

Greeting: “Dearly Beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be guided: and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not in the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.”
Meeting of Elders at Balby in 1656.

Our first hymn is number 1 from the Blue book, “Dearly Beloved Friends”

Our first reading is from Hebrews, verses from chapters 10 to 13. “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this, saying, “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.” Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and have our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for the one who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution, at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So, do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By

faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible (Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham)...All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice, by faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future, by faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, by faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, by faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict, by faith the people passed through the Red Sea, by faith the walls of Jericho fell. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."

The second reading is from 1st Thessalonians 5:12-24. "Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do

not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil. May God, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and will do it."

Our second hymn is no. 286 in the red book "Faith of Our Fathers". In honor of women's history month, and the fact that for most, spiritual guidance comes from our mothers, in the verses let's keep the father's, but in the chorus, let us sing of the faith of our Mothers.

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—We turn in to the Light and reflect out to each other the divine tradition of our ongoing holy communion, a holy community of support down through the ages. The faith of our mothers and fathers, of our forebears who showed us a way, but did not prescribe for us a formula, sustains us. Keep us in that Spirit, so that for the time being, in this time and place, we do not falter as we look towards the mystery of the fullness of time. Let us be the strangers, let us be the angels. It is only together in community that we can test the Truth and be confirmed. Guide us through every season and let faith, hope, and love be our portion. Give each of us the generous and empathetic heart that gives strength to others and returns its own reward. Give us the wisdom to share our burdens and to fill our cups and the cups of others with the living water of life. Amen.

Our third hymn is "A Garden of My Own" number 187 in the green hymnal.

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

Message:

Dear Friends—We each are planting gardens in this common earth, the soil we share, in this short season that we share, while all our fruits and flowers may vary, they also come from a common labor of love and in love. Even when we sing together, we all have our own voices and our own way of enjoying the music, whether choosing a part, or the melody, or just listening. Within the parameters, and sometimes joyfully outside them, we can all be creative, we can all add to the chorus, the harmony, the experience. We all make the music.

In Hebrews, Paul writes of how the letters of the law, the literal law is just the shadow, and the true law comes from and is written in the heart and mind. Doing what is right for now, at this time, is never prescribed, it is a process of discernment. It also comes from an inheritance, a heritage that in any one time and life is never complete, is not over. We act in a long lineage, and humans live naturally in a social environment. So much of human moral virtue is about the importance of dependency, the care for children, the elderly, the disabled. We are born naturally dependent, and the social line only continues if we care for one another. We happen to live in a particularly odd society that holds the very unnatural “independent individual” in high regard. The only time of life when that might be close to true for any person is during a young adulthood before having children—a very short stage of life that is idealized in this society. Most other major cultures honor children or the aged, they honor obligation and reciprocity and care. Every once in a while, we are presented with statistics intended to shock us about how many people, what percent of society is not working for a wage, or is not paying taxes. When one accounts for children and the retired and the disabled and their home-based caregivers, of course it is more than half of society. That is normal. We only succeed together, and we have faith, because so many worthwhile

things take more than one lifetime, and so many parts if a lifetime are not about personal productivity, but about dependence and care. Let us be proud of that and celebrate that and recognize the love that makes that possible.

This is why religion and spirituality, and religious communities are so closely tied to births and marriages and deaths, and why we make ourselves into communities like Poplar Ridge where we are constantly witnessing these events among each other. It is why we look to one another for Light and Life and Love.

The epistle readings for today that I chose are about the sustained communities, about the long haul, about the wisdom and care and decency passed on. Several verses among them stand out—Do not put out the Spirit's fire: Do not treat prophecies with contempt—a command that the rational is not the final word, not everything is understood or neatly packaged. Or the verse: Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Yes, the Angels in America as Tony Kushner wrote about during the AIDS crisis. We look for angels when we need the kindness of strangers.

Be proud to be dependent. Be proud to be dependable. Know that not everything will be completed by you, and that you can trust the succession of others. The building of the cathedrals is like this—even today the apprentices who become stone cutters at St. John the Divine in New York City are guaranteed a job for life that will not be completed. Painting the golden gate bridge. A necessary and never completed task. Teaching or counseling the next generation. Theodore Parker, a great abolitionist thinker whose writings inspired Abraham Lincoln also inspired Martin Luther King when, before he died in 1860 he wrote of the abolition movement, “I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can

divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice."

King also was inspired by the lives of the patriarchs referred to in Hebrews and, like Moses, knew he would not get to the promised land, but in his heart and mind, where the new law is written according to both Jeremiah and Hebrews, he had been to the mountaintop. We call our hill of vision, our mountaintop, a great shining light, an indwelling spirit of the divine, a deep sense of truth, and individually we may not quite get there, but together we know it is there, and we navigate by that star, on this earthen ship, on Gaia, together.

Our closing hymn is number 333 in the Green book, "Go Cheerfully!"

Closing: "I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice."

Thanks/Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude