

Greeting: “L’shana tovah tikatev v’etahetem”—may you be inscribed and sealed for a good year, the greeting of Rosh Hashanah, often called the Jewish New Year today, the head of the year, but it really is in the Jewish calendar the birthday of the world, the universe, consciousness, the month ascribed to when God created everything. And, as Neale Donald Walsch wrote in “Conversations with God”—“The deepest secret is that life is not a process of discovery, but a process of creation. You are not discovering yourself, but creating yourself anew.”

Our first hymn is in the Green Book, #178, “Precious Lord”

Our first reading is from the traditional psalm for Rosh Hashanah, Psalm 27, and while we all face external hurdles and opposition and difficult people, I sometimes read verses that speak of the enemy as that conflict within ourselves, the capacity for evil in ourselves that regularly obscures the light. Psalm 27: “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident. One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord. Hear my voice when I call, O Lord; be merciful to me and answer me. My heart says of you,

“Seek his face!” Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior. Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me. Teach me your way, O Lord; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence. I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”

A second reading from Psalm 51, 10-12: “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.”

Finally, a quote from A. Barratt Brown of Britain Yearly Meeting who wrote in 1932: “We need to guard against undervaluing the material expressions of spiritual things. It is easy to make a form of our very rejection of forms. And in particular, we need to ask ourselves whether we are endeavoring to make all the daily happenings and doings of life which we call ‘secular’ minister to the spiritual. It is a bold and colossal claim that we put forward—that the whole of life is sacramental, that there are innumerable ‘means of grace’ by which God is revealed and communicated—through nature and through human fellowship and through a thousand things that may become the ‘outward and visible sign’ of ‘an inward and spiritual grace’.

Our 2nd hymn is “God Who is Father, Mother” no. 287 in the green book.

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—As each day, each year, each moment of consciousness begins, and then begins again, let us all be guided and grounded in the Light, in the infinite Love that teaches what love can do. Hold us, Precious Lord, in the Light, by the hand, as mother and father, as creator and life force, as inner inspiration. Keep us renewed and open, ever looking outward on creation and the world, ever finding the daily sacraments of life and living in the world and in each other. Despair and resentment easily come upon us when we don't keep the path clear. We need strength in times when our own inner doubts and failures to seek that of God cut us off from understanding and connection and community. God is still speaking. Grant us the grace to discern and disseminate the message, the will to listen and then to act with love. Amen.

Our third hymn is green book No. 274, "Within the Shadow of Our Walls"

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear Friends—This past Friday I was on a support phone call with some Quakers and the message came to me that we should see our faith as a start to conversations and actions, rather than an end or limit. I don't mean that we should be overtly proselytizing and constantly talking about our faith, though that might not be bad, but rather that our inner critic should not be set on the "disapproval" setting. Our faith does not work well as a means of censorship or limitation. No dancing, no music, no alcohol, no joking around was one version of Quaker discipline. This is a constant closing of the circle of faith and belief—writing off or closing ourselves off to those with whom we disagree or of whom we disapprove.

Those rules might be good rules, and keeping a simple and focused life is a good discipline—for ourselves and for the clarity one might seek as an individual. Generally, however, our approach has been queries, questions to ask oneself rather than strict rules. We can't and don't know the needs and circumstances of others. The famous quote to a Quaker with a sword was "wear it as long as thou canst"—and might we say the same to the gun owners of today. We might advise, we might ask tough questions, but we must always be open to new leadings. In fact, we strengthen our leadings when we honestly test them through full and true encounters. Deploring those who have that of God within them cuts us off from God and from sacred encounters with unfamiliar experiences and different perspectives on life and its many dimensions.

As a gay person, I have certainly experienced quite directly the use of faith as justification for bigotry. People have said to me point blank, "my religion does not allow me to accept you", and they have said that in harsher terms involving hell. But our religion quite directly says that it not only allows acceptance in an existential sense, but it demands true pursuit of understanding, real engagement. The great Roman playwright Terence, a Berber from Africa, wrote in 163BC "I am human, therefore nothing human is alien to me" a quote of great inspiration to Maya Angelou. When one adds the Quaker insight of the Light within, it gathers even more strength.

Psalm 27 states that we will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, not only in some hereafter. The enemies mentioned in that psalm I like to think of as the inner wrestling we might undertake with our own doubts, the ocean of darkness we may experience along with the ocean of light, as Fox put it. We need protection, often from ourselves and

conflicts of our own making, and safe harbor, often from situations that we have put ourselves in. So, we should never resort to judgment as a simple or obvious matter. We all learn and discern. Let us dwell deep in that tabernacle, let us be exposed out on that high place, let us see God's face.

Therefore, the experiential seeking of Quakerism is not only about an opening to the world, but an orientation to the sacramental in the world, as our third reading today declares. As a child, I misunderstood the "no Christmas, no baptism, no communion" of Quakerism as criticisms of other Christians, rather than as positive expansions. It is not that one should not have a Sabbath day, but that every day can be a Sabbath. It is not that one avoids celebrating Christmas or Easter, but rather that one should always be celebrating. We are not baptized only at one moment in one ritual. The dawn, the shimmering lake, the laughing eyes, the quiet dignity are all baptisms, are all communions, are all sacramental moments.

Conflicts, the unfamiliar, are times for curiosity, are openings to the unexpected, are references to wider understanding. The new beginnings that come with open minds and hearts are ever developing starting points. Some have heard the phrase that Christ makes all things new—and in this sense, the Inner Light casts promising perspectives on all new things. This is no time to stop. Don't hold back. Don't censor or censure.

Actually, that's just another lists of "don'ts!". Step forward into the world, walk cheerfully on it, look with eyes of light and positive regard, begin with respect. This is not about general constant approval, but about the openness to discernment, the casting first of Light, and that Light be always part of judgment. We are not relativists—we have a grounding and a common experience of the Spirit. Remember and know that the

common experience exists, even if it is not always felt surely and purely on the individual level. The Light within shines in us, even and especially when I can't find it in me. On our sure foundation, let us start.

Worship

The final hymn is in the green hymnal, "Forward Through the Ages" number 258

Closing: Create in us pure hearts, O God, and renew steadfast spirits within us. Do not cast us from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from us. Restore to us the joy of your salvation and grant us a willing spirit to sustain us. Happy New Year, new day, new Light!

Thanks/Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts