

Stephen Grellet, the French Quaker missionary who traveled the world in testimony and finally settled in Burlington, New Jersey wrote in 1800: “I expect to pass through this world but once; any good thing therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”

Our first hymn is green book #184, “What Wondrous Love”

Our first reading is Psalm 148. “Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise God in the heights above. Praise the Lord all God’s angels, praise God all the heavenly hosts. Praise God sun and moon, praise the Lord all you shining stars. Praise the Lord you highest heavens, and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the Lord for God commanded and they were created. God set them in place for ever and ever; God gave a decree that will never pass away. Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do God’s bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for that name alone is exalted; God’s splendor is above the earth and the heavens. God has raised up for the people a horn, the praise of all God’s saints, of Israel, the people close to God’s heart. Praise the Lord.”

A second reading comes from the writings of John Woolman, the American Quaker who wrote in 1763, “Our gracious creator cares and provides for all his creatures. His tender mercies are over all his works; and, so far as his love influences our minds, so far we become interested in his workmanship and feel a desire to take

hold of every opportunity to lessen the distresses of the afflicted and increase the happiness of the creation. Here we have a prospect of one common interest from which our own is inseparable, that to turn all the treasures we possess into the channel of universal love becomes the business of our lives.”

And finally, from Galatians chapter 6:2-6. “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are nothing, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves without comparing themselves to somebody else, for each one should carry their own load. Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with their instructor.”

Our second hymn is green #245 “How Can I Keep From Singing”

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—Let us ever be astounded at this precious life in ourselves and all around us. Let us greet it with love and thanksgiving and value its strength and fragility. When we praise God, the sacred light within, the mysterious chain of being that connects us all to the One, the universe, we acknowledge the great space and power and wonder of a universe of stars and planets, love and being, life and hope. We sing not only in joy, but in awe, and in response, as the birds and whales sing. Thanks and praise is also healing, and beyond the details and emotions of trouble and worry, there is a larger context of joy and Truth, sometimes not in our time, but in the fullness of time. May we all, in our hearts, have been to the mountaintop and seen the promised land. Amen.

Our third hymn is Green book #240 “The Lone Wild Bird”

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear Friends, While I certainly do want to acknowledge that there are many reasons for concern in our world today, that it makes sense that anxiety is at an all-time high, and that so many live in fear even at home, or are driven from their homes, it is all the more important to cling to that rock, to know the Light within and follow its beacon to safety, to be in the congregation, to rest in that Great Spirit that also rests in us. Some of you know that in the nearly twenty years that Craig and I have been singing together, that was the first song we really harmonized. Later this month, after he has surgery on his vocal chords, we'll find out in September if we'll be singing that song again out loud, but it remains in our hearts, a fountain ever springing.

Being loving and optimistic like our readings today, is not a sign of naiveté. It is an opportunity, and often a possible choice as we pass through this world. Stephen Grellet, the great French Quaker who sought to meet with Napoleon and did meet with Czar Alexander and other world leaders, was born to wealthy parents who served Louis XVI before the revolution, and then he himself was sentenced to the guillotine after the revolution. He escaped that fate and then encountered the works of William Penn and George Fox and became a convinced Friend. Knowing the fleeting and changeable nature of life, he wrote his famous words, "I expect to pass through this world but once; any good thing therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again." He was intentional about making those situations happen—not only acting in the moment, but keen in seeking out those moments and possibilities where love and true advocacy for peace could have most effect.

This idea is supplemented by the words of Galatians that exhort us to be fully responsible for ourselves and our responses to others. Let us be true to the inner promptings of our hearts. As John

Woolman observed, we have one common interest in universal love, and that should guide our lives, our way of being, our response and that which we answer in the lives and encounters with others. This is what is rewarding in life. We do not need to seek the reward or try to deserve it, we can live the reward and be the blessing that all so richly deserve.

The pastoral care we take on for each other can be very direct, but can also be unknown. When I was a visiting professor a number of years ago at Davidson College in North Carolina, my alma mater, I attended the meetings of the Friends of Lesbians and Gays on campus, and was the only faculty member who did so, along with some staff members. At the time there was a student who was being very intensely harassed, having food thrown at him in the cafeteria, being assaulted at parties, because of the perceptions of his sexuality, even though he was not necessarily “out”. He did not attend the group, but we were concerned about him. Halfway through the school year, a counselor at the college pulled me aside to say that she just thought I should know that the student had told her that the only reason he was able to make it through the school year was because I was there. I had never had the student in class and had never really interacted with him one-on-one, though I knew who he was and would recognize him. Not only was my presence as a respected faculty member who lived truthfully and expressed my care and concern for others a blessing for him, but the message passed to me by that counselor was a blessing that student gave to me, to cherish my own respectability, to know my risk at the time in being out was valuable, something one doubts when it is so often critiqued publicly. To know it matters. This past weekend, Craig and I became aware of and saw the inclusive diversity mural my niece designed for the Earl Warren College at the University of California at San Diego. He complimented my sister-in-law at how wonderfully open her two children are, and she said, well, no, it was because of the two of you. Similarly, our accepting families were something of great blessing to us, but then,

to our surprise, became a news story in the gay press in Michigan nearly twenty years ago. At that time, it made headlines that we hosted thanksgiving dinner, and everyone in the family came! We were unaware that this was a newsworthy story, we were just living our lives, but it meant a great deal to so many members of a significant community throughout the state all around us, who still today are so often rejected by their families. The families that blessed us, in turn, blessed them.

Forgive the personal details, but this circle of blessing, what you give and also receive, what happens in a wider community when you do not know who is looking, is all the more reason to give thanks, to note the sacred acts, to share the universal love and not miss an opportunity. By existing, by being, the natural world in which we live praises the life force and keeps sustaining, even in the face of challenges. Our responses can knit it together more closely with love.

So many lives in this meeting speak in constant, subtle, big and little ways. I am sure we all have stories about the kindnesses done and expressed to us, the appreciations for things we did not know were that meaningful to another, and the small actions we've observed and seen as signs of universal love, without ever sharing those observations out loud. The reason they are there all around us, even in challenging times, is because God is still speaking and the prophets are alive. They are you. We may never pass this way again, but together we are all on the way, the truth, and the life. We are ever both the instructor and the instructed.

Closing hymn is green #215 "The Great Storm is Over"

Jondhi Harrell, a Rastafarian Quaker in Philadelphia who leads the Center for Returning Citizens, a sacred support for those who have been incarcerated, said in 2015, "Talk less; do more"