

Order of Service ~ April 14, 2019
Unanimous Blood and the Poetry of Everyone

Musical Prelude

Greeting -- "*Like You*"

1st Hymn: Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah, Green 159/158 first verse

Readings -- Luke 22:47-48; *Praise What Comes*; Exodus 12: 7&13; *Passover*

2nd Hymn: Peace is Flowing Like a River, Green 318

Joys and Concerns

Musical interlude

Prayer -- God Is Here

3rd Hymn: When Jesus Walked Upon the Earth, Green 107

Message: The Blessing of Blood

Silent worship

4th Hymn: Julian of Norwich, Green 250

Closing -- One of the Many Names of God

Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude

Greeting: Good morning Friends.

I begin this morning with an adaptation of Roque Dalton's poem *Like You*.

*Like you I love love, life...And my blood boils up
and I laugh through eyes that have known ... tears.
I believe the world is beautiful and that poetry, like bread, is for everyone.
And that my veins don't end in me but in the unanimous blood
(unanimous blood) of (all) who struggle for life, love, little things, landscape and
bread, the poetry of everyone.*

I would like to suggest that when we worship, we try to sing and pray and sit in the silence that brings forth the poetry of everyone, and to come into the reality of that unanimous blood. We don't always succeed, but we try. And so let's try again one more time, **and begin by singing our first hymn:**
Green Hymnal 159 Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah (first verse from 158, then first and second verse from 159)

Readings

Luke 22:47-48 *While he spoke, a crowd approached, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them; and he came nigh to Jesus, to kiss him. Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"*

"Praise What Comes" by Jeanne Lohmann

...Praise talk with just about anyone. And quiet intervals, books that are your (bread) and your hunger; nightfall and walks before sleep. Praising these for practice, perhaps you will come at last to praise grief and the wrongs you never intended. At the end there may be no answers and only a few very simple questions: did I love, finish my task in the world? Learn at least one of the many names of God? At the intersections, the boundaries where one life began and another ended, the jumping-off places between fear and possibility, at the ragged edges of pain, did I catch the smallest glimpse of the holy?

Exodus 12:7 & 13 *Then you shall take some of the blood, and put it on the doorposts and the lintels of the houses . . . and when I see the blood, I shall pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.*

"Passover" by Lynn Ungar

They thought they were safe that spring night, when they daubed the doorways with sacrificial blood. To be sure, the angel of death passed them over, but for what? Forty years in the desert without a home, without a bed, following new laws to an unknown land. (Perhaps) easier to have died in Egypt or stayed there a slave, pretending there was safety in the old familiar. But the promise, from those first naked days outside the garden, is that there is no safety, only the terrible blessing of the journey. You were born through a doorway marked in blood. We are, all of us, passed over, brushed in the night by wings (of horror). Ask that fierce presence, whose imagination you hold. God did not promise that we shall live, but that we might, at last, glimpse the stars, brilliant in the desert sky.

Prayer

Holy One. God of poetry and bread, grace and glory, guide of those who marked their doors with blood, and the pilgrims who wandered through the desert toward Canaan, be thou still the strength and shield of all who sojourn now. Deliver us. Teach us to listen to ancient words and hear your voice, you who speak the language of all people, of all who struggle to live and love, now. Teach us to learn at least one of your many names, and to see your face in the faces of all who journey with us. O God of captives, sinners and saints, O God who sets free, who is everywhere and in everyone bidden or unbidden, in joy and in pain, in peace and in sorrow, cause us to catch a glimpse of you, Holy One, here, with us, now. We pray together today, Amen.

Benediction

*Here where the winter has come and gone~
And at the intersections, the places between fear and possibility~
May we catch a glimpse of the Holy,
May we Be marked by the blessing of unanimous blood
See the stars in the desert sky
And learn at least one of the many names of God.*

Message

Today we gather on the day that many celebrate as Palm Sunday, which commemorates the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem, precipitating the events that would lead to his execution. The scriptural texts that shape this Sunday's celebrations tell of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, a counter procession to the priestly and imperial parade also taking place to mark the start of Passover. In tomorrow's texts he will descend in anger on the money changers at the Temple, which scholars contend was a direct attack on the tribute system that demanded temple complicity with Rome. What has come to be known as Holy Week, this week leading up to Easter, will find Jesus celebrating the Passover Seder meal, or the Last Supper, after which, his advocates will become his enemies and call for his blood. The blood and sacrifice associated with Passover will bleed into the blood and sacrifice associated with Jesus' crucifixion. This year, the holy days of Jesus' devout Judaism and the new faith he inaugurated are particularly intertwined because this Good Friday is also the first day of Passover.

It's hard to talk about the blood and the sacrifice of this radical 1st century rabbi from Palestine. Those words and symbols -- blood, sacrifice -- have been claimed by theologies that have taken the deeply mythological, the anciently ritualistic, the profoundly metaphorical elements of the Bible and forced them into literalistic doctrines for so long, that we can't hear words like blood and sacrifice without their imposed literal renderings. Metaphorical has been made literal over the last thousand years, while the concrete and instructional -- feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, heal the sick -- have been metaphorized so as to be dismissed, a subversion of the good news to the poor that the rabbi riding on the ass brought this day through the desert into the holy city of Jerusalem.

But I would like to talk about blood and sacrifice today. We are Quakers. In this meeting we collect the remnants of 6 Quaker meetings that once met in this area, after schisms and separations, often over bitter disagreements about the meanings of symbols and words, like Jesus, blood and sacrifice. Those divisions still exist, and yet we come together each week...we require no oaths, no recitation of creeds, no doctrinal purity tests. Jesus, blood, and sacrifice may cause Quaking - - from inspiration or dread -- in this community. But let us try to listen with ears

tuned to the ancient poetry of everyone, to the language of metaphor and myth, and perhaps together come into the reality of that one unanimous blood that Jesus has come to symbolize.

The word blood shares etymological roots with blessing, and to bless. In French, the word *blessure* means, literally, to wound, and relates to the Old English *bletsian* — to sprinkle with blood. The word Sacrifice comes through pagan agricultural, seasonal observances, down through the ages by way of Latin, combining the words for *Sacred and To Make*. *Blood is connected to blessing. Sacrifice is To Make Sacred*. For the ancients, meal fellowship was perhaps the first communal ritual observance, an offering to one another, a sharing in the condition of hunger and bodily need. To eat, to survive, was to spill blood, and to share meals was to share in the unanimous blood of human life. Sacrificial rites were meal fellowship offered to the mysterious force called God, and they were intended to consecrate existence, to give thanks, to acknowledge a beholden-ness, to bless with and be blessed by the blood that quite literally gave them life.

I say this all today because I have known the blessing of blood, the ancient meaning of sacrifice, and the experience of Passover. As you who were here last Sunday heard, a week and a half ago, a 9 year old child named Tevy ran out in front of my car as I was driving home from work, and I swerved, but was unable to avoid hitting him. He pinwheeled through the air, and landed in the ditch by the side of the road. His body dented the hood of my car and his head collapsed a portion of my windshield. The force of the impact blew off his boots and socks. He was airlifted to Upstate Trauma center in Syracuse. At 8:00PM his incredibly kind mother texted me, having gone out of her way to get my number from a mutual friend, to say that they cautiously believed there was no brain or spinal injury. At midnight, she sent me a picture of her boy with a chocolate ice cream mustache and a neck brace. Her text read, “he’s eating chocolate ice cream...Angels are here, sleep well Rebecca.” By mid-day the next day, his dad sent me a picture of Tevy watching a movie, reporting “he’s just gotten out of his bed and is walking. He’s really fine..thank God...it’s a miracle....” 24 hours after the accident, Tevy was discharged from the hospital and went home with a concussion, a bruised lung, and a chipped tooth.

On the road, Tevy's parents said two things to me. Apparently I was hysterical, pacing, shaking, sobbing, pointing at Tevy lying crumpled, and screaming over and over "I did this! I did it, I hit him! I don't know how fast I was going!" I felt a compulsion to confess, that this was the gravest of transgressions and I was convicted. I had hurt a child, and I was sure it was my fault. As it happens, the doctors would come to call the accident a "low velocity impact," and say that I must have been going below the speed limit, which is 45 there. But at that time, I didn't know that, and a good deal of my hysteria was due to my sense of having committed terrible wrongdoing because I **have** driven too fast in the past. In the midst of my hysteria, Tevy's father, who arrived like an angel at his son's side, in my memory simply appearing, suddenly, as if summoned, turned to me with fire in his eyes and shouted "This is not about you!!!" It was absolutely correct. It was the truest thing. And then His mother put her hands on my shoulders, looked in my eyes, and said the second truest thing: "we can't change what happened. God is here now. We just need to be here with Tevy, with God." So we prayed, put our hands on Tevy's body and just repeated that we loved him, that we were there, and that God was there.

Many stories like this do not have a happy ending. I do not know why other families might have this kind of terrible horror visited upon them and they are not passed over in the night. their children do not live to eat chocolate ice cream. Why does the Lord favor Israel and smite Egypt? Are not Egypt's firstborn sons also beloved? Is God not the God of Jesus and Judas? To try to work out what theologians have called the problem of suffering, the existence of horror -- risks making facile, sweeping assumptions and grandiose diagnoses that veer toward hubris, or a callous dismissal of particular suffering as just so much collateral damage, the mysterious ways of a God who withholds and metes out blessings and curses to those who deserve them. That kind of theology happens when we read the ancient scriptures without understanding that they are the poetry of everyone, without conversance in the nature of metaphor and myth -- how meanings were enacted through symbol and ritual, and through a kind of expansive awareness that is what we do when we worship. That kind of awareness, that kind of way of approaching scripture like it is a meetinghouse within which to know the reality of unanimous blood, is a skill that we moderns,

post-moderns, and ‘meta-moderns’ have lost, and our capacity to learn some of the many names of God, to catch glimpses of the holy, has suffered. It’s dangerous business to assume that God literally chooses, that we can literally know the mechanics of and reasons for a people’s Passover, as if God is a vending machine in the sky, into which we insert the right observances and doctrines, and our desired outcomes are disgorged into our expectant hands. That does make it all about us.

I don’t think Tevy ate chocolate ice cream at midnight because we said the right prayers on that road. But I do know that God was there. In all the folks who came out of their houses and directed traffic, brought blankets and did what they could, what needed to be done. In the driver behind me who called nine one one and said, I remember, “come quickly. There’s a lot of blood.” God was in the nine one one dispatcher, in the stretcher and the EMTs, the merciful angels of medical technology, the people who go where the blood is. God was there in the way that kindness was the first instinct, and a desire to help, no questions asked. God was in the father who crooned I love you Tevy, I love you Tevy. In the mother’s mercy, in her concern for **me** in the midst of what were probably the worst moments of her life. In all the people who got the family to the hospital, and had food waiting for them when they got home. In the doctors who received Tevy’s stretcher when the helicopter arrived. In the people from this meeting who held me with love. In my sister who came over and spent the night so if I got bad news about Tevy she could get it with me. And the thing is, God was present in all of those people and in all of those ways *even though* we didn’t know then if Tevy was going to be ok. And now God is here in the reverent gratitude I feel for a life in which *I didn’t irreparably harm a child*. Every day in **this** life is a supreme grace, and gratitude compels me to proclaim it is not a result of my conscious making, because that would really be making it all about me.

And God is here in the tears and the laughter and the incredible generosity of Tevy’s family, who shared with me their sense that this accident initiated a healing of a breach in their family, and cracked open hearts that had been closed to one another, that could only, they say, be opened by something this catastrophic. His mother said, “I’m sorry that you had to be the Judas, but I

thank you from the bottom of my heart.” Judas, we know, is the one who betrayed Jesus into the hands of those who would crucify him, with a kiss. Tevy’s mother knows about the poetry of everyone, about the ancient meaning of sacrifice, and at least one of the many names of God. She knows about the connection between blood and blessing.