

***Order of Service ~ March 10, 2019
Here and There, Now and Then***

Musical Prelude

Greeting -- Are we there yet?

1st Hymn: Turn, Turn, Turn, Blue 28

Readings -- Psalm 90:1-2; Mark 1:15; Luke 17:21; 2Cor 6:2

2nd Hymn: Seek Ye First, Green 100

Joys and Concerns

Musical interlude

Prayer -- Eternal Presence, Help us to Be Present

3rd Hymn: Teach Me to Stop and Listen, Green 137

Message: *Here, Now, There, Then*

Silent worship

4th Hymn: One Step at a Time, Green 162

Closing: Now is the Day of Salvation

Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude

Greeting:

Good Morning, Friends.

On a recent long road trip, my son Caz, frustrated and bored, asked with the cooped up whiny wail of generations of children in the backseat, "Are we there yet?" And his dad, my husband George, answered with a truly perfected serene cheer, and a flourishing gesture out the window, "No, we're here."

For these moments, this morning, this Present time, let us be Present, Here. and let us come into the Presence of That Which is Eternally Present ~ here and there, now and then, in all seasons, all times.

**Let us begin by singing, our first hymn, from the Blue Hymnal, number 28
~Turn, Turn, Turn.**

Prayer

Holy One, Eternal Presence. here and now, there and then, everlasting to everlasting. Catch us in our turnings, turn in us, season by season, moment by moment turn us toward you. Tune our attention to your Presence, in this moment, and the next. Help us to be Present, just as you are. Help us to notice this moment, here and now lived in your Presence. We pray together today as our brother Jesus did, thy kingdom come, thy will be done. Here, as it is There. Now, as it is Then. Today, as it will be tomorrow. This is the day of salvation because you are with us, and we are with you. Amen.

Readings

Psalm 90: 1-2 ¹Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.²Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Luke 17:21 nor will they be able to say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'Look, it is over there!' For, behold, the kingdom of God is already within you.

Mark 1:15 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe this good news.'

Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians 6:2

Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Matthew 6:10 *Thy Kingdom Come.*

Benediction

May the time be fulfilled, for the kingdom of God is at hand.

May thy kingdom come, for thou art eternally present, everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

Here, Now, There, and Then.

Behold now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Message

About a year ago, my now ten year old son Cyrus needed a vaccination booster shot. We went to the pediatrician for the dreaded poke, the anxiety building the whole way, and he survived. As we were leaving the office, Cyrus stepped off the curb and a car came careening around a corner through the parking lot, veering erratically toward us. It happened so quickly, and the car came toward us so fast that I couldn't get words out, I couldn't process what was happening. I remember there being no sound, like a giant vacuum had sucked the sound from the world. And then at the last moment the car swerved and sped away. Sounds came roaring back, we looked at each other in shock and I said, my heart pounding, "Cyrus, I thought you were going to die!" And he said, without skipping a beat, "Well in that case I could have skipped that shot."

Cyrus' words from that day have been playing like a spiritual riddle through my days since then, a kind of Zen koan that interrogates the relationship between Present and future. In one off-hand remark, he succinctly distilled his sense that unpleasantness, hardship, and difficulty in the present are better foregone if life is short, particularly in the case of difficulty that is endured for the sake of future payoff, like a painful shot *now*, to protect against possible infection *then*. If that future is almost certainly unlikely to arrive, Cyrus noted, that affects our calculus of choices in our present moments.

Of course, the perennial problem is that we don't, maybe ever, know exactly how long our future will be, or when its curtailment will come. And also of course, we cannot control definitively or dictate precisely the ways that present choices **will** or **will not** inform the as yet unrealized future, nor how they will intersect with the individual freedom of others, with the complexities of interdependence, with collective actions and systemic forces, or with all the unpredictable cascading consequences therein. If such unpredictable complexities **were** in our control, our human condition would be fundamentally altered. We'd be omnipotent. I suspect that complications would ensue. But, instead, in this world, in this reality, we do not have the power to foresee and ensure guaranteed outcomes in a definitive future. The car that came screaming toward us that day was totally unforeseen,

and impossible to plan for. Likewise, for reasons I cannot determine, it swerved at the last second, giving us more present moments to live in, more possible futures to plan for.

We know that planning as if a future will arrive carries likely benefits, such as food for the winter, seeds for the spring, income in retirement, and immunity to infectious diseases. But planning in itself won't guarantee we make it through the winter and see another spring, avail ourselves of our carefully managed retirement savings, or live long enough for the dreaded booster shot to be worth the trouble. **Would** we save ourselves the challenges of projecting the fall harvest, the labor of long days pulling weeds, the long-term planning for our twilight years, if we knew in advance that the hard limit on our days would mean we might just as well have spent the money, let the weeds go to seed, and gone to the beach in the precious present moments allotted to us? Is there value in the booster shot and the garden planning even if the effort, the discipline, the foregone pleasure, the endured pain comes to nought, because our days have reached their end and plans have been cut short? Or, is it possible that the ends are not the full measure of our days? Could it be that there is value in future oriented actions we take in the present **even if** that future doesn't come? Could there ever possibly be a time in our lives when every single present intention, every plan, is carried to its ultimate, complete, final resolution?

One of the ways our ancestors used the metaphor '*Kingdom of God*' was to convey *that* somehow beyond ordinary time, space, and consciousness fulfillment of all intention, the resolution of all that had been hoped for, a cosmic "wrapping up" at the end of all the ages, a conclusive consummation of all the seasons, when everlasting comes to everlasting, full circle. The Kingdom of God is the transformed world at the end of the world, the transformed time at the end of time, a new reality marked by justice, love in action, peace. But throughout the Scriptures the concept is also employed in ways that suggest that that ultimate resolution also *inheres, coheres, co-exists* already somehow with the present moment, the present world. It's both Here, Now, AND it's the Time, the World, the Age to come. It's both something we live within, which paradoxically lives within us, and it's something that's longed for, hoped for, striven for. Something we practice tuning our attention toward in the present moment, AND something we

have faith in for the future. Something that is already among us, and something that is coming, approaching, getting nearer, at hand. It's within our grasp, but also yet to be grasped. The Kingdom of God is already, and it's also not yet. like the unknown future that approaches, even as it begins right now.

Every moment of this aliveness right now carries with it our capacity to be deeply present, and also our capacity to hope, to feel dread, fear or expectant anticipation when we think of the moments to come. We can set goals, map out our wishes, chart a course, schedule booster shots, advocate peace, pray for a new day, for repentance, for a change of heart. We can dream, imagine, and plan. And our noblest dreams, our dearest imaginings, our best laid plans can carry us out from the present moment toward a future that we can see so clearly it is almost as if we are already there.

Quakers have believed, and have practiced living into the belief, that we can give our Present into the keeping of the Eternal Presence, and live, one moment at a time, into the future, that is also, always in the keeping of That One for Whom All Time is an Eternal Present, everlasting to everlasting. Our Quaker testimonies live on the edge of present and future, as do we.

Like Cyrus's spiritual riddle, it all begins to sound like a sacred puzzle. But perhaps the path through the mystery is taken, and can only be taken, just one step, one moment, at a time. Perhaps one moment at a time **is** how we give our Present and our future into the keeping of the Eternal Presence. Safe keeping is, after all one of the meanings of the word Salvation. Maybe salvation is the knowledge that any moment can be lived in that Presence. Maybe any moment **is**. And maybe **that** is how we pray Thy Kingdom Come. One moment at a time. Are we there, yet? No. We're here. Now. and Now. and Now. Behold, it is a very acceptable time. Behold, it is the day of salvation.

Psalm 90: 1-2 ¹Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.²Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.