

***Order of Service -- June 2019***  
***The Holy Seed***

*Musical Prelude*

*Greeting -- The Seed: Elizabeth Bathurst and Isaac Penington*

*1st Hymn: Morning Has Broken, Green 32*

*Readings -- John 12:24; Matthew 17: 19-20; Luke 13:18-19; Mary Oliver: More  
Honey Locust*

*2nd Hymn Now the Green Blade Riseth; Green 116*

*Joys and Concerns*

*Musical interlude*

*Prayer -- Call Us Forth, Act Upon Us*

*3rd Hymn: I Am an Acorn; Green 242*

*Message: The Holy Seed*

*Silent worship*

*4th Hymn: This is My Father's World, Green 29*

*Closing -- Praise the Holy Seed*

*Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts*

*Postlude*

## Greeting

Good Morning Friends.

In mid seventeenth century England, amid great cultural upheaval, Quakers began to speak of their direct experience of God as The Seed within.

Isaac Penington was one such prominent Quaker. He was the son of the Lord Mayor of London, and was imprisoned six times for his radical Quaker beliefs and support of Friends. Sometime after 1660 he wrote: *Only wait to know that wherein God appears in thy heart, even the holy seed, the immortal seed of life; that that may be discerned, distinguished, and have scope in thee; that it may spring up in thy heart, and live in thee, and gather thee into itself, and leaven thee all over with its nature; that thou mayst be ...new..., and mayst walk before God, not in the oldness of thy own literal knowledge or apprehensions of things, but in the newness of his Spirit.*

Right around the same time, early Quaker feminist Elizabeth Bathurst wrote in Truth's Vindication: *The Seed, or Grace of God, is small in its first Appearance, even as the Morning Light; but as it is given Heed to, and obeyed, it will increase in Brightness, till it shine in the Soul, like the Sun in the Firmament at its Noon-day Height.*

Let us witness today to The Seed that is planted in our hearts as surely as it was for those first Quakers, such that It's Spirit may have *scope in us and spring up in our hearts* on this beautiful morning, just as it did for them.

**And let us raise our voices in praise of all that rises and springs anew, with our first hymn, Morning Has Broken, Green 32.**

## *Prayer*

God of Planting and Harvest, Holy Seed, Immortal Seed of Life...days go by and we give you no heed, we neither make ready the fields of our hearts, nor water the thorny ground...yet you are there. Yet you wait. This beautiful morning has broken, all around us tender new plants stretch upward into the sun, and we come together to this still room to wait in Silence, to be with you. To attend to the life that would be called forth in us. O Great Mystery, O Promise, O hope, o morning that breaks, o seed that cracks to bring forth new life....o Word that springs fresh this day in heart and garden...we hear you, we heed you, speak now in us, spring forth **in us**, crack **us** open, break **in US** like a new morning, like a new day, like a seed surrendering it's life to the soil and the sun. Call us forth from the Center of our Being, Holy Seed, act upon us now, sow and be sown. help **us** to make an offering of our lives, an offering to the One Immortal Life that lives in us and through us. That we may bear much fruit, and that we may walk in the newness of your Spirit, O Holy Seed, We pray together today, Amen.

## *Benediction*

Praise the new morning.

Praise the new day.

Praise the new life that springeth green, tender and tenacious, faithful and brave.

Praise the Holy Seed, in Springtime and Harvest,  
For God is Within Us and God is the Tree.

## **Readings**

**Matthew 17:20** *truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."*

**Luke 13:18-19** <sup>18</sup>*He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? <sup>19</sup>It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches."*

**John 12:24** *Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

### **More Honey Locust -- Mary Oliver**

*Any day now the branches of the honey locust will be filled with white fountains;  
in my hands I will see the holy seeds and a sweetness will rise up  
from those petal-bundles so heavy I must close my eyes to take it in,  
to bear such generosity....*

*I hope that you too will pause to admire the slender trunk,  
the leaves, the holy seeds, the ground they grow from year after year  
with striving and patience;  
and I hope that you too will say a word of thanks for such creation  
out of the wholesome earth, which would be, and dearly is it needed,  
a prayer for all of us.*

## Message

It is planting time. Big tractors were out this week depositing their precious freight in the furrows, and in our family's large garden, in my eight year old son Caz's little garden plot, and in the collection of pots and planters and seedling trays on our deck, my boys and I have set into the soil several successions of peas, rows of popcorn, 3 kinds of beans, squash, gourds, cucumbers, carrots, basil, sunflowers, and zinnias...we have placed hundreds of tiny seeds in the ground, gifted them with compost from our own backyard pile, covered and watered them, and waited.

Caz is infinitely curious, and he chattered the whole time as we planted...asking questions, giving the seeds personalities and feelings. "Do you think they are afraid? Maybe they are excited...does it hurt them, getting that big plant out from inside there? What happens to the seed when the plant comes out? One thing I don't understand is how they drink water, because they don't have roots yet!"

How *does* something without a clearly observable drinking apparatus absorb the water it needs? How does something without a brain know when to send down its roots and send up its shoot? How does it know to become a squash and not a broccoli? Where are the instructions, where do they come from, and how are they delivered? For that matter, how are they received? Doubtless there are horticultural explanations and scientific descriptions of the mechanics of seed germination, but although we can map and even alter the genetic codes, identify the enzymes and track the chemical signals that send messages through the cell walls of the seeds to somehow start the process of bringing forth the life that lies hidden within them, we can't identify why it happens. Nor are we so far able to synthesize, synchronize and orchestrate all those mysterious processes, microbes, and unseen mechanisms such that all things work together for the good, year after year, garden to garden, pollinator to pollinator, from spring planting to fall harvest, forever and ever amen. One word I use for the why of it, for the synthesis and synchronization and orchestration of it, for the goodness of it, the acorn to tree to forest and seed to tomato to sauce of it, is God. And, I think that the proper attitude before it, is just that kind of exuberant wonder, curiosity, humility, and awe that comes so naturally to my boy. That, and an unself-conscious willingness to participate in it and with it. --- to work alongside, to add compost, to nourish the proper life-nurturing conditions within which the seed may obey its mandate, may submit to the will that seems to both well up from inside and to act upon it from outside its tiny little self.

Every year we take part in this ritual, and every year I am struck by the faith of it. By the mystery of it, By the miracle of it, by the holiness of it. By the presence of

God in it. By the riskiness of it, by the stubborn fierce vulnerability of the seeds themselves, by the catch in my throat as I cover them up and wish them well, little guys, Godspeed and good luck. Every year it seems impossible and unlikely that come August we will have pots and planters and gardens full of actual real food, every fall a freezer stocked with winter meals, and every Thanksgiving a table full of a whole summer's worth of seeds, sunshine, soil and showers from our own backyard. Every year it just seems there's so much that could go wrong. So many possible plagues, droughts, floods, trials, and tribulations standing between spring seed and fall feast. It's risky and dangerous. I do not know what mystery works upon them down there in the dark soil, and they are so very small. I do not know how such tiny vessels carry such monumental potential within their little bodies, or drink in the living water they need, as Caz also wondered, or read the blueprints for their futures written so minutely, or hear the divine Word when it whispers to them that NOW is the time to transform all they've been, to crack open their shells and send forth their tender new selves, out into the world. I can only pray that it works again this year, that new life, so tenuous and tenacious, both, will spring forth, seeking sun and air and light, impelled toward new being. I can only trust that those new beings will again follow their directive, which, it seems, is pure offering. Offering of body, fruit, and seed, to the service of Life -- to rabbits and groundhogs, flea beetles and honey bees, birds of the air and squash bugs, slugs and, hopefully, finally, us. Offering, also, to the future, to next year, to continuance Itself. Every flower gone to seed is an act of faith that future springs will come.

Faith, wonder, humility, willingness to both cultivate the right growing conditions when necessary, and to submit to a force of will that is not entirely our own are just some of the underlying deep messages when parables involving seeds are found in the Bible. Seeds are a very popular scriptural metaphor. And, of course, as we heard as I opened our worship today, Early Quakers also found The Seed to be a compelling way to describe both God, and God's action within the faithful. To early Friends, The Seed was used to express the power of God, the promise of God, and the inheritance of God sown within every human heart.

In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, both faith and the Kingdom of God are compared to a mustard seed. In the passage from Luke, Jesus proposes that the Kingdom of God is like a tiny seed which sprouts and grows a tree tall enough to shelter the birds of the air. This is a parabolic message. God's Kingdom -- the realm where Good News is preached to the Poor, the time when swords are beaten into plowshares, where lions lie down with lambs, when all the nations are gathered into one body -- that Kingdom Come -- is like a tiny seed inside of which

waits a new Life, a mighty tree. As it is planted, the possible Life inside it is already there. Potential for transformation is in its nature. And Intrinsic to the Life of the tree the seed carries within its body is participation in the life of other beings, in the being-ness of other lives. It exists in relationship, in the community of Life. It grows to provide shelter for God's singing creatures. That's what the Kingdom of God is like. Potential, and actual, cohering in one another, co-existing. A tree of Life, hidden in a common mustard seed, planted in this scripture, by an anonymous someone in an unspecified garden.

Meanwhile, in the other famous mustard seed passage, the parabolic instruction is about what size and scope of faith are sufficient to set in motion things thought to be impossible....and we are told that all that is needed is faith the size of that ordinary mustard seed. There is really nothing less remarkable. Or rather, there are millions just as unremarkable. Seeds are a place of great redundancy in nature. So faith the size of a tiny, everyday, average, one among millions seed, that is cast upon the ground and waits. Perhaps the conditions will not be conducive to germination. Perhaps The Seed will be buried too deeply. Perhaps there will be too much water, or not enough. Perhaps it will rot, or be eaten. Nevertheless, it is for the Seed to be planted. Faith that size, that's the minimum precondition for impossible things to become possible. For mountains to move, maybe, for the Kingdom to come.

So, then, let us thank this Holy Seed, brave little Being, bearer of the power, promise, and inheritance of God, set down in the furrows of our gardens and our hearts as surely as it was for the first Friends, where it rests and waits for the Word to whisper that NOW is the time to crack open, now is the time to offer its body and it's very life. And Mary Oliver is right, such thanks and praise are dearly needed, and -- alongside The Seed's tender and tenacious offerings -- *would be, and could be*, a prayer for all of us, reaching our own tender shoots toward the Sun.