

Greeting: The great African-American poet Gwendolyn Brooks wrote in her poetic tribute to Paul Robeson: “we are each other’s harvest: We are each other’s business: we are each other’s magnitude and bond.”

Our first hymn is a classic Isaac Watts hymn from the red book number 9, “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past”.

Our first reading is another poem from Gwendolyn Brooks: *Speech to the Young Speech to the Progress-Toward (Among them Nora and Henry III)*

Say to them,
Say to the down-keepers,
The sun-slappers
The self-soilers
The harmony-hushers,
“Even if you are not ready for day
it cannot always be night.”
You will be right.
For that is the hard home-run.
Live not for battles won.
Live not for the-end-of-the-song.
Live in the along.

Our second reading is from 1st John Chapter 4 “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love....Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and God’s love is made complete in us. We know that we

live in God and God lives in us because we have been given God's Spirit. God is love. Whoever lives in love, lives in God and God in that person. In this way, love is made complete among us."

Finally, and briefly, from the Gospel of John, Chapter 8, verse 32: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Our second hymn is one of community and love, no. 193 in the green book "Out of the Depths".

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—May all of our Joys and Concerns, spoken, and in our hearts, ever be held in Light and Love, as we look to be healed by God's touch, held in God's care, met with God's grace. The inner Light, the source of spiritual Truth we share, is where we hold these things in mutual love among and between us and all, from ages past and years to come, an eternal home. Give to us the steadiness and faithfulness of the time-tested strength that comes from sacred love and truth. Let us be the manifestations of love and truth in the ways we guide and discern and share in spoken and enacted ministry. Keep us patient and kind as we find the steady path, as we mark the guideposts of the way, the truth, and the life for one another. Let us truly be each other's harvest, let us fully be each other's business, let us ever be each other's magnitude and bond. Let us live in love as Friends. Amen.

Our third hymn is "That Soul Prays" on the handout. We will sing it a number of times like a Taizé hymn, and then as a round.

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

Message:

Dear Friends—What is interesting and essential about that last song is that those words of John Donne recognize that what we see and experience and feel in each other may be more and deeper than what we see or feel in ourselves. That without fully knowing it, we might be the voice of the sacred, the prayerful soul, the shining love, the embodied message that moves the heart. While Donne famously observed that no one is an island, that philosophy is profoundly fleshed out in this message of mutual and often unintended inspiration. That the song is a round, that each line together makes harmony, only more fully expresses how it is all the members of community that keep us inspired and alive in hope.

When 1st John speaks of the ways that God is Love and that in loving we make the sacred manifest among us, the verses also affirm that Love, our mutual bonds and affection, our sense of each other's inner beauty and essential value, that these real experiences of love and actual expressions of love are the ways on this earth that we experience the eternal Truth, that we experience what many call God. The profound concept of the beloved community gains its power in that it brings out the manifestation of the sacred—that the community reinforces itself in a spiral of both conscious and unconscious care, of mutually observed care, of love seen on the path, in the woods, out on the water, deep in the heart, here in the world.

This is what Friends understood and why we call ourselves a Society of Friends—that our mutuality is essential, and that alone in a single consciousness, we simply do not know or

experience enough of time and space, of life and being, of spirit and emotion to know the divine. Friends have always visited each other, have traveled to share Light and to seek Truth, to write epistles and to express our inner revelations, to spell them out and not just leave love and truth as sensations or feelings, but as real expressions of support and understanding. This is a tested and experiential religion, a spiritual journey that is shared. As seekers, we are seeking out one another, we are seeking the Truth in all we encounter, we are not seeking for ourselves, we are not lone explorers. Seeking among Friends is not an individual quest—it is the walking cheerfully over the earth answering that of God in others of all faiths and experience. That is our seeking, that is our calling, that is where we find love and as John writes, it is therefore where we find God, the only way to know God on earth.

Jesus was speaking of the new community, the beloved community, when he said that then we will know the truth and the truth will set us free. It simply cannot and will not be an individual thing, a personal revelation, in fact, we are deeply mistaken if we are only looking for a personal savior. We can only love the inner Christ, we can only love Jesus, we can only find eternal Truth by also loving one another. That is the tao, the Buddha, Krishna. We must love our neighbors, with no exceptions. That is where we find and experience love and Truth and the presence of the sacred. The beloved community is enacted practically daily encounter by encounter, it is not some future unknown utopia.

Gwendolyn Brooks message for the lost, and she mentions Nora and Henry III, is her Speech to the Young Speech to the Progress-Toward where her closing lines,
“Live not for battles won.
Live not for the-end-of-the-song.

Live in the along.” tell us that our lives are not about goals or final achievements but about the way and the encounters and the time spent together in the mutual effort of understanding and listening and knowing and being.

So many have come before. So many have struggled. We have come this far by faith and by the faithful. Dear friends, we must be friends to those who are seeking, we must be those who are sought as we search. This one wild and precious life becomes meaningful in appreciation and understanding. In the middle of this beautiful Black history month of February, the resilient and fraught African American heritage of difficult Truth and abiding hope, is the central holiday of love. We are all in the beloved community, and therein lies our truth. Let us seek it out in one another. Let us truly be together and in loving one another, make the sacred real. Without fully knowing it, we might be the voice of the sacred, the prayerful soul, the shining love, the embodied message that moves the heart.

Our closing hymn is a powerful tribute to ourselves and all who have gone before, number 255 in the Green book, “Valiant for the Truth”

Closing: “God is love. Whoever lives in love, lives in God and God in that person. In this way, love is made complete among us. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Thanks/Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude