

Greeting: Our Friend, Elizabeth Bathurst, who lived her life from 1655 to 1685 wrote, “The Seed, or Grace of God, is small in its first Appearance, even as the Morning Light; but as it is given Heed to, and obeyed, it will increase in Brightness, till it shines in the Soul, like the Sun in the firmament at its Noon-day Height.”

Our first hymn is from the blue book number 68, “Brightest and Best of the Sons of the Morning”, an Epiphany hymn recognizing the link of humble and divine as the Light is in the world and revealed to all. It makes the story of the wise men sound a bit like the message of the Shepherd’s Play.

Our first reading is from T.S. Eliot, from Sec. V of *Four Quartets*:

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from. And every phrase
And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,
Taking its place to support the others,
The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
An easy commerce of the old and the new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together)
Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
Every poem an epitaph. And any action
Is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat
Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.
We die with the dying:
See, they depart, and we go with them.
We are born with the dead:

See, they return, and bring us with them.
The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree
Are of equal duration. A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments. So, while the light fails
On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel
History is now and England.
With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

Our second reading is from 2nd Corinthians 5 from verse 16 to Chapter 6, about answering that of God in all. "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to the divine through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to God in Christ, not counting human sins against them. And God has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making an appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made Christ who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God. As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For Isaiah wrote, 'in the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."

Finally, and briefly, from Romans 12: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the

renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—God's good, pleasing, and perfect will.”

Our second hymn is no. 241 in the green book “Lady of the Seasons’ Laughter” where we acknowledge the feminine qualities of the sacred.

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—May our Joys and Concerns, spoken, and in our hearts, ever be bathed in Light, ever be held anew, in love and community, and understanding. The turning year, the turning day, the turning earth, the turning age, are part of the pattern of timeless moments, the Lady, Sister, Mother, Goddess, the brightest and best of the sons of the morning. Let us know in our hearts and for each other the deep Epiphany of sacred grace and life in the everyday that makes all extraordinary. In the power of every day being there, being in joy and concern, grant us wisdom and serenity. As each future becomes a past, add to our store of renewal in the eternal now of the inner Light, of responding freely with joy and concern. We look for a reconciliation that is transforming, not a settling, but a positive startling. As the calendar changes, we know that Light and Truth do not change, and yet they are the catalysts that change everything. Let us be changed, renewed, have epiphanies, dwell in love. Amen

Our third hymn is “Heir of All the Waiting Ages” no. 74 in the green, an old French tune.

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

Message:

Dear Friends—The stunned awe of the original words for that last hymn that many know as “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent” commands us to ponder nothing earthly minded, since God is present. And the words we sang about the waiting ages are words for the new year, the new age, the transformation of time and circumstance.

The theme of the message that came to me for this morning, this marking of the new year, is the phrase, “Everything Old is New Again”, which is often trivialized in pop culture to mean that past fashions and fads will come back. But what I mean is that in the reconciliation with the sacred that Paul describes in 2nd Corinthians, we are answering that of God in Christ and in each person, and no longer dealing with them on simple temporal human terms. As the scripture puts it, “now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.” In this way, all is made new, and as in Romans, we are exhorted, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—God’s good, pleasing, and perfect will.” At the new year, it is refreshing to take on this idea of the renewing of our minds—the refreshing reset of our old patterns into the Light of true discernment.

I like that this transformation away from conformity is also referred to as reconciliation, that we are working at bringing our outer lives and relationships with each other into better alignment with our inner Light, our inner teacher, our sacred sense. That at the new year, at the start, the essential start and beginning, we are committing to that. The verse says that it is as if God were making an appeal through us so that we can take on a righteousness not of reasoned analysis nor of superiority,

not a self-righteousness, but a discerned and careful rightness of habit, of consistency, of harmony with the Spirit. Let that be our new year, our renewal, the way we are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

However, when it comes to beginnings and new beginnings, we cannot just drop or forget the past as if it never happened. It may be in a new light, but that transformation may actually demand from us more about reconciling with the past, about really facing the past. As the old becomes new, it may make new demands or expectations. T.S. Eliot observed in our first reading, "What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.

The end is where we start from.... A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments." When we mark occasions, when we number our years or days, those inflection points are both ends and beginnings, since time from those points flows in both directions. Now is ever an ending and a beginning. It can always be a time of reconciliation, of transformation, of making everything old new again in our lives, in our experience, in our relationships. We do not leave them and start afresh or start over, but rather we renew our minds, we reorient ourselves and set the compass, we catch again the wind of the spirit in our sails and stop wandering, to get back on the journey as Friends together, as partners in seeking and exploring this life.

Eliot is so often seen as a bleak and difficult poet, but he closes with great hope and beauty as he writes: "With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."

I have traveled a great deal in my life and lived in many places and I remember when I lived in rural Africa thinking of those I knew there who had never been much beyond the walking distance of the villages. They are such good and sophisticated people, knowing much of the world and human nature. And some in that village had been in India and Canada and Togo and fields afar, just as I had. Distance is not experience, and change is not development, and learning is not insight. To be made anew, one must be open, and sometimes the pursuit of the new is actually an evasion and an elaborate effort not to be transformed nor to be reconciled. Distracting ourselves from our lives and from our relationships with the novel, just keeps the old in place. Everything old can be new again, even in the small village, in the quiet life, with the people we know, in the day to day mundane. Let that seed of Grace Elizabeth Bathurst saw in her short life grow in brightness and make all new now, in this place, in this life, in this year, in this age.

Our closing hymn is one for the new year and the winter. Let us sing the faith-filled words of number 39 in the Green book, "All Beautiful the March of Days"

Closing: "The Seed, or Grace of God, is small in its first Appearance, even as the Morning Light; but as it is given Heed to, and obeyed, it will increase in Brightness, till it shines in the Soul, like the Sun in the firmament at its Noon-day Height."
"With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling We shall not cease from exploration--And the end of all our exploring--Will be to arrive where we started--And know the place for the first time."

Thanks/Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude