

The Quaker writer D. Elton Trueblood wrote in 1951, “One has made at least a start on discovering the meaning of human life when they plant shade trees under which they know full well they will never sit.”

Our first hymn is green #264, “That Cause Can Neither Be Lost Nor Stayed”

Our first reading is from the mystical Sufi poet, Hafiz,
“**All the Hemispheres**”

Leave the familiar for a while.
Let your senses and bodies stretch out

Like a welcomed season
Onto the meadow and shores and hills.

Open up to the Roof.
Make a new watermark on your excitement
And love.

Like a blooming night flower,
Bestow your vital fragrance of happiness
And giving
Upon our intimate assembly.

Change rooms in your mind for a day.

All the hemispheres in existence
Lie beside an equator
In your heart.

Greet Yourself
In your thousand other forms

As you mount the hidden tide and travel
Back home.

All the hemispheres in heaven
Are sitting around a fire
Chatting

While stitching themselves together
Into the Great Circle inside of
You.”

A Second Reading comes from 1st Thessalonians 5:12-28. “Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil. May God, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and will do it. Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all God’s people with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Our second hymn is Green #167 “Standing in the Need of Prayer”

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—We often pray, even when we are praying about immediate needs and concerns, for the shade of trees to come, and sometimes it is our prayers themselves that plant them. We may pray, that others may enjoy their shade. While it is specifically we who pray--it's me oh Lord--in the larger community of prayer, in these ongoing conversations with the divine, we also know that we are a part of a broader voice, a collective voice. We ask for that of God that we know, to be real to us and recognizable to others, to be both in us and around us. Let our hearts and actions and lives combine so that unceasing prayer is our condition. May this prayer be part of the continuation for all, part of the unquenchable spirit, of the whole spirit, part of all the brothers and sisters. Let this prayer and all of our prayers evoke and invoke the great circle of love that is our grace, our inheritance, and our legacy. Amen.

Our next hymn is green book #187 “A Garden of My Own”

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear friends—I am fairly sure that it would amuse Elton Trueblood, the author of the opening quote with which I began, that it is now often referred to as an ancient Greek proverb, which it is not. Elton Trueblood really did compose these words himself. He wrote, “One has made at least a start on discovering the meaning of human life when they plant shade trees under which they know full well they will never sit.” Doing the steady, good, and loving work of life for the greater good was a central part of his sense of Quaker calling. He saw those who understood life and its sacred meaning as knowing that we act not just in our time, nor only in the particular age, but also, and more deeply in the fullness of time. While he had been chaplain at Harvard and Stanford and was a lifelong friend of Herbert Hoover and main advisor to Dwight Eisenhower when he was president and founder of the Earlham School of Religion and helped establish the World Council of Churches, he always stayed close to young students.

He was a friend of my grandfather's and led a Quaker men's group that my grandfather, Wyatt Acton Miller, joined called the Yokefellows. Like the horses, mule teams, and oxen that pulled the plows, the carts, the wagons, the harvesters, the sleighs and sledges, they would be steady and work together, and use their strength to carry others forward and get work done. They would see that pulling and work as their purpose and mission in life, reliable and strong. They were the workhorses, not the racers or the show ponies, cooperative and humble and impressive. One other aspect of the metaphor is that yokefellows, draft animals, do the work at hand without necessarily knowing the goal or the long term outcome. Do your share and the Spirit knows the larger picture. I was twelve when my grandfather stepped out of his yoke and left this life, so I must have been ten or eleven when I was brought along on a visit to Elton Trueblood. Grandpa Miller was an old school Quaker of few words and profound actions and spoke in the plain speech of "thee" and "thou" within the family, though he was a practical business man in the world, wearing his plain, but substantial dark suits on his tall thin frame. Like Elton Trueblood, his jokes and smile were always a delightful surprise—he loved to take the respect he often inspired in people as an invitation to irreverent humor, all the more funny coming from him. Yet, even his humor seemed purposeful, a slow building, a bit of shade from the hot sun of life.

Just this past August, my cousin rented my grandparents house on Airbnb for a family reunion and discovered that very little had changed, both inside and out. It was fun to show Craig the flagstone patio where I attended Quaker barbecues with men in three piece suits and women in dark dresses and hats on summer evenings. They were a peculiar people, and always planting seeds.

I like the complexity of Quaker simplicity. The determination to stay in between and within the world and the sacred. I think this is why the Quaker color is grey. There is always more to anyone,

more to be revealed, and so we don't sum up or finish in black and white, we stay faithfully in the grey, never ending the holy conversation. We are settled and confident in the gray and the ongoing-ness of life. My grandfather's sister, Alice Miller, was the first woman volunteer in the American Friends Service Committee during World War I, as I think I've shared with you before, and she too was irreverent. She took her Quaker-issued grey-uniform dress for relief work in France and sewed pink ribbons around the hems. I realize now that even then, they were pink, not red, not the completed color, but the gesture in play, the possibility, pointing the way, but not insisting. Knowing that even in the devastation of war, there needed to be a glimmer of hope, that in serious work, there still needed to be a smile, but not a grin.

Duty and responsibility are not burdens when they are bourn for humanity, as part of the meaning of life. Steadiness may not quite reach for the stars in a spectacular way, but it keeps them always there, viewing the whole of the sky. That's where Hafiz sees all the hemispheres, not as an overwhelming or dazzling display, but as a rich and steady presence, like the deep forest, like the water in the gorges, like the quiet lake, like the flight of birds or the color of leaves in green or in gold. The gentle steady power of the pull in the yoke. These are the eternal prayers, the work of our days.

When things go very wrong--when the news is bad, or sensational, or unsteady, or outrageous, we can stay in the grey, not as a neutral non-comment, but as an openness. We bend toward justice as witnesses to the arc of the universe—in this complex human world, where justice is not an absolute, is complex, but always an aspiration, a standard, the shade towards which the saplings we plant are tending.

Another line in the Hafiz poem is “change rooms in your mind for a day”. Sit in another place, in another perspective, to know more about what you are accomplishing and where your work fits. And

when Paul asks us to greet all God's people with a holy kiss, it is an invitation to look with the eyes of blessing on everyone, with the eyes of generosity and love, with the embrace of Spirit. It is the answering that of God command straight from scripture. Let us be truly together with those we share this time and place now, and with those who have been, and those who will come.

Our closing hymn is Red #180 "There is Nothing I can Give You"

Closing: A short poem from Hafiz:

It Felt Love

How
Did the rose
Ever open its heart

And give to this world
All its
Beauty?

It felt the encouragement of light
Against its
Being,

Otherwise,
We all remain

Too

Frightened.