

From Psalm 37: “Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the Lord, and God will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in God and God will do this: God will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.

Our first hymn is green book #175, “Oh God, Eternal Friend and Guide”

Our first reading is from John 15:9-17 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this; to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.”

A Second Reading comes from William Penn in 1693: “Love is the hardest lesson in Christianity; but, for that reason, it should be most our care to learn it.”

Finally, Pierre Ceresole wrote in 1920, “If you allow me to have Christ simply as a friend, he may become what you call God; if you force him on me as God, he cannot become a friend.”

Our second hymn is #33 in the Green book “Still, Still With Thee”

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—We sit in hope. We pray in shining joy. May we find an inner light that guides like a star and floods our days like the noonday sun, like our closest star, God’s sun. Learning to love, learning to have and be love in the world and with each other is a gift we seek both to give and receive. The love of the Father is ever ours as we are of the Father’s love begotten. Bless us with the solid, quiet strength of the tender loving Father, the shepherd, the carpenter, the teacher. Wipe away our tears and hold us in loving arms. We are grateful for the gift of each other and the love we have for one another. Keep us grateful and aware of all of our blessings, and comfort us when sorrow comes near. Let love be most our care to learn. Amen.

Our next hymn is green book #128 “Let Your Light From the Lighthouse”

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear friends—When thinking of the inner light, that of God in each one of us that guides us and helps us discern our way and allows us to remain calm and grounded as well as stirred up and inspired, we sometimes have a tendency to think of it as small, as a spark that might be hard to see, as something to be searched for carefully and with concentration. Perhaps we view it as something buried deep inside that we have to be trained or skilled to uncover or decipher. Today, our readings and hymns invite us to think of it as a lighthouse—a strong signal and a guiding force, or as bright as the noonday sun, as a dawn that will fill the sky. When we speak of being in touch with that of God, of knowing the sacred or the divine, we’re not talking about something small. Even a bit of God is spectacular. When it is completely dark, a

small candle is bright. And we profess that it is in each person. Do we see our miraculous selves in this way? We are shining. Light can cross the infinite universe—and it does.

There are light years, where whatever the size or power of the beam of light, it keeps going, keeps traveling, for years, in all times and all directions. Eternal. Scientific instruments have recently detected some of the light from the origins of our universe, from the big bang. That first light that there let be is still traveling, still out in the universe, still in the beginning. This is some of the power of the metaphor of Light and inner Light. Take joy in that—joy and wonder and delight in light. This is the month of growing light, of greatest daylight in our hemisphere. Soak it up. Bask in it.

Our reading from John today seems almost playful on the part of Jesus. He brings up the idea of commandments, what sounds like rules or tasks or high expectations, and then says—be friends, love each other. It's like a set-up in terms of the way he talks of giving commands that we must be prepared to follow, to show our true faith and love and to really follow God's will, saying “are you ready? This is a big deal....and then the gentle response: love each other.” The secret of your personal salvation is to turn to someone else—the task can only be done in community, as a group. If you are anxious for yourself, love someone else. His yoke is easy, his burden is light. Light.

The verses in John are interesting also in their repetition—the number of commandments are really one, it's simply love. Not only are we to be friends with each other, but also friends, equals, with Christ. He specifically says that we are not servants, we are not of a lower station, but are also his friends, and close to God. At another point he states that we are not orphans, but beloved. It is a transformation of the stern and powerful and sometimes vengeful and judging old testament God—the authoritative old-

style vision of a father, to one whose expectation is generous and gentle, kind and loving. The unexpectedness of it is what makes the verses playful and a sort of happy irony, a simple joy. Over and over it comes down to loving one another.

On the other hand, as William Penn observes, love may be a welcome and joyful expectation and prescription, but that does not mean that it is easy. He calls it the hardest lesson in Christianity. It may be that we may want some people to be punished and we might want to be part of something exclusive or special, to have elite status, and instead, we are told to love each other. We are looking for salvation, for a generosity towards us, and instead are told to ourselves be generous. Don't expect to get, but rather, give.

Some of you may be familiar with the African concept of Ubuntu - -that I am because we are, in fact that the only significant way that we exist is in the hearts and experience of other people. This is the wisdom from Eden, from the garden between the rivers, the great branches of the Nile that nurtured the first humans. And we have just recently had this same ancient wisdom confirmed. Some of you may have heard of the huge longitudinal study of adult human health carried out by Harvard over the past 75 years—the longest such study ever done. There were two major groups of men who were compared over these many years with interviews and their medical records and life experiences, a cohort of college students and a cohort from the most impoverished tenements of Boston. The single greatest factor for all of them in terms of good health outcomes was having positive relationships. It was in loving one another. That is how we show love for Jesus—he told us this.

Love and be loved. Open ourselves. These are the fundamental instructions of Jesus at the last supper to his disciples as recorded by John. He keeps reiterating, not just in the reading I shared, but many more times in the five chapters of the Gospel of John

devoted to the last supper, that love is the answer, love is the commandment, love is the way, God is love.

The last short reading I shared from Peter Ceresole, “If you allow me to have Christ simply as a friend, he may become what you call God; if you force him on me as God, he cannot become a friend.” is, to me, a sort of reformulation of the reading in John and the words of Jesus himself. He goes back and forth from the idea of the expectations of God and commandments and then tells the disciples to be friends, to love each other. It is a message that anticipates the ongoing dilemma for many who wrestle with the authority or divinity of Christ or of just how Christian Quakerism might be. Here in John is Jesus himself saying that it is not about him, but about us loving each other—that God comes to us directly when we are friends. His authority comes when we ourselves are humane. Let love make your God, not try to have God make you to love. Be friends, share love, Light is there.

Our closing hymn is #154 in Green, “Be Thou Our Vision”

Closing: “Love is the hardest lesson in Christianity; but, for that reason, it should be most our care to learn it. This is my command: Love Each Other.”