

Greeting: Rufus Jones, a leading Quaker mystic and intellectual of the first half of the twentieth century once wrote: “We are seeking God, but God is also seeking us.” I would add: Expect to find the Divine. Expect to be found.

Our first hymn is about the Light lit by love, the Light that we find and that finds us, from the green book number 269, “Let Your Light Shine”.

Our first reading today is from John 15: 9-17. It is this passage of Christ’s words that inspired George Fox to call his followers “Friends of Truth”:

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead I have called you friends, for everything I have learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.”

On this idea of loving friendship, William Penn wrote:

“A true friend unbosoms freely, advises justly, assists readily, adventures boldly, takes all patiently, defends courageously, and continues a friend unchangeably. Friendship is the union of spirits, a marriage of hearts, and the bond thereof virtue... Death is but crossing the world, as friends do the seas; they live in one another still.”

Our second hymn expresses the variety of ways that we might experience the divine as Friends of Truth: No. 275 in the green book “We Worship God in Many Ways”

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—For we are Friends. We sit among Friends in our joys and concerns, spoken and unspoken, with hearts both joy-filled and broken. In these full moments when there are so many ways to Truth, and so many ways that the Truth will find us, as we are open, and as way opens, let us truly share. Let us follow the command to love one another and to share our paths to Truth. Make us deeply Friends to each other and to the Divine. Bring us sacred friendship in a society of love and deep understanding of our purpose and place in this world of great change and uncertainty. Love is scarce and needed in the general ways of the world. Let us be the Light to love in this place and time. However we find and experience the Divine, let us transmit whatever Light we have, and let us be prepared to be transformed by the transmissions all around us. As we are both seeking and being found, let us remember to love. Amen

Our third hymn is “Move in Our Midst” no. 80 in the blue book, a hymn more about how the Divine might find us.

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

Message:

Dear Friends—How good it is to be among Friends and to know that we have committed ourselves to be a religious society of Friends. William Penn defined the relationship among friends so beautifully that his words persist on cards and posters in this 21st century after the life of Jesus: “A true friend unbosoms freely, advises justly, assists readily, adventures boldly, takes all patiently, defends courageously, and continues a friend unchangeably. Friendship is the union of spirits, a marriage of hearts, and the bond thereof virtue... Death is but crossing the world, as friends do the seas; they live in one another still.”

Unknown to many who encounter that definition is the deep link to our religious society, where we are meetings of Friends, and where our bonds to each other are based not only on our mutual friendship to each other, but to our mutual common universal friend. What does it mean to be God’s friend, to be a friend to the sacred, to the transcendent, to the light within our hearts that we seek inwardly and also seek to share and to recognize in others?

The Bible passage in John, in which Christ makes clear that we are not to be followers of him or servants to God, but rather to be his friend, to be God’s friend, sounds like it has tradeoffs. Twice the words seem to set conditions on this amazing term of equality in the intimate concept of friendship: “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.” And “You are my friends if you do what I command.” These “if/then” quid-pro-quo kinds of statements don’t exactly sound to our modern ears as real ways to friendship. However, all around these words he lets loose what the command is: “As

the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.” “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” And finally: “This is my command: Love each other.” As an old folk song from my childhood said, “They will know we are Christians by our love”. We are one in the Spirit.

But, there are other issues here, because of this word, “Friend”. The bigger context in this part of the Gospel of John is that the disciples are questioning Jesus—asking about him and God and the relationship to others just as the time of Jesus’ death is nearing. It is like he is giving their final graduation message in his teaching. And, in essence, he is saying, “I am no longer your teacher—I am your friend”. As a teacher myself, I have loved that moment, both with my mentors, as well as with my students. Friendship implies equality and likeness. It is hard to imagine being friends with one’s boss, one’s teacher, or even with one’s parents when they are in those roles. Friendship removes authority. Friends advise, share, sit with one another in compassion and strength, and are open to each other’s gifts and insights and experience. As our friend, God is not judging nor intimidating.

So, the time before holy week in the experience of Jesus and the disciples was a time of removing authority, a time of moving from teacher to friend. Can we warm up in that way to the sacred and to the divine? Can we sit down with the inner light in ourselves and one another, recognize it, share our perspectives and openly compare notes, find the certainties amid all the doubts of the world? Simply be loving? Becoming intimate with one’s true self, and with the universe, is the goal of our spiritual life if everyone has the potential to become a Friend of God. When George Fox started calling us “Friends of Truth”, he meant in many ways that we are friends because of a common mutual experience of deep friendship. In the mystical

experience of light and the divine that we have in common, we have become friends. In fact, in that place, all have the potential to be our friends, if we can locate that common ground, see it in each other.

Another part of that passage in John is the well known verse: “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” Which also has its Lenten context and its parallels in what was to take place for the historical Jesus. But there is a wider way to interpret that verse as not just a very literal “being willing to die for one’s friends”. Each time we open ourselves to the concerns of others, each time we listen with compassion, each time we come together to wait expectantly for a mutual message and experience of the eternal, when we take time for one another, we are laying down our individual lives for our friends, for a common life, for a shared experience—a shared life, a friendship.

Our individuated experiences, when shared and expressed, give us multiple perspectives, a clearer and more accurate view than one might get from only one vantage point. Keeping our spiritual lives to ourselves, thinking “well, I don’t talk about those kinds of things” will leave us narrow. When friendship deepens, when trust deepens in love, we share our thoughts and experiences, our insights. All of our hymns today speak and sing of that sharing across difference, the guidance and support we get from another vantage point offered by a friend.

In this big universe, this sea of all time, in these many places where we live, it is easy to feel lost. It is easy to be bewildered by the motivations of some people we don’t know or observe from a distance. Our lives have meaning when we come together, when we find each other, when we make time for each other in our hearts, and in our simple daily time, in the

limited time we all have together. A number of months ago, I used the metaphor of a trail we are on, recognizing that trail markers are not put literally on the path, but along the sides of the path as guides. These might be put there by our historical friends, the words we read, the stories we tell, the memories we have. But we are on the path with some real live Friends. We can point out the trail markers to each other, and we can also look far in that distance and say—“Yes, I see the Light. Do you see that Light?” or sometimes even “I have some light—if it’s too dark for you, let me get my light out.” In all of those moments, it is not just that God is present, that the sacred and the divine is around us. God is one of those friends. The transcendent force of love is all of those friends. Let us truly be for one another and for the world, a society of friends.

Worship

Final hymn is number 2 in the Green book, built on the text of St. Francis of Assisi, where the context for our friendship is the sacred experience, the divine encounter in all of the universe.
“All Creatures of Our God and King”

Closing: “We are God’s friends. We may be seeking the sacred, the divine, the meaning of life, but that great blessing and insight is also seeking us. Expect to find the Divine. Expect to be found.”

Thanks/Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude