed to cause the parting of this secret sea, a wriggling wave of earthworms, clearing the way for me. There seemed to be thousands. I walked slowly, this sea of creatures parting in front of me, feeling a strange, almost euphoric feeling: it was the realization that this solid earth, the ground, stalwart, hard, immovable, was actually a living thing, full of living things. I felt I was truly walking on holy ground, on aliveness. It felt like grace, like I had been giving this momentary glimpse of what is always true, but mostly not experienced. And the worms, these living creatures, were showing me that they were aware of presence, as much as and in the way that worms can be aware and express that. They responded to me and my light.

That slow, reverent nighttime walk reminded me that from physics we know that in things that appear to be solid and still, there is actually movement on an atomic level. Even rocks, the most solid, hard, seemingly inert substance, are made of atoms, and in those atoms are electrons that are moving, and between those tiny particles is, on that micro-level, space. What appears to be still, and as solid as anything can be, holds within its stillness and solidity an unseen movement, and spaciousness.

This invisible aliveness seems like a mirror for the spiritual life. Quaker faith and practice stems from a lived experience of life in stillness and silence. Of something stirring. And our historic and present day witnesses testify that there is a relationship between stillness and action, between silence and what speaks in the silence, between the constant, eternal indwelling presence and its movements and expressions and leadings out into service in the ever-changing world.

Last week I caught the tail end, on the radio, of a speech by Vandana Shiva. Vandana Shiva is a quantum physicist, scholar, activist, voice for sustainable development and social justice, who has taken action against genetically modified foods and a corporate controlled foodsystem. Her speech was entitled Radical Compassion, which I know, because the announcer of the radio program said “That

was *Radical Compassion*, by Vandana Shiva” and it sounded like a really good speech that I mostly missed, but in those last 30 seconds, she said something that has been turning around in my mind ever since, and echoing Buckminster Fuller’s words. She said, “Truth is a verb.”

That truth is a verb, and that God is a verb -- These are somewhat jolting assertions, because they suggest that what we might wish to think of as constant, immutable, fact, noun -- may contain within itself movement, change, and that what is most real is not static but dynamic, found and given meaning in its living, in action, in the doing.

But I think I actually disagree with these extraordinarily smart physicists who understand science more than I do. Or actually, I agree, but I would say that I think it’s not either/or. It’s not noun or verb. It’s both. And at the risk of sounding grandiose I say that the transformation of our world is possible if we begin to think about The Truth, and if we begin to think about God, as both something that IS and something that IS DONE. I think this is what Quakers have been about, I think it’s what Mahatma Ghandi meant when he said we must *Be the Change we wish to see in the world*. I think it’s what Quaker activist A.J. Muste meant when he said “*There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.*”

These great teachers have come to understand that the Truth, the Sacred, God -- whatever we call what is most Real, most Ultimate, is both noun and verb at the same time. In the mysterious, powerful I AM statement from Exodus, God is the absolute Being and God is also true essence of Being, ultimate being-ness: the great I AM, the original I AM, the I AM at the heart of everything. God is Noun *and* verb. In Psalm 24, knowledge of God is something that stills, finally, ultimately, that creates space, space that transforms paradox and transcends either/or: maybe the space where it makes sense to say something like noun and verb are one. In that stillness, God Is. Truth Is.

This is the space that we inhabit sometimes in worship. We live it, occasionally, when we are astonished by the actual aliveness of this incredible world. And I think that transformative space is invoked in the words attributed to Jesus in the gospel according to John. I AM the way, the truth and the life, that paradoxical union of verb and noun, of being and doing.

I AM THE WAY: I embody a method, a process, an energetic dynamic in my very cells, in the flesh of my living body. I AM the TRUTH : I embody what is real, what is, I am one with the truth, what is most real is what I AM. I AM the life: I

AM one with life, I am not separate from Life. Life lives through me, and I through life. He seems to be unifying stillness and action, noun and verb.

I know that the next words he says, “no one gets to the Father except through me” are known as a “clobber text” used to clobber people with claims of an exclusive Christian Truth. I also know that many scholars of the Bible are now convinced that the Gospel of John, probably written at the end of the first century, many decades after Jesus’ life and ministry, emerged from an intense debate over who Jesus was, or is, and was written in the heat of controversy, to defend certain views of Jesus and to oppose others. I know it probably was a bold claim to the exclusivity and specificity of Jesus’ salvific role. I know that life was chaotic and dangerous for those following The Way of Jesus, in the years after his life and his execution, and the early church was extremely divided, persecuted and embattled over what it meant to be Christian and who got to decide. And I know that more than 2000 years later we’re still arguing over that.

We are still arguing. And I think we are still struggling with unifying the being and the doing, the listening for I AM and then proceeding from there. At least it is a struggle for me. I am not on social media and I don’t have a smartphone, but even without the instagrams and the twitter and the facebook and the texting I can feel a churning urgency to the pace of life, the pace of change in our time, and the feeling of emergency and crisis on so many levels. I often feel like my to-do list expands even as I cross something off it, there is no way I can keep up, and on it are all the daily chores and tasks of being a mother, running a household, making a living, and that is twenty items long and then there are a dozen more things at the bottom always there, and growing, in urgency and number: global climate change, terrible violence, children in poverty, oceans dying, mass incarceration. The to-do list of our day is daunting. But what about the To-Be list? Do we have a To-Be List?

I think that is one way to read the passage in John, today. As a To Be list, and as a way to unify urgent being with the urgent doing. After the I AM statement, Jesus’ famous next lines are *“No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”*

I want to read those lines like this: No one comes to what is Real, Sacred, Most True, except through embodying the way, the truth, and the life, as I have tried to do. If you have watched me and seen me, you have seen also the Holy Source which lives in and through me.

I think that Vandana Shiva and Buckminster Fuller are right that Truth and God are lived and living realities, the experience of which are sorely needed in our time. But at the same time I resist the frenzied pull of relentless activity that our culture has become, and so verbs make me a little nervous. I resist the driving force to do more and more, faster and faster, to have *more* activity and action. So I read this passage in John as a call to infuse our action with stillness, to start our To Do list with a To Be List. As in Be the Way, Be the Truth, Be the Life. Jesus' words for us today are aimed right at the heart of the union between Being and Doing, between noun and verb, between God and Godding. What he embodies is stillness in action, a truth that is both changing and changeless, both constant and filled with movement and life. he starts with I AM.

As we stare down the daunting To-Do list of our day and our time, what is on our To Be List? How can we make those two, one? What is the I AM, the life that lives beneath the surface of things, the being-ness and aliveness in all things, saying to us in the silence? Let us Be Still and know.