

## Saving Darkness, Saving Light --Message for 6 December 2015

Greeting: Parker Palmer wrote in 1990, "We need to remember that all the great spiritual traditions, when you boil them down, are saying one simple thing: BE NOT AFRAID! They don't say you can't have fear, because we all have fears... but they say you don't have to be your fears, and you don't have to create a world in which those fears dominate the conditions of many, many people." Palmer was reflecting what George Fox wrote in 1678: "The love of God has been poured into your hearts, so let it banish all fear."

Opening Hymn, no. 40 in green book—Dark of Winter

First Reading: I was very surprised this week to learn that the familiar prophecy of Isaiah in chapter 9 is actually a response to war and desolation and is rarely read in its entirety. Here it is verses 1-6: "Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan—The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

The places mentioned in this passage—the lands of Zebulon and Naphtali are the same lands devastated by Assyria's armies in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings. Thus Isaiah offers a word of distant hope for those parts of his nation most affected by war, and a sword into plowshares message. A Messiah from Galilee!

A second reading about rejecting the swirl of doubt in negative news, in times of trouble, in days of little light, from Rumi:

They say, "The King of Love will turn from His lovers." —Lies!  
They say, "The darkness will never turn to dawn." -Lies!

They say, "Do not sacrifice your life for love's sake.  
When the body dies, you will die." -Lies!

They say, "The tears you shed in love are worthless.  
They block your eyes and hold you from the truth." -Lies!

They say, "You can go beyond the cycle of time but your soul  
can travel no further." -Lies!

People are caught in their own vanity and say, "The lives of the  
prophets are nothing by fairy tales." -Lies!

People who have lost their way say,  
"The servant can never reach God." --Lies!

They say, "The knower of secrets does not tell His servants all  
the mysteries of the Unseen." --Lies!

They say, "He does not reveal the heart's innermost secrets. He  
does not lift His servants up to heaven." --Lies!

They say, “One who is born of Earth will never join the angels of heaven.” --Lies!

They say, “The pure soul must remain in this earthly nest; it will never soar on the wings of love.” --Lies!

They say, “The Sun of God does not fill this whole world; He misses a few atoms.” --Lies!

Now go to that inner stillness.

Some say, “You will not hear the voice of God there.” --Lies!

Let us sing some of the hopeful truth:

2<sup>nd</sup> Hymn, no. 241 in green —Lady of the Seasons’ Laughter

### Joys and Concerns

Dear Friends—As we settle into the days of extended darkness let us feel the peace of the inward turning and let us kindle the warmth of community to keep doubt from commanding our anxiety. Oh Spirit of Truth, great spirit of Love, be near when news of the outside world frightens and disturbs us, and settle blessings on those whose lives are subjects of that terrible news. The human family needs hope and strength when comes the dark and cold of the stricken soul, the fear, so let us be conduits of that hope and strength, that inner peace. Each day the sun rises, each year the sun returns. It is a pattern and an example of the natural world, of which we are part. The voice cries out again to all, Prepare ye the way! Amen.

3<sup>rd</sup> Hymn, no. 56 in the green book –Carol of the Advent. Just a note on the final line where there is an asterisk—the first verse love is the guest, then love is the rose, then love the bird, and finally love, the star is on the way.

Children are free to head downstairs to prepare for our holiday children's event

Message: Dear Friends—Just as it darkens for the season, the human world turns grateful, and then generous. I think that these holidays are natural holidays, since we know that in many cases the current versions are simply substitutions and adaptations of prior human celebrations of similar observance with different stories. Harvest and the subsequent fallow time are rich in Spirit in so many cultures. In times of waiting together, our thoughts can go deep, our hearts can fill. This is the promise of winter, a promise down through the ages.

The early childhood lessons of please and thank you, and the gratitude of thanksgiving are exercises in the reminders of our blessed dependency. Most obvious in children and the elderly, we are reminded at the beginning and the end of life, the alpha and omega, that our hope, our health, our hearts, depend on others. We cannot do it alone, we never could and never will. It is the ultimate stronger counter influence to the evil of which we all are capable, and that we fear in each other.

Yes, we cannot pretend that desperation will not touch us. As Desmond Tutu wrote in 2007, "Anger, resentment, a lust for revenge, greed, even the aggressive competitiveness that rules so much of our contemporary world, corrodes and jeopardizes our harmony. Our dependence points out that those who seek to destroy and dehumanize are also victims—victims usually of a pervading ethos, be it a political ideology, an economic system, or a distorted religious conviction. Consequently, they are as much dehumanized as those on whom they trample." I would add that they are also just as much a part of us.

But, Tutu also observed that our need for each other makes it our natural tendency to be cooperative and helpful. If this were not true, we would have died out as a species long ago. It is a tendency that leads all nations to Paris this week.

Ghandi once wrote, “When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible but in the end, they always fall—think of it. ALWAYS.”

So in the darkened days, the winter, nurse the embers and share the light. The seasons of gratitude and generosity are also ones of joy and of music, and each seems richer, more precious in the vivid outline of cold and snow.

Many of you know that last year, Craig and I spent much of December in an even darker location visiting my cousins and MaryAnn Nobben, a member of this meeting, in Norway. In those very short days, many candles are lit as part of the local tradition. Small points of fire that glow warmly, that live in ways quite different from artificial light. Down the street, at each doorway, one sees pillar candles alight. And perhaps, most beautiful, the five-day candles lit across the cemetery hills on Christmas Eve, lights to remember light. Some of us have had those powerful mystical experiences of the Inner Light only very occasionally in our lives—but one can nurture much of the soul, and carry on with memories of the Light, with honors of profound Light. Then, when summer comes, the beauty of the quiet winter and those warming lights endure.

There are ways in which the constant glare of lights, the summers of long and busy days, can obscure the quiet subtlety of deeper Light. In darkness, even glimmers and glimpses of light become bright. Our eyes adjust to catch the subtle

shadows, the lightness of grey, the subtle rose before the dawn. Just as the sun, and even the moon obscures the stars, in their absence, the longer nights of winter can quiet the mind, and lead the heart to see the farther suns, the deeper space, and we gather in the stories that connect one to the other. And shortened days are made all the brighter by snow and clear blue sky.

Winter brings both clarity and strength. The tree without leaves bearing an outline in snow or standing naked in the wind seems stoic, both vulnerable and enduring. It is rooted. So are we, even standing within storms of seasons fierce.

Worship

Our closing Hymn: no. 237 in green book—When in Our Music God is Glorified anticipates the coming concerts and carols.

Closing: Yes, even at the ending year there comes the Alleluia. May the darkened days make all the more apparent the Light we see within each other in gratitude and generosity in the celebrations new of ancient days.

Afterthoughts, thanks, introductions, announcements.