

The opening quotation I have for you this morning is actually from RuPaul Charles, the glamorous drag queen performer: “My show is an endless reminder that it’s possible to find love for others—and ourselves—despite all of the pain and heartbreak we go through in life”. “I don’t want to do anything mean spirited—the essence of drag is compassion”. “It’s about recognizing that you are God dressing up in humanity”.

Our first hymn is #242 from the Green book, “I am an Acorn”

Our first reading is from Matthew 28, and the verses are nearly identical in Mark 14: “Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed. “My father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet, not as I will, but as you will.” Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” He went away a second time and prayed, “My father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.” When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So, he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.”

Our next set of readings are related statements from Quaker elders on the Spirit to physical body issue: First from William Penn in 1693 “The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the

mask they will know one another, though the divers liveries they wear here makes them strangers. This world is a form; our bodies are forms; and no visible acts of devotion can be without forms. But yet the less form in religion the better, since God is a Spirit; for the more mental our worship, the more adequate to the nature of God; the more silent, the more suitable to the language of a Spirit.”

George Fox wrote: “So as man and woman come again to God, and are renewed up into God’s image, righteousness and holiness by Christ, thereby they come up into the Paradise of God, the state which humans were in before they fell, and into a higher state than that, to sit down in Christ that never fell.”

Isaac Pennington wrote: “The sum and substance of true religion doth not stand in getting a notion of Christ’s righteousness, but in feeling the power of endless life, receiving the power, and being changed by the power. And where Christ is, there is Christ’s righteousness.”

Our second hymn is #255 in the Red book “Let There be Light”

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—Let our encounters with each other and our taking heed to the promptings of love and truth in our hearts be a refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble, trusting them as the leadings of God, of Truth. Let us shelter in the shade of the mighty and powerful oak, the tree that is there to grow miraculously from the acorn where each of us are held in God’s hand, are carved by the precision of that laser of Light. Let it not be dim or obscured or mistaken in the cares and distractions of the everyday, or dismissed by the expectations of the conventional, or slept through because of the exhaustion and stress of conflict and contention. Let us not mistake form for substance, but ever place our souls at

the center, be aware of the inner Light, the inner Guide, and be ready to answer that of God in any form. Allow us to know and truly feel a deep connection in love and a still point in this turning world that is always accessible, always steady. Amen.

Our next hymn is #274 in red “Love Divine all Loves Excelling”

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear friends—The radical equality that we know as Quakers, that means that children like those from Parkland, Florida or prisoners or billionaires or Jesus’s favorite prostitutes and tax collectors all have equal access to the Light and to speaking an essential message for all of us, is not only a grounding for our treatment of one another, but for our own identities. What if the inner Light, that of God in each person, is not something to be searched for or found, or contemplated only in meeting, but is the most essential part, the main element of identity? What would it mean to live that way in our minds and hearts—to step away from or detach ourselves from a strong identity with worldly forms, with outer trappings and situations and circumstances? As some Friends used to put it, to be in the world, but not of the world? Can we, as Fox wrote, sit down in Christ—not just tarry with him nearby, like the disciples, not just understand or get an idea of the power of the Spirit, but experience that power, be changed by that power? And what if experiencing that essence is more about the Buddhist practice of letting go of all the worldly elements around us, rather than about finding some experience or new place or way of being? What if each one of us is actually that of God and only currently dressed up in a particular projection of humanity?

The story of the passion of Christ that is a part of this season for so many Christians has as one element a sense of abandonment, of betrayal, of the wonderful counselor and prince of peace left alone by friends and followers who fear the power of others, the opinions

of the world, or who are simply exhausted by the situation and by the conflicts. When that of God is left alone, when the divine is ignored or denied, that's when the Spirit is vulnerable, when it can be mocked and scorned. And so, in the garden, in that beautiful and peaceful garden of Gethsemene, Christ struggles, as nearby his closest disciples fall away, they stop paying attention, they fall asleep.

We all struggle with the world, we all seek the Spirit. It is not a simple task to just pay attention to the essential instead of the everyday. We live in the everyday. But we can pause. We can simplify from distractions. We can stick close to the truth and integrity. We can hold to peace rather than the drama of conflict and chaos. We can be still and settle ourselves in expectant silence. We can be attentive when the sacred says to us in the formation of the snow geese, in the fall of the waters, in the quiet sleeping child, in the gathering storm, "watch and pray with me". And we do all these things together, not alone, in a community that helps us recognize that common essence, the many different and illuminating perspectives of that of God. Our individualities provide the many paths to Truth, some that find God or Jesus and some that find serenity or love or humility in the vastness of time and space—we don't all reach all of the destinations of the many paths, but we all can give some direction, can tell which is farther or nearer. It is our oneness, the common inner light, the transcendental experience of life, of being, of living that allows us to share, that compels us to share, that makes it essential to be of a society of friends and not just a lonely seeker by oneself. Separating ourselves from that essence might be the betrayal. Going it alone might be the tempting pride of those thirty pieces.

There is also a larger story in the passion of Christ, a story of two realms of power. The power of force and authority built on fear and punishment, on coercion and compliance. And the power of love that was the essence of Christ's ministry and preaching.

Solidarity and love can resist force and intimidation, and can defeat it, perhaps inevitably. By its nature, force and authority divides to conquer, while love unites. Force and authority depend on the differences of this world to generate fear and suspicion, to insist on absolutes and laws, while love is dependent on finding commonalities and giving the benefit of the doubt, of assuming good intentions. When we listen to each other's messages, do we judge, or are we generous? Do we translate for ourselves or do we transcribe for critique? Love is patient and kind. The law judges. Some prisons seek to bring the captive home, while others throw away the key.

Jesus told Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world. I am still inspired by the quotation in last week's meeting that substituted the word kinship for kingdom when speaking of the sacred in modern times. If we are to seek first the kinship of God, a religious society of friends, a family of faith, then we need to follow the basis of relationship. Relationship can resist coercion.

We are witnessing this struggle between fear and love right now in public in our own society. The power of the NRA, as with much advertising, is built all around fear. They sell firearms, and are an industry seeking profit by making people afraid, by stoking paranoia and isolating people from a sense of community. If it is you against the world, then you need to be armed. If you don't want to lose the election, you need to follow our demands. And yet, those who naturally act on love and service—the parents and friends of those who have died, the public servants who are teachers, responsible hunters and law enforcement, see the inherent danger and contradiction of trying to solve violence with further escalation and fear. The love that we all have for our communities may yet win out. John Lennon once said that “It matters not who you love, where you love, why you love, when you love, or how you love, it matters only that you love.” As Pastor Rob Bell titled his recent book, “Love Wins” and does not depend on anyone else

losing. Being blessed does not depend on anyone else going to Hell. How we profit as children of the Spirit and people of truth leads to no one's loss.

In some ways, the story of the passion pits the love of power against the power of love. At the level of personal experience, we struggle between asserting our individuality and trying to understand ourselves and our circumstances, with finding a true sense of community and social connection and common purpose. That of God within each of us, an inherent essence and common humanity upon which is built the whole concept of human rights in our world today, is both a simple concept and a deep and profound mystery. Let us find it in ourselves and recognize it in each other. Let us live there.

Our closing hymn is #180 in the Green, "There is Nothing I can Give You".

Closing: No peace lies in the future for ourselves or humankind which is not hidden in each person's here and now. Take peace, take heavenly joy, take peace and joy and heaven.