

Call and Response--Message for 9 August 2015

Greeting: Dear Friends—St. Aidan, who died in 651 AD left us with this prayer: Leave me alone with God as much as may be. As the tide draws the waters close in upon the shore, make me an island, set apart, alone with you, God, holy to you. Then, with the turning of the tide prepare me to carry your presence to the busy world beyond, the world that rushes in on me till the waters come again and fold me back to you. Amen.

First Hymn, no. 69 in the blue book "At Worship"

Isaac Pennington wrote in 1663: What is love? What shall I say of it, or how shall I in words express its nature? It is the sweetness of life; it is the sweet, tender, melting nature of God, flowing up through his seed of life into the creature, and of all things making the creature most like unto himself, both in nature and operation. It fulfills the law, it fulfills the gospel; it wraps up all in one, and brings forth all in the oneness. It excludes all evil out of the heart, it perfects all good in the heart. A touch of love doth this in measure; perfect love doth this in fullness.

From **Matthew 5:13-16** "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Rufus Jones wrote in 1920: Perhaps more wonderful still is the way in which beauty breaks through. It breaks through not only at a few highly organized points, it breaks through almost everywhere. Even the minutest things reveal it as well as do the sublimest things, like the stars. Whatever one sees through the microscope, a bit of mould for example, is charged with beauty. Everything from a dewdrop to Mount Shasta is the bearer of beauty. And yet beauty has no function, no utility. Its value is intrinsic, not extrinsic. It is its own excuse for being. It greases no wheels, it bakes no puddings. It is a gift of sheer grace, a gratuitous largesse. It must imply behind things a Spirit that enjoys beauty for its own sake and that floods the world everywhere with it. Wherever it can break through, it does break through, and our joy in it shows that we are in some sense kindred to the giver and revealer of it.

2nd hymn “We Sing of the Modern City” no. 259 in the red book.

Joys and Concerns

Dear Friends—We pray that all receive those recharging moments, of the tides of solitude and busyness with St. Aidan, of nature in our first hymn, of beauty with Rufus Jones, of the People in our second hymn, of Love with Isaac Pennington, and of being the salt and light in Matthew. In late summer, the blooms bear fruit and the light changes to gold. May we ripen in love, light, and beauty, neither remote nor aloof, but fully present in the constant presence. We pray for those who need maturing light. Bring the fullness of days to a world of understanding each other in a call and response of heart to heart. Strengthen our community, and make us both contributors and beneficiaries to the coming harvest. Amen.

Our third hymn is no. 12 “Spirit of God” in the green book.

Children are free to head downstairs in community of youth.

Message:

Dear Friends—We on these lakes and hills know that sensation of that warm breath and breeze, reliever and invigorator of a summer's day—we sing to have it fill the earth and bring it to birth. Some of those verses speak of discouragement, and yet invoke the Spirit to wake us up and move us in becalmed times.

And it's not just the wind that moves, but as St. Aidan prayed, in the ebb and flow of the tides we can become islands of joy and wonder, surrounded by the flood of a profound presence, an unexplained or deeply calming sense at sunset. What is that emotion, that sense that bears us up and gives us strength for the new day and the rest of the world?

My theme today is call and response—the calls and responses of inspiration, the intimations of the divine amid the blank screens of the answerless. When we are called to be salt and light to the world, that through us the Spirit might be savored and shine, we need to have our sources, our places to recharge. Something must make us ready to answer that of God. Isaac Pennington finds it in love, and I remind you of what he wrote:

So often, in the contemporary world, one hears from others that God is hard to find or recognize or experience. But if God is love, is that so hard to find, to experience, to recognize? It is always a blessing. And if the wonder in our hearts at beauty is yet another way to recognize the divine and our connection to it, we can join in the wisdom of Rufus Jones, who wrote:

These are calls, and we are the responses, in our everyday times and interactions. Interaction sharpens the dull.

Yet, to have these hopeful, loving eyes described in these readings takes courage and support. It takes the sharing of strength and the strength of sharing. When we open up and let down our guard, overcome our resistance, ripen in the summer sun, the light changes, just as it has in these last few days. This mature, golden light of summer is for mutual sharing. At ball games and reunions, as some of us have done over these past days and weeks, or in memories, conversation, and mutual work. The seasoning prevents us from losing interest in life.

Find the rhythm of your call and response. Find among us in this meeting or in your lives beyond, the support, the ground for a ripening light, a deeper flavor. We are the ones we've been waiting for—you are the salt of the earth—you are the light of the world. We are what we have to appreciate and inspire and recognize the Divine. The many millions of us in the hymn of the city all have our beauty and love, all can feel a beauty and love that can be shared. Engage and share. Dive in and encourage. Accept love and support. Taste and see.

Worship

Love and Beauty are not ends in themselves, but sources of power, energy, and support, and means to face the world.

Closing Hymn: no. 330 "As we Leave this Friendly Place" green book. Since it is so short and sweet, we will sing it twice.

Closing: Dear Friends—May all of us be alert to the calls and responses of Spirit and soul, of the divine, of the needed friend and the Friend in need. Let us share the golden days of high summer in peace and joy, witnessing beauty and love as we strive for justice and truth, adding spice, brightening space.