

Greeting: The vision statement of the Friends Committee on National Legislation “We seek a world free of war and the threat of war. We seek a society with equity and justice for all. We seek a community where every person’s potential may be fulfilled. We seek an earth restored.” May we be grounded in this soil, in the peaceful, embracing good darkness of this earth.

Our first hymn is in the Green Book, #40, “Dark of Winter”

Our first reading is from the first chapter of the book of James:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything...Blessed are those who persevere under trial, because when they have stood the test, they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him...My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for human anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all the moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like people who look at their faces in a mirror and after looking at themselves, go away and immediately forget what they look like. But those who look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continue to do this, not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.”

Our second reading is also about the word planted within us to which James refers, and is eternally part of the universe before the beginning of days. This traditional advent reading is also often referred to as the opening of the Quaker gospel of John:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. It was with God in the beginning. Through it all things were made; without it nothing was made that has been made. In it was life, and the life was the light of humanity. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

There was a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all people might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

It was in the world, and though the world was made through it, the world did not recognize it. The light came to that which was its own, but its own did not receive it. Yet, to all who did receive it, to those who truly believed in it and could name it, they were given the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a couple’s will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from God, full of grace and truth.”

Our 2nd hymn has very simple words and comes from the musical “Godspell”. “Long live God” paired with the cry of John the Baptist, “Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord”. In the taizé tradition, we will sing the refrain repeatedly as we learn it.

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—We pray not only to heed the Word that is the prompting of love within our hearts, but to respond, to act, to make real the grace and truth. In the calm and comforting dark of winter, let us prepare the way of the Lord. Let us look into that mirror and fully remember ourselves and what we see. Let us know the deep eternity before time and that planted in human and full earth consciousness that dwells among us. We pray that the things the Word bids us seek, the wholeness that is coming to birth in the sacred places of the heart will endure in the faith and faithfulness of friends and of our perseverance. As we witness the light, let us also be the light, let us hold each other in the light. Like John the Baptist, we can proclaim the coming of Truth and Light even as we know it in our hearts. This advent, this beginning, let us welcome love fully and truly, so that its expression in the wider world can answer fear and anger with depth, with understanding, and with the glory of the one and only. Let us act with confidence, be patterns and examples, be the ones who are needed in God's long life. Amen.

3rd 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 may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear Friends—What happens when we are in a time of regarding the future, or specifically our own futures with dread or fear? That frightening diagnosis, that threatening bill or debt, that political turn, that unfulfilled dream that seems to be slipping away, that looming worry? Several lines in our last hymn say “Furrows be glad though earth is bare...” or “Even the hour when wings are frozen...” or “...keep the watch when night is dim.” In many ways, we often think we are looking to

the future when we look towards the sunset, the finish, the expected or even known outcome, the final results. This hymn, however, keeps telling us to look east, look for the start, the coming newness, the renewal. What is on the way that might counter the fear or dread or doubt of now? The dormancy and cold of winter is a resting, a gathering of strength, a tough time, yes, and a preparation for beginning. We know that on an individual level each one of us will end, but the love we invest in the world--that guest, that rose, that bird, that star--will go on and will ripple forward in the lives we touch, in the tree we plant, in the words we write, the paths we clear, the things we build, however small, and in the light we share, that inner light.

I've titled my message this morning "grounding and rising". It may not always be obvious that all of my messages have titles when you hear them, but if you go on line to the meeting web site where they are posted, you can see titles for each one. At any rate, in grounding and rising, I'm not only referring to our practice here at meeting, of centering ourselves in silence together to hear the messages that our hearts prompt in us, and then rising to speak Truth as we hear and see it, to bring forth the Word that the Gospel of John links to light and life. But also, the rising to doing that James identifies as essential fulfillment of that Word and Life and Light, the action that is gestating in perseverance. Perseverance. I like both of the possible pronunciations—the one sounds out the severe and the difficult and the other severs one from the possible despair and giving in. In that double meaning—a poetic meaning of sound rather than a dictionary meaning—in some ways a more British stoic meaning in sever and a more dramatic and rugged individual story in the U.S. severe—both look all the way through the night to dawn, or like the hymn, might be heading towards the final west, riding backwards on that wagon, and keeping eyes on the east. So, a second, perhaps bigger, but

more accurately, probably, just parallel meaning of grounding and rising beyond our worship practice, is in an approach to life that depends upon a grounded response, a faithfulness to larger Truth than immediate circumstance that allows one to rise, to lift eyes, to speak truth to power in both personal and social instances, and also to act, to let one's life speak. It is for that reason that I quoted at the opening the FCNL vision statements, sometimes referred to as the "we seeks" which go beyond the queries of any yearly meeting, the questions that it is important for one to ask oneself and one's fellow Quakers, the challenges about our life dilemmas, to statements about goals. "We seek a world free of war and the threat of war. We seek a society with equity and justice for all. We seek a community where every person's potential may be fulfilled. We seek an earth restored."

Many of you know that in the immediate days following the surprising results and impending changes of this recent U.S. election, and of several elections around the world in 2016, I headed to the annual meeting of FCNL. During that time, I also visited the offices of our Senators and local Congress member to speak about criminal justice and sentencing reform. Even in all the changes still unfolding in that election result, we discovered that our own agenda, our own legislative priorities set in a year-long process of consulting Quaker meetings and churches around the nation, did not change. We considered the circumstances, we were grounded and we rose in unity.

As we settle into the gathering dark of winter, as in our first hymn, let us remember that God's life, the sacred life of the eternal work is long, and when we prepare the way of the Lord we are not thinking of a sudden and completely new, stunning transformation. We are in a faithful tradition of welcoming again that blessed birth of hope, of strength, of life, of a still

small voice that is also enduring and powerful and heard through the ages. Look east, gather in the darkness of the ground, of the earth, and find comfort in each other. Another great advent hymn is comfort, comfort, ye my people. And in that comfort and grounding, on that runway with those wings, prepare to rise, to speak the Word, to persevere, to persevere, and to act in faith. We need and experience this season every year, and we need you, faithful friends, in your life and light, at every moment.

Worship

The final hymn is no. 53 in the green hymnal, "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus"

Closing: The word, the eternal Christ, rests in the blessed darkness and also shines in the light that finds as we seek a world free of war and the threat of war. We seek a society with equity and justice for all. We seek a community where every person's potential may be fulfilled. We seek an earth restored."

Thanks/Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts