

Greeting: The great Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi wrote, “Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.” And he also wrote, “What you seek is seeking you.”

Our first hymn is number 291 from the Green book, “O Holy City Seen of John”

Our first reading is from the Persian poet Hafiz who wrote, “We have come into this exquisite world to experience ever and ever more deeply our divine courage, freedom, and light!”

The second reading is from a modern translation and summary of Robert Barclay’s *Apology* of 1676, a major theological defense of Quakerism. It is organized in fifteen propositions, as follows.

Proposition 1: The True Foundation of Knowledge

The height of happiness is the knowledge and firsthand experience of God in our lives. This is essential to our faith and should be understood and trusted. (John 17: 3)

Proposition 2: Inward and Unmediated Revelation

The only way to know God first hand is as an inward experience. Revelation is not only the foundation of faith, it is the main purpose and object of faith. Revelations serve as their own evidence. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God.” (Rom 8: 14)

Proposition 3: The Scripture

The Scriptures are useful because they are (1) a faithful account of God’s people through the ages, (2) they are prophetic, and (3) they outline the chief principles of Christianity. Nevertheless they are only a declaration of the source of Truth, not the Truth itself. Mistakes in translation and interpretation can and have been made. The Spirit, not Scripture, is the foundation and basis of all truth

and knowledge. The Spirit allows us to interpret scripture with confidence and it is the primary rule of faith. You do not need to be literate or able bodied to understand the work of the Spirit.

Proposition 4: Spiritual Estrangement (“The condition of man in the Fall”) Although there is an inward impetus that can lead to evil, we are not born evil. People do evil when they give in to their evil impulses. Separating ourselves from evil is necessary to walk in the Light. (Rom 5: 12-15)

Proposition 5: The universal redemption by Christ

There is a Light which enlightens every soul that comes into this world (John 1: 9). It is not necessary to profess Jesus or know of him to be redeemed. The Inner Light of Christ is available to all.

Proposition 6: Universal Spiritual Opportunity (“The Saving and Spiritual Light by which every man is enlightened”)

While outward knowledge of the history, principles, or testimonies of Christianity are helpful, it is not necessary, for a soul to walk in the Light. Anyone can respond to the Light and turn to goodness. “Conscience is a wonderful thing, when it is properly informed and enlightened,” but it is not the same thing as the Light, because conscience is culturally conditioned; the Light is universal.

Proposition 7: Walking in the Light (“Justification”)

For those who do not resist the Light, but receive it, it becomes a holy, pure and spiritual birth within them. It produces all holiness and good works, which are the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5: 22-23). God works through people everywhere, not merely by good works, even those that arose from the Spirit of Christ, but “follow as naturally as fruit from a fruitful tree.”

Proposition 8: Perfection [or “the achievement of spiritual maturity”] When immersed in the awareness of the Inner Light a soul is oblivious to evil promptings. “Yet there is still room for spiritual growth, and some possibility of sinning remains if the mind is not diligently and watchfully applied to heeding the Lord.” (Rom 6: 14, 8: 13, 6: 2, and I John 3: 6) Walking in the Light takes persistence. It is however achievable because Christ’s yoke is easy, and the burden is light. (Mat 11: 30)

Proposition 9: Paradise Lost (“perseverance in the faith and the possibility of falling from grace”) Even though “the inward grace of God is sufficient to bring about salvation,” people will resist it deafening their spiritual awareness, hardening their hearts, and make a shipwreck of their faith. (Jude 4, I Tim 1: 19)

Proposition 10: Ministry

All true ministry is ordained by God. Without spiritual ordination there is no spiritual authority. All ministry should be guided by the Light and offered freely. (Mat 10: 8) While receiving aid such as food and clothing are acceptable, we are not to make a trade of our religion. No matter how learned or by whose authority you preach the gospel, it must be Spirit led. Those who do otherwise “they should be considered deceivers and not true ministers of the gospel.” Because we are all “one in Christ” (Gal 3: 28) men and women have equal access to the Light and gender is not a qualifier for ministry.

Proposition 11: Worship

“True and acceptable worship” of God stems from the “inward and unmediated moving and drawing” of the Spirit. “It is not limited by places, times, or persons.” Worship is based on inward seeking and waiting in the Light. (Isiah 40: 31) Outward rituals may produce feelings similar to the Light, but “these empty forms are to be denied and rejected.” While it is necessary to set aside some time for the worship of God, we are not required to do it on any particular day of the week.

Proposition 12: Baptism

There is only one true baptism which is “of the Spirit and of fire”, (Matt 3:11, Eph 4: 5, I Cor 12: 13) which does not include an outward observance.

Proposition 13: Communion

True communion is inward and spiritual, not an outward observance. Christ’s breaking of bread was symbolic and not meant to be a continuing ritual. (John 6:32-35, I Cor 5: 8)

Proposition 14: Government and conscience

The power and dominion of the conscience is the province of God.

No person, regardless of their position in government, has the right to force another person to act against their conscience.

Transgressors must be subject to law and justice must be evenhanded.

Proposition 15: Vain and empty customs and pursuits

True religion liberates people from prejudices, customs, tradition and belief's which cloud their spiritual vision so that they may better walk in and be taught by the Light. Those who abide in the Light will feel its increase within and its blessings. Vain customs such as bowing to one another are unfitting for followers of Christ. Participation in revenge or warfare are not consistent with our faith. We are called to be humble and therefore should wear modest clothing. [Note: No mention is made of what constitutes modest attire.] Frivolous diversions, such as card playing, stage plays, dance and music are to be avoided because they “waste precious time and divert the mind from the witness of God in the heart.” (Eph 5:11, I Peter 1: 14, John 5: 44)

Our second hymn is no. 252 in the Green book “Thou That Goest Forth With Weeping”.

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—Our joys and concerns, the warp and weft that make up the fabric of our lives are what also inhabit our prayers and our encounters with Spirit. Like George Fox, we are all children of a weaver, an inner Light that is not elusive, but constitutes and composes us, sliding back and forth between the threads of the day to day. As the patterns emerge and the colors change, grant us clarity and awareness, Love and Light. As we seek meaning and understanding, let us also be constantly found, and not lost in the details or circumstances, however challenging or distracting. While we seek the patterns and examples, we also embody them for each other. We give thanks for that, for being on this journey together, cloaked in this warmth. Amen.

Our next hymn is “O Word of God Incarnate” number 197 in the red hymnal.

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

Message:

Dear Friends—God, the sacred, is all around and in us, if we can get past our own self-imposed limits on love and truth. As Rumi wrote, “Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.”

Our opening hymn expresses this possibility of realizing and experiencing the sacred in this life and this world, of making the vision of a new Jerusalem portrayed in Revelations an actual pattern, a measure for how we live and work and see our nation and our communities. Whatever we think of the ideal in terms of attainability, why be satisfied with less? Each life and each heart is called to contribute to our common endeavor and understanding.

The second hymn recognizes that these visions of sacred order, of divine Light, are profoundly demanding, but they happen in conjunction with the blessings of love and community. They succeed, when they do, in concert, in connection with a natural and organic order. Is not planting and harvesting already a miracle?

The mystery for us today, as people in this world now, is how not just to experience the inner Light, the sacred encounter, which is difficult enough in all the distractions of the day to day, but to actually enact the healing in the world. We cannot just let the world be, just let things fail, just stand by in the face of suffering and injustice or retreat into cloistered silence. Our possibilities for action as individuals may be limited, but as a dedicated group or

community, over the years, we can with faithfulness keep a steady effort, a common purpose, a sacred mission, an ongoing testimony in action. We speak truth to power not once, but constantly. We let our lives speak in many places, at many times, in a common effort. What we are seeking finds us in each other.

I shared Barclay's fifteen propositions not because they are any final or definitive tenets. They are purposely called propositions, and they are mostly about practices, not aiming to inform the reader of what the Spirit says or should say to each sincerely listening heart, but rather how to be open. In a way, the list mostly casts off limits rather than defines them. It opens doors to today's Buddhist Quakers and Jewish Quakers, to Agnostic Quakers and Muslim Quakers, even Atheist Quakers—and all seeking Quakers. When seeking, look everywhere for truth and inspiration. Some of the specifics of distractions to avoid may be amusing to us today, or not sound relevant, but to not be distracted from the essentials in the world of 2017 is quite a challenge. While it is a respected historical statement of Quaker faith, it is from a particular time and place, while in us and through us and all around us now, God, Truth, Love is still speaking, and speaking anew. As a comfort in these days, in solidarity, let us wait and listen, let us seek and be found in that love and truth now.

Our closing hymn is number 215 in the Green book, "The Great Storm is Over"

Closing: "We have come into this exquisite world to experience ever and ever more deeply our divine courage, freedom and light!"
"What you seek is seeking you."

Thanks/Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude