

Margaret Fell Fox, considered a Mother of Quakerism, who died in 1702, was quoted in 1710, “The Truth is one and the same always. Though ages and generations pass away—one generation goes and another comes; yet the Word, and the Power, and the Spirit of the Living God endures for ever and changes not.”

Our first hymn is Blue #68, “Brightest and Best”

Our first reading today comes from the Persian Sufi poet Rumi:

“I said: What about my eyes?

He said: Keep them on the road.

I said: What about my passion?

He said: Keep it burning.

I said: What about my heart?

He said: Tell me what you hold inside it?

I said: Pain and sorrow.

He said: Stay with it. The wound is the place where the Light enters you.”

Our second reading comes from the American naturalist, John Burroughs, who wrote, “The lesson which life repeats and constantly enforces is ‘look under foot’. You are always nearer the divine and the true sources of your power than you think. The lure of the distant and the difficult is deceptive. The great opportunity is where you are. Do not despise your own place and hour. Every place is under the stars, every place is the center of the world.”

A final reading comes from the Declaration of Friends to Charles II in 1660, which New York Yearly Meeting affirmed in 1960 and again in 1990: “We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and

fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretense whatsoever; and this is our testimony to the whole world. The spirit of Christ, by which we are guided, is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the spirit of Christ, which leads us into all Truth, will never move us to fight and war against any person with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.”

Our second hymn is red #115 “What Star is This”

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—Our joys and sorrows, our wounds and worries along with our hopes and fulfillments connect with our real world constantly made manifest by time and place, and by these our Friends. We are thankful for a place of sharing, for the empathy and understanding of companions who are not only present, but fully meeting, connecting, discerning. Give us stillness and quiet in times of turmoil, and give us voice when we face injustice, so that the peace we seek is mutual, sustaining, and Spirit-led and Spirit-filled. Let us follow the stars, carry our true gifts, find the Christ within, from all corners of the world. Bestow on us the wisdom of the ages, the insights of love, the blessings of a new and renewing season, year, and time. Amen.

Our third hymn is green #305 “In Christ There is No East or West”

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: In our readings today, I quoted the strong and clear peace testimony of the Religious Society of Friends that dates back to the 17th century early days of Quakers. That clarity remains true, just as Margaret Fell, the wife of George Fox, asserted in her life and testimony of the same time period. It is clear and true for

all of us in a nation with a federal holiday dedicated to Martin Luther King Jr., our most important national holiday. And yet we also live at the same time in a nation that is an empire dedicated and well invested in constant, escalating war. We love and we misunderstand. We center and ground ourselves in ideals and intentions, in inspired actions that change our world for the better, and yet we also succumb to petty jealousy and greed, to judgment and gossip, to discouragement and despair, and yet also to hope and joy. In this sense, as John Burroughs wrote, we are all under the stars and at the center of the world. And that center, that Light is in each of us. As Rumi observed, “the wound is the place where the Light enters you.”

After the winter solstice that some call Christmas, the date chosen to honor the birth of the Christ precisely because it is when the Light returns to our hemisphere, not only does a new year begin, but a new world comes together in the story of the wise. Since early times, the three magi have traditionally been depicted as Asian, African, and Indigenous, in the wisdom of a world alliance. From our vantage points across the world and across the seasons, we see many of the same stars, and always the same moon, whoever and wherever we are. In the Christian tradition, this time of year is the season of epiphany, a word that in its origins means manifestation. And while the eastern orthodox churches see that as when Jesus was baptized and the western churches see it as the coming of the Kings, both testify to the realness of the Spirit as it comes to all, it embraces and envelops humankind. It is made manifest and true, even in a broken world, a world of empire then and now, a world of threat and a world of comfort. It is a cold world of warm souls, of hardened hearts on a beautiful earth.

The realities of the contradictions that are us in all our humanness, the constant possibilities of going in many directions, negative and deeply blessed, are also touched and grounded in the elemental truths that are identified by our inner guide, the Light within, that

is both revelatory, provides our insights and our personal epiphanies, but also lets us recognize the eternal truths of love. And one of those truths is that war is not the answer, never, to any question or any dilemma.

This past week we went through a lot of worry and speculation about war with Iran. And while at least in this iteration a formal declaration of war between our countries seems to have been avoided, it is not as if this country is not at war. The military of the U.S. is constantly killing civilians in a wide variety of countries with drones and special forces and various other measures. As more agreements and alliances are abandoned, international laws and human rights ignored, we must acknowledge that this is an ongoing pattern, in addition to the current outrage. Our testimony that this is fundamentally contradictory to the Spirit of Christ is needed more than ever, especially when there are those who perpetuate these crimes who assert that they are acting upon God's will, just as they did in the days of Charles II. The 1660 declaration very specifically states that religion never justifies war and that Quakers would never fight for Quakerism, nor for Christ.

While there were many unusual things about the Marianne Williamson campaign for President, it was certainly refreshing to have someone join the political arena to speak openly about the power of love overcoming the power of fear. Our immediate human experience is capable of so many contradictions, which is why, I believe, we search beyond ourselves to the sacred, to an inner Light, to find more stable and abiding truth. Justification, affirmation, reassurance are part of the way there, but it is when we reach toward expectation, inspiration, and revelation that the creative power of Spirit drives our hearts to one center where we are, rather than looking for meaning in what has already happened.

The order of Rumi's poem is significant and interesting of how he reaches the message of the wound being the place where the light

enters you. There is first the journey and the passion along with the struggle and the pain, what drives us forward and what discourages, the contradictions that lead to Light.

“I said: What about my eyes?

He said: Keep them on the road.

I said: What about my passion?

He said: Keep it burning.

I said: What about my heart?

He said: Tell me what you hold inside it?

I said: Pain and sorrow.

He said: Stay with it. The wound is the place where the Light enters you.”

So it is, with the defiant speaking of truth to power to achieve peace, to Martin Luther King Jr’s declaration that war is the enemy of the poor. The simplicity and clarity of the message stands within the complexity of the world, of the conflicts, of the weapons and of the refugees and the children, the terror and the love, the guilt and the innocence. There is the epiphany, the manifestation, growing and being, the potential in the hearts of all.

We must know our wounds, experience the pain of life and loss in the natural constraint of time, understand the directions we do not wish to go, recognize the bad influences of greed and fear, the dishonesty of manipulation, in order to purposely seek, to quiet the confusion, the temptation, the noise, and seek the Truth, the Light, the Way, the epiphany fulfilled, the manifestation of That of God.

Closing hymn is green #303 “Peace in Our Time, O Lord”

The wound is the place where the light enters you. Every place is under the stars. Every place is the center of the world.