

Greeting: From the statement of the All Friends Conference of 1920: “You cannot foster harmony by the apparatus of discord, nor cherish goodwill by the equipment of hate. But it is by harmony and goodwill that human security can be obtained. Armaments aim at a security in isolation; but such would at best be utterly precarious and is, as a matter of fact, illusory. The only true safety is the safety of all, and unless your weapon of defence achieves this work, or works towards this, it is a source of antagonism and therefore of increased peril”

Our first hymn is #303 from the Green book, “Peace in Our Time, O Lord”

I’ll start with two long readings. The first is from the testimony of faithful Friend Helen Steven before the British high court in 1984.

“I do not wish to deny that on April 4<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of the death of Martin Luther King, I was inside the Faslane Submarine Base, and that I was there as a deliberate act. However, I pled guilty to the charges because had I done otherwise I would have been guilty of far greater crimes against my conscience and against humanity. If I may, I would like to outline very briefly the reasons for so acting, not so much as mitigation of guilt, but rather as a declaration of intent, for as long as those bases remain, I must continue to act as my conscience guides.”

“My charge is that I entered a protected area without authority or permission. My claim is that I had authority—the authority of my Christian conviction that a gospel of love cannot be defended by the threatened annihilation of millions of innocent people. It can never be morally right to use these ghastly weapons at any time, whether first, or as unthinkable retaliation after we ourselves are doomed.”

“I acted also with the authority of the nameless millions dying of starvation now because we choose to spend 11.5 billion pounds on Trident whilst a child dies every 15 seconds.”

“I am further authorized by my 13-year-old Vietnamese god-daughter whose guardian I am. She was adopted and brought to Scotland to take her away from the unspeakable horror of the Vietnam war. If all that I have done is to bring her closer to the nuclear holocaust, I stand convicted by her of the most cynical inhumanity.”

“I am charged under an Act giving control and disposal of land to the Queen, the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, the Commons assembled in Parliament and eventually the Secretary of State. I believe the world is God’s creation. This beautiful, delicate world in all its infinite wonder is threatened with extinction. That to me is blasphemy.”

“And so, out of love, love of my god-daughter, love of my world, I had to act. If I see that base at Faslane as morally wrong and against my deepest convictions—as wrong as the gas chambers of Auschwitz, as wrong as the deliberate starvation of children, then by keeping silent, I condone what goes on there.”

“On April 4<sup>th</sup>, I made a choice. I chose to create the dream of another way. My only crime is not working hard enough, or long enough, or soon enough towards the fulfillment of the dream. If my actions were a crime, then I am guilty.”

The second reading is from the writing of Jonathan Schell in his 2003 book *The Unconquerable World: Power, Non-violence, and the Will of the People*. “The events of our time show the dual aspect of power lies not only in the uses of the word but in the new phenomena it must describe. The power that flows upward from the consent, support, and non-violent activity of the people is not

the same as the power that flows downward from the state by virtue of its command of the instruments of force, and yet the two kinds of power contend in the same world for the upper hand, and the seemingly weaker one can, it turns out, defeat the seemingly stronger, as the downfall of the British Raj and the Soviet Union showed. Therefore, although it may lead to paradox and linguistic tangles to speak of martyrs as being more “powerful” than the authorities who put them to death, the exercise is inescapable. For it is indeed a frequent mistake of the powers that be to imagine they can accomplish or prevent by force what a Luther, a Gandhi, a Martin Luther King, or a Havel can inspire by example. The prosperous and mighty of our day still live at a dizzying height above the wretched of the earth, yet the latter have made their will felt in ways that have already changed history, and can change it more.”

“Fifty-eight years after Hiroshima, the world has to decide whether to continue on the path of cataclysmic violence charted in the twentieth century and now resumed in the twenty-first or whether to embark on a new, cooperative political path. It is a decision composed of innumerable smaller decisions guided by a common theme, which is weaning politics off violence. Some of the needful decisions are already clear; others will present themselves along the way. I have chosen them not merely because their enactment would be desirable. They represent an attempt to respond to the perils and dangers of this era as it really is, by building on foundations that already exist. For even as nuclear arms and other weapons of mass destruction have already produced the bankruptcy of violence in its own house, political events both earthshaking and minute have revealed the existence of a force that can substitute for violence throughout the political realm. The cooperative power of nonviolent action is new, yet its roots go deep into history, and it is now tightly woven, as I hope I have shown in these pages, into the life of the world. It has already altered basic realities that everyone must work with, including the

nature of sovereignty, force, and political power. In the century ahead it can be our bulwark and shield against the still unmastered peril of total violence.”

“This power can be spiritual in inspiration but doesn’t have to be. Its watchwords are love and freedom, yet it is not just an ideal but a real force in the world. It now must be brought to bear on the choice between survival and annihilation. It is powerful because it sets people in motion, and fixes before their eyes what they are ready to live and die for. It is dangerous for the same reason. Whether combined with violence, as in a people’s war, sustained by a constitution, as in democracy, or standing alone, as in satyagraha or living in truth, it is becoming the final arbiter of the public affairs of our time and the political bedrock of our unconquerable world.”

Two short readings from the Bible. From Psalm 91, “Those who dwell in the shadow of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, God is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust. Surely God will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. God will cover you with feathers, and under wings you will find refuge; God’s faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday” and from Isaiah 2, “God will teach us the ways so that we may walk in the paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. God will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord.”

Our second hymn is #223 in the Green book “Though I May Speak with Bravest Fire”.

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—Let us not live in fear, but be sheltered by the wings of Light, the unconquerable Truth that is our shield and bulwark. Let us claim the power that comes from living in Truth and speak that truth to power as a force more powerful than even the greatest of dreaded weapons or environmental threats. When we stand before those who judge, give us the eternal voice of peace, the calm and surety of a right spirit. Let us not look for justice only in the temporal logic of fairness and human consideration, but know the deeper and higher ground of the ongoing inspiration--the breathing in—of sacred Love. Forgive our timidity and doubt that come from fear. Expand our understanding of peace, what we will risk for peace, our full experience of peace, our true sense of peace. Amen.

Our next hymn is #305 “In Christ There is No East or West”.

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

Message: Seventy-two years ago on this date, a horrifying crime against civilians culminated a war filled with crimes against civilians. As one of the scientists responsible, J. Robert Oppenheimer quoted the Bhagavad Gita when he saw the first nuclear test, “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.” The scale of the bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Hiroshima bomb called “Little Boy” was not just in explosion, but in enduring poison. It took over a year for a broad understanding of what happened to emerge thanks to the writing of John Hersey who stepped away from the grand scale to the stories of six individuals in the article and then book, “Hiroshima”. The New Yorker

magazine that week cancelled all other content to publish that one work. That extraordinary issue of the New Yorker magazine sold out 300,000 copies immediately, Albert Einstein worked to get 1000 copies for fellow scientists, the BBC read it in its entirety over the radio because of rationed news print, and the Book of the Month Club produced a free special edition for all of its members. The ancient power of human stories rose up to meet a spiritual need. Hersey served as a witness not to a technical or physical event, but to a human event, an existential spiritual event. Miraculously, such bombs have not been dropped on people during war again, but the threat looms. This year in July 2017, in response to that threat, 122 countries agreed to ban all nuclear weapons in a United Nations treaty, and once 50 ratify the treaty, it becomes international law. This is a hopeful sign in our times.

As Friends, we not only seek a world free of war, but free of the threat of war. We seek to look at the world with a force more powerful, with the eyes of love, of solidarity, of one. On a day like August 6<sup>th</sup>, one can end up in appropriate solemn reflection and grief, but as Sadako Sasaki taught us on this international day of peace, we must look up, the cranes must fly. When we are guided by the Light, our response to terror, the attempt to fill us with fear, is not outrage or dismissal or denial or retort, but resolute compassion and inclusion.

The author Jonathan Schell wrote the profound book *The Fate of the Earth* on the consequences of nuclear war in 1982, and in his final illness in 2014 he was hoping to complete a book on climate change. In both cases, he observed that every other loss is a loss within the framework of life to give that loss meaning. But what happens if we lose that whole framework? It is here that we move to faith, to religious questions, to beyond individual humans in a particular time period. And yet, we must and can only also be humans conscious at a particular time. It seems to me that it is here that “that of God comes in”, an inner Light and transcendent

Truth, a beauty and a mystery of nature, of Spirit. We must hope to answer that of God in all whom we encounter on a daily and personal basis, but we can also answer that of God in a bigger and broader sense. In a meaning of life sense. In a sense of truth and hope. Schell was a determinedly secular writer, and yet he could not but turn his pen to write the unmistakable expression of faith, “shield and bulwark”.

This is a serious observance day of a tragic and profound event. In contemplating these most serious conditions, Jonathan Schell was both realistic and always turned towards hope in his vision of the unconquerable world. Early Friends also saw the Light, the Truth as enduring and unconquerable, and as directly accessible to all. It is not our tradition to avoid thinking about painful circumstances. We are willing, I hope, to risk love, to risk peace.

Our closing hymn is number 299 in the Green book, “Last Night I had the Strangest Dream”

Closing: The only true safety is the safety of all. In the Light and Love that reaches all, let us dream, let us hope, let us act in this world for the Truth that dwells in the unconquerable world.