

In 1657, George Fox wrote, “Friends, meet together and know one another in that which is eternal, which was before the world was.”

First hymn is green #202, “Blessed Quietness”

Our first reading is from the great Quaker historian, Howard H. Brinton, who wrote in 1931: “Worshippers are like the spokes of a wheel. The nearer they come to the centre of all Life, the nearer they are to each other. Having reached the centre they become united in a single life through the creative love of God”

A Second Reading comes from George Fox. “Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou wilt feel the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord God, whereby thou wilt receive God’s strength and power from whence life comes, to allay all tempests, against blusterings and storms. That is it which moulds up into patience, into innocency, into soberness, into stillness, into stayedness, into quietness, up to God, with God’s power.”

Our third and last reading is Psalm 46: “*For the director of music. Of the sons of Korah. According to alamothe. A song.* God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. *Selah.* There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fail; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; God lifts a voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah.* Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations brought on the earth. God makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; God breaks the bow and shatters the spear, God

burns the shields with fire. Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah.*”

Our second hymn is Green #171 “Can a Mother Hear Her Child”

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—May we all be menders and weavers of the torn web of the world. Let our hearts spin those healing threads in the deep and full silence of our spiritual unity, on the wheel where the hub is the collective single life in the creative love of all. Help us sing the psalms of encouragement and of assurance to each other and to those in need. Let us hear and know the prayers that come forward all around us, the prayers of the earth, of the heavens, of the people. Let our prayers, too, be heard. In this sacred time and place, in all sacred times and places, let Love be known, be present, be near, be affirmed, be true. Amen.

Third Hymn in Green #203 “There are Angels Hov’ring Round”

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear friends—Some of you may remember a number of years ago when I gave a message inspired in part by the wheel or medallion or fan or wooden rose window in our ceiling. That last idea of it being a wooden rose window is new to me and might seem strange because it is dark and leads to an attic, but if our true light is Inner Light, then the fact that it looks down on us from our midst and rather than shining on us, we are to shine up to it may be appropriate. That it has the forty openings around the edge, and that we often worship as about forty people, I’ve observed before. But that it might be a spinning wheel, that image Ghandi used so effectively in portraying the simple common work of the people, and that what might be spun is what I put in our prayer today and

we sang in the hymn: the threads to help us mend the worn and sacred web of this world, is a new image in satyagraha.

As we head towards the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, it is good to be reminded of this synergistic worldwide weaving of soul force, as Ghandi was inspired by Thoreau and the South African resistance, the shuttle of the loom going back and forth across the world, South Africa-US-India-US. As Ghandi stated, “Truth (satya) implies love and firmness (agraha) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement Satyagraha, that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence”. Of course, I was also delighted to find Howard Brinton’s quote about the wheel as well, in regard to Quaker worship.

“Worshippers are like the spokes of a wheel. The nearer they come to the centre of all Life, the nearer they are to each other. Having reached the centre they become united in a single life through the creative love of God”. Often in meeting we are inspired by nature and what is outside our windows, but it all must come back to what is inside our hearts, inside this room, as we lift our eyes. Brinton also observes that it is the spiritual centering that makes us close to one another, that builds community, not the sense of community that leads to the centering. Many of us know that it was the sense of the spirit, the worship, that drew us first to this community. We came close to the hub, and then found ourselves together. For a meeting house, it is such an unusual and yet blessed symbol of and for our meeting, and I hope these observations are blessings for you.

From there we have the solid assertions of the psalm, the sense of protection in the Spirit, in God’s care. In the text are the musical instructions, which I chose to read to you today. The sons of Korah were of the choral lineage of Israelites, the singers, as were the alamothe women singers. The word “selah” appears between psalm verses in the Bible 74 times, and though the exact meaning

is not known, it is believed to be a performance instruction to the effect of “stop and listen”, or “pause, and think of that”. Since we know the psalms were accompanied, this may have been a time for an instrumental interlude amidst the singing, a time for reflection to let the words sink in, but not the final “so be it” of amen. So, we are instructed to pause, and know that God is here. *Selah*.

God is here in the conflict, in the Angels hovering around us. But the closer we get to the hub, the more we can see others there, even those we wouldn't recognize in other circumstances. In November, there were a couple of hate incidents at the university where I work, some hateful messages written on notice boards in dorms, some fliers found on campus for documented hate groups, and as a result, I was interviewed on the news. In early December, I received this letter:

“Re: Cultural Diversity. Mr. Miller, I heard you on the TV December 4<sup>th</sup> and I don't know how you can back the idea of “Cultural Diversity.” Look at the back of the penny. It says ‘E pluribus unum’ which means ‘out of many one. ONE. One country; one culture; one people. The immigrants that came here at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, came here **legally** and with respect for the United States. They assimilated. They became citizens. Their children learned English, even if they were held back a year in school. They wanted to live here. That has nothing to do with ‘cultural diversity’. In fact, it is the opposite. The incidents happening at CMU are a result of unrest with the system. Unknown to young college students, they don't even realize their unrest is deeply rooted in our American heritage. But more importantly, to keep that hate going, Cultural Diversity must keep putting the hate, no matter how fake, out in the forefront so the public, especially college students, believe ‘racism is alive and well in the U.S.’ ....I have a B.A. in Political Science, summa cum laude, which is a miracle because so many universities are liberal. I am conservative, sensible, and I found that out in my first

Political Science class... Liberal means communist ideas that professors push on students...". Well, you get the idea. It was something of a rant, a lot of talking points, recommendations that I read Adam Smith and the Constitution. A letter possibly to laugh at a bit with friends and colleagues, or to dismiss as from some crank. And yet, the writer had bothered to look me up, find my address, quote me several times, and type out two pages. She actually reached out to me, so, I decided to write back. I used an FCNL note card that had the cover "Love Thy Neighbor, No Exceptions" and on the back had lots of information about FCNL, though in my handwritten note, I did not direct her to it.

I wrote: "Thank you very much for your letter and for taking an interest in my work here at CMU, prompted by the brief quote from me in a news report that you saw early this month. In a time in our country of sharp divisions and intolerance, with many not seeking to understand one another and views different from their own, it is refreshing and helpful to have someone purposely reach out and interact. Congratulations on your academic achievements and therefore knowing that in a university setting, we need our students and faculty to understand a wide variety of viewpoints and theories in order to come to their own positions. Asking everyone to understand the various perspectives is certainly not the same as asking them to agree with any or all of them, but simply to consider them fairly and in context. This is, of course, what the freedom and values of our country and constitution are all about—to encourage and allow all to be part of the one, fully expressing themselves and their beliefs and commitments. As a Pastor in my own religious tradition of Quakerism, much of my work is grounded in that heritage from my forebears, which contributed a great deal to the establishment of the U.S. in Philadelphia. Thank you for the readings you recommended, with which I am quite familiar. I hope you have good holidays with those you love, and send you best wishes for the new year." I sincerely believe what I wrote, and I know that sometimes people who have such anger in

their system have been wounded, or disrespected, or treated with scorn. I recognize the obvious racism in her initial message. My reply brought closure to me. It was my little attempt to turn some anger to peace. I did not expect her to write back.

“Dear Mr. Miller, I received your thoughtful letter and had to reply. My husband, Pete was a Quaker also! He was a very good man that had lived through sad situations and never complained about it. He lived in a children’s home during the depression until he was 17 and did not resent his parents for doing that. A one-year old daughter died suddenly in about 1942 and his 21-year old son was killed twenty years later, and he kept on going, being good and kind to people (and funny) and providing. I asked him once what religion was. He said, “Just be kind”. There are people we know that we admire very much then there is this BLOB the media puts out that is an insult to humanity. Perhaps it’s best to ignore those we don’t personally know and assume they are just fodder created by the news. I’ve met too many nice people that keep my faith and hope going. You are one of them. Thank you for writing back. I was a city cop for 16 years and the best job I had was inner city, third shift. These people became family that had to be protected from the evil BLOB people...” and she goes on to tell me a bit more about herself and recommend a bit more reading. I don’t know if she looked at the FCNL website or anything like that. She still says that these days she’s ‘narrowed her help down to those who want and deserve it’, but her closed mind is a bit more open, her heart is a bit softer, our lives are a bit connected.

Let Light in. Let it shine up to our wooden rose window. With God as our refuge and strength, be close to love and the center of all Life, to the things eternal. Non-violence is an action, it is soul force, Ghandi made very clear that it is not passive. Let us all make peace! The threads can be spun, woven, wrapped, warm.

Our closing hymn is Green #303 “Peace in Our Time, O Lord”

Closing: “Worshippers are like the spokes of a wheel. The nearer they come to the centre of all Life, the nearer they are to each other. Having reached the centre they become united in a single life through the creative love of God”