

Prelude

Greeting/Opening Prayer

1st Hymn Green, #166, “Open My Eyes, That I May See

Readings

2nd Hymn, Green, #131 “Christ Thou Word of God Once Spoken”

Joys and Concerns

Musical Interlude

Pastoral Prayer

3rd Hymn, Green, #242 “I Am an Acorn”

Children Leave

Message

Silent Worship

4th Hymn, Green, #158 “God of Grace and God of Glory”

Benediction

Messages That Did Not Rise to Vocal Ministry

Thank Yous/Introductions/Remembrances/Announcements

Postlude

Readings:

That Nature is a Heraclitian Fire and of the Comfort of the Ressurrection

Flesh fade, and mortal trash,
Fall to the residuary worm; world's
Wildfire leave but ash;
In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am at once what Christ is, since he
Was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch,
Matchwood, immortal diamond,
Is immortal diamond.
Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J.

The Road to Emmaus

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.^[b] ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" ¹⁹ He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth,^[c] who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to

redeem Israel.^[d] Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning,²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.”²⁵ Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah^[e] should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on.²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them.³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.³² They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us^[f] while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

Message:

On Seeing That of God in Each Other

There is a story in the journal of George Fox, one of the founders of Quakerism, which has stayed with me over the many years since I read that tome. A man came up to him, whom he described as “a flashy, notionist man.” In early Friends language, “notions” were ideas that came from the best thinking of our everyday selves, contrasted to “leadings,” which were divinely inspired insights. So this “notionist” is someone who is not grounded in anything beyond his own ego-self. And this “flashy, notionist man” asks George Fox, “When I die, what part of me will be damned?”, meaning, what part of him will not survive after his death? And George Fox looks him in the eye, and says, “The part of you speaking to me now.”

This man is asking Fox a theological question: what part or parts of his humanity will continue on after death, and what parts will not? Fox’s answer illustrates Friends sense of the human condition, based on their experience- that there is that of God in each of us, but also, that

there is an overlay, a false self, which masks that Divine Spark. Fox responds that the aspect of the man speaking to him, his false self, will not live on after death. In so doing, he perhaps sought to reach over the defenses of the man's constructed exterior, to "answer that of God within him," as we often quote Fox.

Implicit in Fox's answer, is the complementary aspect of our sense of the human condition: that the Light within, the Divine Spark, the Inner Christ, does indeed live on after death.

In its day, this was radically heretical. The human condition was viewed as inherently flawed and sinful. The force of God to clean up that mess was only seen as something coming from without, and only after one's death. In that view, there was no Immortal Diamond, no Divine Spark, no Inner Christ. Even more heretical, Friends professed that our practice could move us from one condition towards the other, in our lifetime, if we would but follow the gentle urgings of this Inner Light.

Modern Friends refer rather glibly to "That of God within each person." I fear in our using this phrase so frequently, we lose the full impact of that amazing, monumental assertion, based not on "notions" but on our very experience. I fear that we also risk minimizing the existence of the false self, the ego construct, and its capacity to obscure our Inner Light.

Almost thirty years ago, Bob Schmitt, an elder in Twin Cities Friends Meeting, was asked to lead a workshop for Minneapolis Friends meeting. He asked me to accompany him, and hold him in the Light while he facilitated. New to this role, I spent six hours, with only a break for lunch, imaging the Light of God pouring down on him as he did his ministry. At the end of the day, I was startled by the revelation that my person was like a shell or exterior, inside of which was empty, a void. This was a profound wake-up call for me, which has motivated me over the years in a spiritual search to fill that void with substance, with the Divine Spark which Friends attest to.

I was astonished some years later to read these words of Thomas Merton: "*For most of the people in the world, there is no greater subjective reality than this false self of theirs, which cannot exist. A life devoted to the cult of this shadow...starts from the assumption that my false self, the self that exists only in my egocentric desires, is the fundamental reality of life to which*

everything else in the universe is ordered. Thus I use up my life in the desire for pleasures and the thirst for experiences, for power, honor, knowledge and love, to clothe this false self and construct its nothingness into something objectively real. And I wind experiences around myself and cover myself with pleasures and glory like bandages in order to make myself perceptible to myself and to the world, as if I were an invisible body that could only become visible when something visible covered its surface. But there is no substance under the things with which I am clothed. I am hollow, and my structure of pleasures and ambitions has no foundation.

The only way I was able to “see” that reality in myself, was to step outside it for a concerted time, focusing not through the lens of my own egocentric reality, but instead to focus on another. In so doing, I stumbled across what Richard Rohr refers to as “respect”- *re* , again, *spect*, to see, to see a second time, the process of seeing from outside the narrow confines of the self as reference point, the “first sight.”

This capacity of our practice as Friends to unmask the false self, to unwind the bandages of false identity Merton speaks of, to reveal that of God within, to open the door to that Immortal Diamond, was central to the experience of our spiritual forebears.

Today’s Gospel reading, the Road to Emmaus story, traditional for the first Sunday after Easter, illustrates how blind we can be to spiritual reality, and gives us a hint as to how to step outside that blindness. I view this reading as storytellers often name stories, that some stories are true whether they happened or not. Whether or not these things actually happened, there are truths to be mined there for us.

In this story, two followers of Jesus, who had left their former lives in order to follow their friend and mentor, are now walking away from Jerusalem, after witnessing his crucifixion, and hearing stories of his resurrection. Understandably, they are both crushed by his crucifixion, and astonished by news of his resurrection. They are joined by Jesus, who they walk with for hours, but do not recognize, as they are still stuck in “first sight.” Perhaps he is now unrecognizable, having had the human element in him burned away through crucifixion. They were unable to see what was left, his Divine nature.

But somehow, their hearts knew. And their hearts burned within them. They didn’t see, but their hearts knew. Their conscious minds could not embrace the spiritual reality before them.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery wrote, “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”

In order to witness that of God in another, we can only do so from our true self, from that place in our heart that is beyond self, from the center of our being, from the Immortal Diamond. The ego self cannot do that. It’s stuck in its own reference point.

Our primary task as Friends is to live more and more from that place of God within, and to see that in those we meet. Yet that seeing from the heart, to witness that of God in others, from beyond the bounds of my little, proscribed world, is something I struggle with. As I looked at what gets in the way of that, two things emerged.

First, I have not really, deeply let in that there is that of God within me, to know that in my bones, beyond my own “notions.”

Second, I am still gaining the willingness to surrender loyalty to trying to look good, to wrap more bandages around a hollow center, and instead to grow in a willingness to live in touch with the wounded, vulnerable, broken places, the places Paul referred to in himself as “a thorn in the flesh,” and which Bob Franke sings about as “a hole in the middle of a pretty good life.”

Our brokenness and our divinity are side by side, intertwined.

God lives in that tension between crucifixion and resurrection.

Richard Rohr states: “As an icon, representing woundedness and resurrection in one body, the Risen Christ ultimately invites us into our divine-human identity. This is true for all of us. We must surrender to our personal crucifixions in the journey of Transformation. When we have the eyes to see, we witness the constant resurrection of life all around us.”

I want to close with a long quote from Thomas Merton, which says all this better than I have done.

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. ... This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud. ... I have the immense joy

of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun....Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed. . . . At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. . . . It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely.

Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Doubleday: 1966), 140-142.

Benediction:

Be patterns be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone; whereby in them you may be a blessing and make the witness of God in them to bless you.

George Fox