

Robert Barclay, a Friend who documented and interpreted the beliefs and testimonies of early Quakers wrote in 1678: “And as many candles lighted, and put in one place, do greatly augment the light and make it more to shine forth so when many are gathered together in the same life, there is more of the glory of God, and sacred power appears, to the refreshment of each individual, for that one partakes not only of the light and life raised in the self, but in all the rest.”

Our first hymn is in the red book #151, “Come, Gracious Spirit”

Our first reading comes from the Quaker wise teacher in our contemporary world, Parker Palmer, who wrote in 1977: “The Society of Friends can make its greatest contribution to community by continuing to be a religious society—I mean by centering on the practice of corporate worship which opens itself to continuing revelation. Again, community is simply too difficult to be sustained by our social impulses. It can be sustained only as we return time and time again to the religious experience of the unity of all life. To put it in the language of Friends, community happens as that of God in you responds to that of God in me. And the affirmation that there is that of God in every person must mean more than “I’m okay, you’re okay.” The silence of the Quaker meeting for worship can be an experience of unity. I am an orthodox, garden variety Christian; I find the image of God first in Jesus the Christ. But it is my joy in the silent meeting to seek with those who find different ways to express the inexpressible truths of religious experience. Words can divide us, but the silence can bring us together. Whatever kinds of community the world needs, it surely needs the kind that embraces human diversity.”

Our second reading is from the advices and queries of Britain Yearly Meeting: “Do you recognize the needs and gifts of each

member of your family and household, not forgetting your own? Try to make your home a place of loving friendship and enjoyment, where all who live or visit may find the peace and refreshment of God's presence."

Our final reading comes from William Penn, who wrote in 1693, "A good end can never sanctify evil means nor must we ever do evil that good may come of it...It is as great presumption to send our passions upon God's errands as it is to palliate them with God's name... We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive, or gain by love and information. And yet we could hurt no one that we believe loves us. Let us then try what Love will do: for if others did once see we love them, we should soon find they would not harm us. Force may subdue, but Love gains: and the one that forgives first, wins the laurel."

Second hymn Red #160 "Lord, We Thank Thee for our Brothers"

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—We give thanks that we are not alone, that we are a congregation and that we are this congregation. Our joys and concerns are shared and are truly ours, not left alone to struggle, but blessed by presence and witness and faith. Give us the candor and courage to share, and the time to be fully present and with each one who joins us or reaches out to us. When we struggle to understand, or fail to see what we have in common, let us grasp the full meaning of forgiveness, let us achieve that laurel that will open and feed our hearts and our community. Keep our silence blessed and full, warm and enriching, a bridge and not a gap. Let love continue to be our guide and our strength. Amen.

Our third hymn is in the Green book #33 "Still, Still With Thee"

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear friends—In the hymn we just sang, I cannot help but also be thinking of actually keeping still, as well as an ongoing, enduring presence. The hymn illustrates images of stillness, a settled sanctuary, along with the idea of staying or keeping with. And in that sense of being still within, it is only possible when we are fully comfortable and at ease with someone. This is how we should be with God, with the sacred, with the Truth of the universe, the oneness of all—in a life affirming peace. In the English of the 1600s, thee is the familiar form, for family and friends, so in the scriptures at the time of the first major English translation, using “thee” for God was meant to be a sense of family, a sense of confiding in a personal space with someone you know. “you” is actually the much more formal word, and back then, typically plural. So, in that hymn there are two double meanings of still and thee, along with the images of the welcome surprise of morning each day. Wonder, and contentment and safety and joy, peace and persistence. That is at the heart of our f/Friendship, of our community, the heart where the home is.

In our readings today, Britain Yearly meeting speaks of the peace and refreshment of God’s presence being in the home, just as it also is the home, the thing that creates home deep within each of us and is realized when we put it together with the yearning for and knowing of home in others. As Parker Palmer observed, it is beyond social—a unity of all life. It is as Robert Barclay observed in our opening quote, where he also makes use of “refreshment” as a word to describe what happens when sacred power appears and is present in those people by whom we are surrounded and with whom we are in community. Our inner knowing is not only expressed in our outer acting and messages for one another, but it is a sensibility that is not easily explained, but is recognizable and shines ever outward, creating us, and making us more well-rounded, more true. Holding someone in the Light is something like that, and it is also a persistent sense of being held.

The other day I read about the waterfowl rescue sanctuary in North Carolina that ends up taking in thousands of wild bird chicks every spring—wild chicks that need nests to develop properly and to stay warm. They put out a call each year, and people from all over the world knit little nests for these orphaned hatchlings, and thousands survive. That caring is part of those little nests, and that sense of being held, and it is part of what we provide just by being in meeting, by turning up and expressing hope and caring. We are that haven, that nest for each other, that added light from inside that brings the divine to our relationships and knits them together.

We are also reminded in today's readings that we cannot make a home for others if we ourselves are not at home. I'm not speaking here about a household or an apartment or even a place to live in a physical sense, but rather, a place to live in a spiritual sense. It is very interesting that we quiet ourselves and simplify as Quakers in order to be deeply moved and stirred by the spirit. We get calm in order to agitate, we sit in silence to embody and envelop all in love. We settle in to generate power, to create common Spirit.

Parker Palmer has such an interesting observation in finding the silence our powerful unity. While he himself has a traditional Christian view of religion, he sits with those who find God and the Spirit in so many ways and on so many paths. This was also true of the very first Quakers, some of whom were universalists like Robert Barclay and others more specifically Christ centered, and all kinds of mixtures of those sensibilities. What we all have in common in our paths to oneness and to sharing our Light, is the journey home, the sense of being settled and secure to some degree with those we trust. We often hear from folks who join Quaker meetings that part of the reason is that they walked in and felt at home. In some senses, we are free to explore and find new ways and paths because we have an essential common home. Those who are homeless, are not free to think and explore and go deep because they must constantly meet immediate needs and struggle

to be seen and provided for. When you have a home, a foundation, a common base, then you are free to range widely, to share deeply, to know greater boundaries, and to be truly available and friends, able to be listeners and generous with time and love and life.

Filling the silence with peace and love and refreshment is what we do in the stillness of the morning, in our practice here in meeting, in our being with and for each other, and all of humanity, under the stars and out in the woods and by the waters. We do not find truth to be changeable or seasonal or even of a particular history or culture. We find it more deeply, more intimately, and in unity. It is the combination of many perspectives and ongoing revelations in new experiences and metaphors of expressing the undefinable, along with a solid oneness, a religious experience of the unity of all life, as Parker Palmer puts it.

This is our anchor, our foundation, our touchstone, our safe and sure resting place, our home. It is also a generative source of creativity and refreshment, not settled and fixed and stayed, but ever joined by new folks who in their perceptions greatly augment the light. The physical and the soul, existence and consciousness, science and spirituality, they are all continua, a spectrum of experiences of our worlds of grace and circumstance. Human skills in a practical listing or training are not enough to take away the occasion of all wars nor to bring us all to love. We cannot just be people together as a religious society of friends. As Parker Palmer wrote, community is simply too difficult to maintain by our social impulses. It needs a home, a grounding, in love.

Closing hymn is Red #159 “Christ is the King”

John Woolman, an American Friend, wrote in 1770, “Dig deep...carefully cast forth the loose matter and get down to the rock, the sure foundation, and there hearken to the divine voice which gives a clear and certain sound.”