

George Fox wrote to Friends in November 1663, during the time of much persecution: “Sing and rejoice, ye Children of the Day and of the Light; for the Lord is at work in this thick night of Darkness that may be felt: and Truth doth flourish as the rose, and the lilies do grow among the thorns, and the plants atop of the hills, and upon them the lambs doth skip and play. And never heed the tempests nor the storms, floods nor rains, for the Seed Christ is over all and doth reign. And so, be of good faith and valiant for the Truth.”

Our first hymn is green book #290, “O God of Earth and Altar”

Our first reading is most of Romans, Chapter 12 “Therefore, I urge you, beloved, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—God’s good, pleasing, and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a person’s gift is prophesying, let them use it in proportion to their faith. If it is in serving, let them serve; if it is teaching, let them teach; if it is encouraging, let them encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let them give generously; if it is leadership, let them govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let them do it cheerfully. Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil, cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in sibling love. Honor one another above

yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

A Second Reading comes from the FCNL statement of Legislative Policy, *The World We Seek*: "We seek a world free from war and the threat of war, we seek a society with equity and justice for all, we seek a community where every person's potential may be fulfilled, we seek an earth restored. Our legislative policy rises out of our belief that there is that of God in every person and that all creation has worth and dignity. Facing profound global challenges and great opportunity, we speak from our faith for a new vision of how the world community can live together more peacefully and justly and with greater care for each other and our shared world. The issues we strive to address are inextricably linked, leading us to focus on the root causes and long-term consequences of injustice, inequality, economic disparity, disproportionate power and violence. A better future is possible through dedicated effort, creative cooperation, right relationships and well-directed resources. Change will require personal and material costs that we are prepared to share. We are convinced by our faith and experience to continue building the peaceful, just, equitable and sustainable global community we seek. Above all, we seek to remain open to where God's spirit leads us."

Our second hymn is #289 in the Green book "Not Only Acts of Evil Will"

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—How we need the Truth and clarity in uncertain times! Reign over all, dear Seed Christ, and give us the collective faith support and security of our having many and varied skills. Help us open ourselves to ongoing revelation while also staying steadfast in what we know to be right. Let us not hang back, but seek, find, and live the gospel we proclaim. Bind us together in an ongoing transformation of worlds, both around us and inside us. When we are challenged, keep us in the way of peace. When we are ridiculed, keep us in the way of love. As we seek to stay valiant for the truth, let it be a truth more powerful, so that the Truth will flourish as the rose, and the lilies grow among the thorns, and the plants atop of the hills, upon them the lambs will skip and play. Be our still point in this turning world, the star by which we navigate our faith in our reality. Amen.

Our next hymn is green book #162 “One Step at a Time”

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear friends—Last week I was speaking with some Friends at FCNL, the Friends Committee on National Legislation, and we got into talking about the complexity of our faith. On the one hand, we are confident that we can be in touch with God or the sacred directly, which sounds like a way to be insufferably overbearing, like a possible main route to overconfidence. And there certainly are times when others find some Friends to be a bit too self-righteous. On the other hand, we also are open to new and ongoing revelations of the spirit, new leadings and levels of discernment, and always to be in a state of testing with and in the Light whether we are on the right path. This is why meditating by oneself is not Quaker worship. We are always ready for new and clearer insight, we are in a constant process of refinement as we answer that of God in all whom we encounter, knowing that we

each are but one part of the larger body, we each have but one angle or perspective on the universe of love. This is what brings forth the humility that Paul describes in the reading from Romans. It is a process of mutual discovery, not a competition for the best or “right” answer. We are always on a mutual mission—we don’t go out to tell others or bring others to a singular faith. Rather, we go out to learn and discover what God has done and is doing with others in other parts of the world, and to join them in pursuit of greater light and more profound love. Every person who joins us here at Poplar Ridge, every seeker who is not confident and is searching, is also a missionary to us, a revelation, a preacher, a bearer of truth. And we have the same responsibility with them.

There is a common story about a person finding their way to a Quaker meeting without much preparation. After sitting down in the unprogrammed space and waiting for a while, the individual leaned over to the silent and placid elder in front of them and spoke into the waiting ear, “When does the service begin?” The response, of course, was “Immediately after the meeting”.

Yesterday, across this land, in incredible heat, people gathered to speak the truth that families belong together and that children belong with loving parents and guardians. In the community I have just been learning and becoming a part of in central Michigan, the first week there I attended an event called “Honoring, Remembering, and Healing” hosted by the tribe, the town, and the university on the reservation land we all share, since Mt. Pleasant, Michigan was the site of one of the federal Indian Schools which purposely separated children from their families as federal policy in order to erase language and culture. The Mt. Pleasant school closed in 1934, and yet in our tour that day of the buildings which still stand, and from the testimony of many, everyone present learned of how difficult it is to recover from such child separation and removal. To have this issue arise the next week in our nation’s public life is incredibly painful for the

Saginaw Chippewa people of Mt. Pleasant, and for all of the indigenous people of north America, not to mention how it implicates the huge reconciliation efforts and the look to compensation in Canada and the United States for past such policy. I had the poignant honor to be part of the ceremonial recognition at Ryerson University in May of 2016 when Senator Murray Sinclair made a major presentation on the work and ongoing obligations related to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Canada. Such work begins only after families are reunited.

And yet, in a very trying time of deep persecution specifically directed at Quakers, George Fox wrote, “the Lord is at work in this thick night of Darkness that may be felt: Sing and rejoice, ye Children of the Day and of the Light.” The Religious Society of Friends has the largest peace lobby group in Washington DC as our modern way to speak truth to power, to proclaim the Spirit in our world today, to sing and rejoice. Last week, with the strong work of FCNL shepherding the bill through several sessions of Congress, the Senate passed the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act. This faithful steady work, even in the face of the storm, must keep our light shining in our testimony to the world.

The passage in Romans calls for our humility and mutual cooperation, but it also calls for us to go beyond conformity to transformation. To not let the physical circumstances of our bodies in this world determine the actions and feelings of our hearts and minds, but to be led from within to transform our sense of what is possible in the world. We are idealists. Our tradition uses the words Love and Truth as synonyms for God. Let us support each other in this mutual work, attentive to our hearts and hope, in love, and valiant for the truth.

Our closing hymn is #286 in Green, “Who Are the Patriots?”

Closing: Richard Claridge of Peel Monthly Meeting had been a parish rector, then became a Baptist in 1691, and in 1697 he became convinced of the truth as understood by Friends. He recalled his experiences in these words “This was the way that Friends used with me, when I was convinced of truth; they came oftentimes to visit me, and sat and waited upon the Lord in silence with me; and as the Lord opened our understanding and mouths, so we had very sweet and comfortable seasons together. They did not ask me questions about this or the other creed, or about this or the other controversy in religion; but they waited to feel that living Power to quicken me, which raised up Jesus from the dead. And it pleased God so in wisdom to direct, that all the great truths of the Christian religion were occasionally spoke to. Now this was Friends’ way with me, a way far beyond all rules or methods established by the wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God: and this is their way with others that are convinced of the truth.” When the meeting ends, the service begins.