

Here this morning as we approach again the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month we can remember the words of William Penn written in 1682, “True Godliness don’t turn people out of the world, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavours to mend it: not hide their candle under a bushel, but set it upon a table in a candlestick.”

First hymn is green #238, “I Know Not What the Future Holds”

Our first reading is Psalm 121. “I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of Heaven and Earth. God will not let your foot slip—the One who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, the Lord who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you—the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm—God will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.”

A Second Reading comes from an English Friend, Horace Pointing, written in 1946. “The art of living must be studied, as must every art. It calls for imagination, so that every advance, every change, is not merely a difference, but a creative act. Achievement, at any level above the lowest, calls for courage to hold on, in spite of current moods, and for exacting self-discipline. The art of Christian living calls for the same self-preparation; but its reward is not merely aesthetic satisfactions. The soul, hungry for God, is fed. Life itself takes on new meaning. Thus it is that we break from the confines of the prisons we have built about ourselves. Thus it is we are brought into the freedom of the Kingdom of God which, every day, through the wide world, is being realized in the hearts of all.”

Our third and last reading is Psalm 122. “I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord.’ Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to praise the name of the Lord according to the statute given to Israel. There the thrones for judgment stand, the thrones of the house of David. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: ‘May those who love you be secure. May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels.’ For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, ‘Peace be within you.’ For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity.”

Our second hymn is Green #240 “The Lone Wild Bird”

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—May we all be bourn up, may we feel the imminent rescue, the coming peace—may we see and experience confident joy, knowing the days ahead are not only shielded, but blessed. When we find inner calm and serenity, that still sacred place, let it be a source of power, a core, a base, a foundation from which to act. When we feel fundamentally unsettled and are seekers of peace, let us find each other, let us break out from all fear, and stand in shining light. We shall not hide, and that of God will not hide from us. When we feel adrift, we also know that there is enveloping love and care in our community, in our hearts, in our fellowship, in our faith. We listen as love calls. Amen.

Our next hymn is #158 in Green “God of Grace and God of Glory”

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear friends—Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, yes, keep us strong, and prepared, and able and confident as a people,

as a community, especially when it seems hard to hold those attributes as individuals. An old-fashioned name for the eleventh of November is Armistice Day, and an armistice is a very interesting thing. It is not a treaty, it is not a truce, it is not a full resolution to a conflict, it is more than a cease-fire, it is not a surrender nor a victory, but it is the formal and solid commitment to stop warfare even in the midst of ongoing conflict. One hundred years ago, at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, many nations decided to step back from the killing of World War I, to step back from the brink, from the armageddon, to step back before it was too late. The commitment to treaty and resolution holds out a future hope, while peace breaks out. In the conflicts in our own lives, even before resolution, are we able to step back, to hold the peace that allows for navigating the break, the difference, the conflict. Can we find that core of Spirit, that still point in the turning world?

Last week I attended a celebration of Diwali, the Hindu festival of light that is shared with the Jain religion, Sikhs, and even some versions of Buddhism, particularly in Nepal. The celebration is of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, good over evil, and it is one of definite positive outcome for the year ahead. Diwali is not a hope for a good year, but an expectation, an affirmation that the coming year will be a good one. Like the armistice, while there may not be a total resolution, there will definitely be peace, so in Diwali, as in our Quaker faith, there will definitely be Light and insight and good. We will settle into it, as in Diwali it is celebrated with joy. As in the psalm, we lift our eyes to the hills.

The psalm of Jerusalem sees the city figuratively, I believe, and talks of the gathering of tribes, and while tribal concerns are often seen as sources of conflict, a gathering is more of a resolution, an armistice. The name of Jerusalem is often interpreted as an abode of peace, since salaam, shalom is the word for peace in many local languages. Even further in the past, the city was seen as sacred to

shelem, the Canaanite god of the dusk—which is a time of late day often used as a symbol or representation of peace. Even in the times of modern conflict in that city, it remains at the confluence of Islam, Judaism and Christianity, with many ancient traditions that allow for coexistence even to today. The psalm speaks of peace within the place, but it also says “Peace be within you”. I like that phrasing. In many religious traditions there is a greeting of peace or one wishes another the peace of God. I like thinking of that as both the p-e-a-c-e of God, but also the p-i-e-c-e of God. May a piece of God be with you, be within you. When the armistice comes, we experience a piece/peace of God.

Bear with me as I continue with this word play. In the traditional interpretation of the phrase, “the p-e-a-c-e of God that passes understanding” I’m used to thinking of that as being beyond comprehension. However, if one thinks of it as the p-i-e-c-e of God that we are passing to another then it could be that we are actually giving them full understanding. It is transformational.

So, in a subcontinent of many conflicts between India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, a common Diwali is celebrated, and in war torn Jerusalem, the religions of the book coexist. A hundred years ago, the guns and gas and bombs of a terrible war fell silent on schedule and a peace/piece of God broke out. After another such war, in 1946, Horace Pointing brought forth our second reading about just these kinds of puzzles and miracles and blessings and mysteries. I read again: “The art of living must be studied, as must every art. It calls for imagination, so that every advance, every change, is not merely a difference, but a creative act.

Achievement, at any level above the lowest, calls for courage to hold on, in spite of current moods, and for exacting self-discipline. The art of Christian living calls for the same self-preparation; but its reward is not merely aesthetic satisfactions. The soul, hungry for God, is fed. Life itself takes on new meaning. Thus it is that we break from the confines of the prisons we have built about

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Our closing hymn is Green #250 “Julian of Norwich”

Closing: From Britain Yearly Meeting Questions and Counsel from 1988: “Do you cherish that of God within you, so that love may grow in you and rule your life?”