

Still Rising—Message for 5 April 2015

Greeting: Universe—and every universe beyond, spin and blaze, whirl and dance, leap and laugh—as never before. It's happened. It's new. It's here. The liberation. The victory. The new creation. Christ has smashed death. He has liberated the world. She has freed the universe. You and I and everything are free again, new again, alive again. Let's have a festival, and follow the One across the skies, and through the flames of heaven and back down every alley of our town! There, let's have the Light come to liberate our city, clean up the mess, and start all over again. You conquered. Keep on fighting through us. You arose. Keep rising in us. You celebrated. Keep on celebrating with us. You happen. You are new. You are here. "Easter" in *Interrobang* by Norman Habel.

First hymn: red book no. 134 "Alleluia! Hearts to Heaven"

First Reading: From John 20, 10-16 "Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away", she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. "Woman, " he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary" She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!"

The Second Reading is Luke 24, 13-32 “Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?” “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth, “ they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other “Were not

our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

Second hymn no. 133 in the red book “Joy Dawned Again on Easter Day”

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—May the Spirit of Truth, the Inner Light, keep rising among us. May we recognize it in each other at the right and necessary times. May we know the rising beyond death, the eternal comfort of our common shared faith. We hold in our hearts all whom we love and on whom we see and feel and pray for a risen sense of deep hope and love. May it be the recognition, the resurrection of the true, the sincere, the beloved, the vivid experience of real life. Amen

Our third hymn is the handout “Christ is Changing Everything”

Children may now head downstairs to prepare our post-meeting activity involving eggs, searching, and finding.

Message:

Dear Friends—In a past message, I shared how the medallion in our ceiling represents to me to some degree our worship here together as a group of about 40 linked to a common hub or center. Another aspect of the meeting house that moves beyond that wheel is the general use of wood—the expanse of the wood ceiling, the windows, the benches, the wainscoting. I sit and see the living trees outside passing through the seasons –we’re in a ring of trees seen through every window, and I also see this wood, the trees of the past that are inside. In that transformation, this wood, these trees inside still live, I feel. They were cut, but they rose again in beauty and enduring

service, in protection and utility and grace and strength. So it's not really living wood outside and dead wood inside—both are living in different ways. I'm not sure I would go as far as calling it a resurrection in terms of the move from one condition to the other, but there is a beauty in both fixed side by side, the planted trees and the built house of worship. This wood is not that tree, but each reminds us of the other. They are related.

When one looks at the earliest Christian writings, it is clear that many strands of the Quaker tradition match the beliefs and practices of the Gnostics, one of the main strands of belief found in the writings of the oldest traditions of the first and second centuries in the dead sea scrolls and in Alexandria, where the first Christian communities that wrote theology formed. These communities typically were based around the teachings of Jesus, and did not speak of him as a super hero, and many not as God, or as supernatural. They were more mystical and spoke of the spirit of Christ and shared various gospels such as the gospel of Mary, the gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Sayings of Jesus, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Book of Clement as well as early versions of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and others that were later left out of the new testament when it was officially declared around 380 to 390 AD. The New Testament canon was not really confirmed until the Council of Trent in 1546 and for the orthodox churches in 1672—after Quakerism began. You may have heard of the apocrypha—disputed scripture. The Epistle of the Laodeceans was a favorite of many Quakers and was published in John Wycliffe's English Bible.

The first Quakers spoke of their practice of experiencing directly the Spirit of God and the inner Light as gathered groups of Friends as a form of Primitive Christianity Restored. The idea was to go back to what original Christians believed

and did before the church became heavily formalized by the Romans. Many of us may know that one aspect of the varied forms of Christianity is the adaptation and incorporation of other pagan traditions. The eggs and bunnies of Easter and the date itself all come from ancient spring fertility festivals that got Christianized, just like the eternal evergreens of ancient religions and the Saturnalia got blended into Christmas. This kind of blending and incorporation also happened much earlier to change and alter what the earliest Christians believed.

One can view aspects of the Christmas story as a Romanization of Jesus, it has elements of a Greco Roman myth, where the extra blessed heroes were always the children of God and a virgin human woman. This was not a unique story, but the tale of Hercules and Achilles and many others. Humans being declared gods—the emperor, Pharaoh, also was not unusual. The resurrection story comes straight out of the Egyptian Book of the Dead where all souls venture down to the underworld for judgment and then rise again on the third day. So, when Christianity became the religion of the empires in the Council of Nicea in 325 AD, these factors were incorporated, and the Gnostics and other mystics were banned from official imperial religion. Constantine wanted things sorted out, especially the divinity of Jesus, and the idea of the Trinity was officially declared then. I don't say these things to challenge anyone's faith, but just to point out that these were common ways for divinity to be described in that time period.

So where does this leave us at Easter for Quakers today? This is a holiday that early Quakers rejected, just as they rejected Christmas—both as silly and idolatrous notions. The message of Jesus is to be celebrated every day—Jesus is born every day, the resurrection occurs every day. The belief was that we don't need these myths and symbols, though they can certainly be

valuable comforts and sources—but that God is with us now, that there is continuous revelation, that the Spirit is among us and we know it directly, and that we see it in each other. That Christ is changing Everything. They were building a house of worship from the heart of the tree and stripping away the bark and the branches. I chose this morning's readings about the gardener and the stranger on the way to Emmaus because I see in them a Quaker sensibility. Mary and the disciples do not initially recognize a literal Jesus. It is after a moment that the gardener and the traveling companion become for them Jesus. Christ had said to them that whenever they feed the hungry or visit the prisoner, they are with him. I see these stories as them saying, "Oh, there you are, Jesus!" Christ is constantly arising in those all around us. The risen Christ is in the setting sun, the faithful friend, the thoughtful companion, the cherished memory. Daily, we look into many eyes and see the resurrection. Oh, here you are, Jesus!

I sought my God, but my God I could not see, I sought my soul, but my soul eluded me, I sought my brother, and found all three.

Closing Hymn: Red hymnal number 130 "Christ the Lord is Risen Today".

Closing: Divinity, the sacred is all around us, and when the story is over, we need to find it for ourselves. From *Jesus the son of God* by Khalil Gibran: In my heart dwells Jesus of Galilee, the one above all, the Poet who makes poets of us all, the Spirit who knocks at our door that we may wake and rise—and walk out to meet the truth, naked and unencumbered.

Thanks/Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts
Postlude