

## The Rock on Which We Stand Message for 7 August 2016

Greeting: Desmond Tutu wrote:

*We humans can tolerate suffering, but we cannot tolerate meaninglessness. Peace involves inevitable righteousness, justice, wholesomeness, fullness of life, participation in decision making, goodness, joy, compassion, sharing, and reconciliation. Instead of separation and division, all distinctions make for a rich diversity to be celebrated for the sake of the unity that underlies them. We are different so that we can know our need of one another.*

Our first hymn in the Green Book, #248, "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy"

George Fox wrote in 1649: "We need no mass for to teach us, and we need not your common prayer, for the Spirit that gave forth the scriptures teacheth us how to pray, sing, fast, and to give thanks...The true faith changeth not, which is the gift of God, and a mystery held in pure conscience...Our faith, our church, our unity in the Spirit, and our Word, at which we tremble, was in the beginning before your church-made faiths, and our unity, church, and fellowship will stand when they are all ended. A minister at Nottingham told the people that the scriptures were the touchstone and judge by which they were to try all doctrines, religions, and opinions, and to end controversy. Now the Lord's power was so mighty upon me, and so strong in me, that I could not hold, but was made to cry out and say, "Oh, no, it is not the scriptures", and was commanded to tell them God did not dwell in temples made with hands. But I told them what it was, namely, the Holy Spirit, by which the holy people of God gave forth the scriptures, whereby opinions, religions, and judgments were to

be tried; for it led into all Truth, and so gave the knowledge of all Truth. If there was not scripture...Christ is sufficient.”

The second reading is from Colossians 3:12-16: “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

Our 2nd hymn is “Within the Maddening Maze of Things” no. 242 in the red book.

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—We are all seekers in some sense—at least of safety and stability, of the higher ground in the flood, of the shelter in the storm, of love amid the loneliness. Let us find the Rock on which to stand, let us be the foundation, the stones, the mortar, the gravel, the sand, let us fully find each other. Let us make meaning of this time. Let us reach a settled place, a heart of calm, a holy blessing of peace and truth. That sacred spot of sunlight, that divine Light of angels in the gentle rain, that settled Truth in the calming lap of God, beneath the stars, the wind in trees, the darkened room. Oh Great Spirit, be our spirit, and steady us in the heated days of late summer to quench our thirst in the drought of these days. In this now, let us know in full that we are the ones whom we await. Amen.

Our third hymn is green book No. 260, "Here I am, Lord".

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear Friends—I recently read a piece by the contemporary Quaker writer on education, leadership, social change and community, Parker Palmer. He was discussing the abundance of summer, the gardens and crops and the state of plenty. His assertion is that abundance is also about choosing community—when we come together to share our common store. I would add to his examples of summer's abundance the warmth and time for visits and vacations, the sense of expansion and generosity, the ease with which one can go outside. We are more likely to see what others are doing, to join in at free festivals and parks and beaches and simply walking or visiting encounters in the summer. It stands in contrast to winter and scarcity and a struggle with the elements. Summer is a kinder season, even for the very poor.

And yet, how often are we unable to relax in what we already have, in the promise of today. We can often worry about future scarcity, focus on the lack, on what we don't know for sure. This kind of focus leads us to compare, to hoard, in fact to create scarcity by drawing circles around what's ours or what we think we might need. We mask our meanness with a veneer of calling it practicality or planning ahead.

Did you know that the most generous people are regularly statistically measured as the poor? Rich people won't give you stuff—that's how they became rich. You have to be mean to be rich in this world. Some of you may have heard the story on the radio yesterday about the shop in a refugee camp in Greece which actually barely breaks even, and offers many things for

free. It's not really a shop, but more of a service, bringing goods to the isolated camp from the nearest town 16 miles away. It operates on an honor system, partly so that the owner does not sit there minding the shop, which might embarrass those who cannot pay. These are people in a situation where they cannot afford not to share. They cannot afford a commercial relationship. They cannot really afford the margin of profit. It is not exactly commercially viable, but somehow it is sustainable—it keeps going because of need and care.

When I headed a rural Friends school for eight years in western Kenya, we regularly had refugees from Uganda coming across the border and passing by the school on their way to a nearby camp. At the time of a major famine, I was struggling to feed 500 people per day a solid lunch on campus—for many their only meal of the day, and it was tremendously stressful. I had seen the provincial storehouse with its dwindling stock of food and our menus started to get rather creative, while other schools were closing. I tried to figure out if one should discipline school workers for taking food home to their families or students sneaking food through the fence to siblings, and we would send the refugees on to the camp at the gate with water and directions. At that time, I was called to a special meeting by the board of the school and the local elders. I was asked if we had food in storage. Why had I not fed the refugees? This is not hospitality. I was reprimanded and had shamed them. I learned about borders and planning and hoarding in that moment. Part of the reason that there are so many refugees in Africa is that borders are open, that hospitality is expected.

So, in many ways, we create abundance through community in the moment. Like the old children's book, "Stone Soup". And abundance, in turn, as in the summer, can create and build community. It is no accident, that we need the countercyclical

reminder and have embedded the major season of giving and generosity in the season of scarcity in our own culture. We are all rich when we are together, and no one can be rich when they are alone in hoarding or ownership—the inequity just makes things more and more insecure.

Community is the rock that makes us more and more secure. This is why we are called a Religious Society of Friends. We have a collective foundation, a solidarity of Spirit. We are wealthy together. We make meaning together.

Our hymns and readings today underscore that this is true in the abundance of Light, in abundance of Spirit and insight and blessings and grace. When we are struggling with meaning for our lives or through adversity, or just thinking through our relationships to each other, making decisions about what might be right or wrong for us, we need to share. We need to build the abundance of such messages and considerations in our communities. Wisdom is collective. The wisdom that grows with age, the wisdom shared last week on peace, comes from the accumulated encounters with others. Let us share our abundance of Light.

Worship

The final hymn is on the handout on the benches, “It’s in Every One of Us”

Closing: Let us carry each other in every one of us. Let us be wise. Let us know our need of one another through our differences and our insights. Let us fill our own gaps with our group abundance. Balance out our seasons with inner Light.

Thanks/Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts