

*Order of Service – October 9, 2016
Across a Great Divide*

Musical Prelude

Greeting -- John Woolman and Thich Nhat Hahn

1st Hymn: How Can I Keep From Singing, Green 245

Readings -- Revelation 2:9, 'Thank You' W.S. Merwin, 'I Got Kin' Hafiz, Luke 9:2

2nd Hymn: Diverse in Culture, Nation, Race, Green 320

Joys and Concerns

Musical interlude

Prayer -- Calling out across the great divide.

3rd Hymn: Love Grows One by One, Green 220

Pastoral reflection or message

Silent worship

4th Hymn: Love Will Guide Us, Green 243; 1, 2, 4, 6

Benediction -- Love so God knows he has kin

Thank yous/ Introductions / Remembrances/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude

Greeting

Good morning Friends. Last week during worship a message was given to us about Friends calling out to one another, with love, across a vast chasm of difference. And this week I have repeated that single phrase -- *Friends, calling out to one another across a vast chasm* as a prayer for our country and our world. 18th century Quaker John Woolman once wrote:

There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath different names: it is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no form of religion nor excluded from any, where the heart stands in perfect sincerity.

Vietnamese Zen Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh called this deep pure inward principle our 'true names' in a poem he wrote on the way to the United Nations Special Session on Disarmament in 1982. With it, he challenged a forum of religious leaders to see those shared true names in both victims and perpetrators of violence. *I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones, my legs as thin as bamboo sticks, he wrote, And I am the arms merchant, selling deadly weapons to Uganda. Please call me by my true names, so I can hear all my cries and laughter at once, so I can see that my joy and pain are one, so that the door of my heart can be opened, the door of compassion.*

It takes faith, and the courage of an open heart to call everyone by their true names, to pray that we are all friends, calling across a vast chasm. And to nurture that faith and courage of heart is why we gather together. So let us raise our voices together in our first hymn, of praise and open-hearted courage and faith, from the Green hymnal, How Can I Keep From Singing, number 245.

Readings

Revelation 9:2 *The star opened the pit of the abyss, and smoke rose out of it like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke from the pit.*

"Thanks" by W.S. Merwin

Listen

*with the night falling we are saying thank you
we are stopping on the bridges to bow from the railings
we are running out of the glass rooms
with our mouths full of food to look at the sky
and say thank you
we are standing by the water looking out
in different directions.*

*back from a series of hospitals back from a mugging
after funerals we are saying thank you
after the news of the dead
whether or not we knew them we are saying thank you
looking up from tables we are saying thank you
in a culture up to its chin in shame
living in the stench it has chosen we are saying thank you*

*over telephones we are saying thank you
in doorways and in the backs of cars and in elevators
remembering wars and the police at the back door
and the beatings on stairs we are saying thank you
in the banks that use us we are saying thank you
with the crooks in office with the rich and fashionable
unchanged we go on saying thank you thank you*

*with the animals dying around us
our lost feelings we are saying thank you
with the forests falling faster than the minutes
of our lives we are saying thank you*

*with the words going out like cells of a brain
with the cities growing over us like the earth
we are saying thank you faster and faster
with nobody listening we are saying thank you
we are saying thank you and we are waving
dark though it is*

I Got Kin, Hafiz

Plant

*So that your own heart
Will grow.*

Love

So God, that Friend with the comfortable bosom, will think,

"Ahhhhh,

I got kin in that body!

I should start inviting that soul over

For coffee and

Rolls."

Sing

Because this is a food

Our starving world

Needs.

Laugh

Because that is the purest

Sound.

Luke 9:2 And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God.

Message

This week I saw a picture of a large truck, with two big exhaust pipes deliberately rigged up to spew black exhaust, and a prominent bumper sticker pointing to the pipes, reading “Prius Repellant.” Online, I found websites devoted to the anti-Prius community, one which began “Do you have an irrational hatred for the Toyota Prius and the latte-drinking, quinoa-eating, yoga class-attending pencil necks who drive them?”

I drive a Prius. I’ve occasionally had a latte, eaten quinoa, and done yoga. I’m not sure about the shape of my neck. I am sure that it is hard to picture the driver of that truck, whom I’ve never met, having an irrational hatred for me. It’s also hard to believe that we might be Friends, calling out to one another, across a great divide.

My brother-in-law is an astrophysicist, and when he was visiting us last Saturday, he explained to George that we humans have the technological design capacity to harvest energy from the sun while in space and beam it to earth with a super concentrated laser beam. It would be an engineering feat, but we could do it, and if we did, it would be observable from other distant planets, a way of waving, saying, “Hi, we’re here!” We could also observe that kind of harvesting of energy if anyone else in the universe was doing it, we would see them waving, and in the astrophysicist world, the fact that we haven’t as yet observed such a phenomenon from our vantage point in the universe is considered one more piece of evidence pointing to the unlikelihood of technologically advanced life elsewhere in the universe.

A lot of what my brother-in-law does and knows about is far beyond me. But what is not beyond me is awe at the vastness of the universe, and feeling small, feeling wonder, feeling both held within and lost in something immense, feeling alone and wanting to feel connected to someone else, wanting to feel less alone. I think that some of those feelings might inform the quest to find life elsewhere in the Universe, and I think that they also might be a distilled essence or impulse behind what religion does, or could do: it is a place where people come together, bringing our awe and wonder, our curiosity, our smallness, separateness, and loneliness, and

we call out across the distance, looking for kin, in the dark. The etymology of the word religion comes from a combination of Latin words meaning to bind, to connect, and to revere what is sacred, not just once, but again and again. That's the "re" part. Over and over, we call out across the great distance. We wave in the dark, looking for The Friend with the comfortable bosom, for God, for the One with whom we hope at last to know that *we* are in the deepest, truest part of ourselves RELATED, kin, to the deepest, truest part of something else. We wave, believing that maybe we share a common true name.

When I was 21, a very old nun told me that for her, one of the sub-meanings that she chose to hear in the words 'Kingdom of God' was Kinship. The Kingdom of God, I remember her saying, exists in the Kinship of God. Ironically, though, one of the ways that religion in its long history has created the feeling of kinship is by separation, of Us, from Them. For me, this story-line of Us as opposed to Them, of defining who We are, is one of the harder, trickier parts of the Bible. The longing for kin, the longing to belong, and know what we belong to, and who we are, is a very ancient story, told by our spiritual ancestors, in both the First and Second Testaments. And if one of the ways we can approach the Bible is as a truthful mirror for our own condition, then it reflects something that is still true about the human race today. We are still searching for who we are, really, and still often defining ourselves and finding ourselves in relation to something we call Other than Us, whether that is God, an Ultimate Other, or other people, those who drive hybrids or big trucks, or other species, or other races, or other religions. Sometimes we think of ourselves as the chosen, the set apart, with a special relationship to what is most holy. Sometimes we are the ones who welcome the other, the stranger, the one who requires us to question who we are, and what makes us "Us," and whether there is a larger "we" than we'd previously imagined, that we could be part of. Sometimes we keep out the strange and unfamiliar and reinforce the boundaries between who we've decided *we* are and who we've decided *they* are, sometimes we say that our set apartness is what is holy.

The history of Christianity tells this story, and so does the history of Quakerism. The first generation of Quakers believed that we were a people set apart, Friends of the Truth, Friends of the Light, working with God to bring about the kingdom of God on earth, the great apocalyptic revelation from within that would change

everything. By the 1800s, there was disagreement about what constituted a Quaker, and discord over, among other things, the authority of Scripture and the Inward Light, and the Lordship and Divinity of Jesus. Not able to come to agreement, the Society of Friends splintered, a crevasse opened, and we would come to call it The Great Separation. Subsequent smaller schisms would follow. Allen Jay, a weighty Friend who traveled extensively in the ministry and was born after the first great separation but lived through several smaller separations, wrote of that time:

'Justice to history demands that I record a separation.... This is one thing that both sides agree on. They are also clearly agreed in saying that the other party was the one to blame, and the yearly meeting minutes of each party show plainly that a Christian spirit was not manifested by the other side.' *'Private letters from both sides have told me how deeply they mourn the separation and how they have wept over the un-Christian spirit of those who went out from them.'*

We were, then, Friends, calling out across a Great Divide.

Sometimes the divisions and the distances between seem too great to bridge, all that can be seen is the divide, the abyss, belching fire and threatening cataclysm. Sometimes, it feels like the chasms are widening -- rock faces heaving and splintering, shards and fragments falling, and we are all stranded on the uncertain edges. In this time, it might be deluded lunacy to believe that across these perilous spaces, we could call to one another as friends. It might be wishful thinking, naive, even dangerous, if across the chasm are not friends at all but people who hate us, who want to hurt us. Quakers and Christians have certainly been accused of being deluded, naive, and dangerous in our belief in the possibility of a peace that comes from kinship across the divide.

We might be naive, deluded, or dangerous. It might also be the way we practice our religion on the edge of the abyss, again and again binding ourselves one to another, connecting across The Great Divide, waving, over and over, calling out thank you, thank you, into the dark. It might be that this is what faith in our true names, in That of God in everyone *looks* like in a culture both unfathomably poor and unquenchably rich. It might be the way to proclaim the kingdom, the Kinship

of God: to dare to believe that if enough of us throw out our ropes of friendship in hope and faith, we can build a bridge across this chasm. It might be that this is how we plant so our own hearts grow, love so that God knows he's got kin, and sing, because it's the food that this starving world needs, because we hear the music ringing.

That man in the truck, repelled by me and wanting to repel me-- we would probably not even agree on the definition of deplorable. But I can tell you that when I pray "friends, calling out across a vast chasm," for that second, peace seems possible. I don't know if it's enough, and I am not sure if we ever get to know that. On the side of the Great Divide, we wave, in the dark, not knowing if anyone waves back. We say thank you even though we are unsure who we are thanking. We believe that underneath the widening abyss there is the bedrock of our true shared names, though unseen, even in the people who hate us, even in the barbarity of this world. Maybe it is futile, wishful thinking, as the abyss belches its smoke. And maybe what Love asks of us is to throw out our flimsy bridges of friendship, and step out upon them in faith.

Prayer

God of love, friend of our hearts. We need you. Sound an echo in our souls here today, and call to us in the language of our true names. Help us to hear your music ringing, help us to add our own voices to the song that our kin of every nation and clan have been singing since time began. When the chasms widen, and the darkness grows and the air is clouded with smoke and soot...guide us. Guide us when we cannot see the way across the great divide. Help us to believe that your song echoes in everyone and everything, however faintly we hear it from across the rifts in your world. Give us the wisdom to build bridges with what you have given us. Grant us the courage and the faith to call all people by their true names, the names you have written upon their hearts, as you have written upon ours. We pray to you together today, for the peace that surpasses all understanding, for the peace of kinship with you and your world. Amen.

Benediction

Let us plant so our own hearts grow, love so that God knows he's got kin, and sing, because it's the food that this starving world needs.

May we hear the music ringing, May we call to one another across the chasm in the language of our true names. May we wave in the dark, and say thank you, thank you, even if seems like no one is listening. May our prayer and our faith be a bridge across the Great Divide.