

From Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: “By means of all created things, without exception, the divine assails us, penetrates us, and molds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible, when in fact we live steeped in its burning layers”

First hymn is Green #269 “Let Your Light Shine”

Our first reading is from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century American writer, Henry David Thoreau: “There is a season for everything. You must live in the present. Launch yourself on every wave. Find your eternity in each moment. Fools stand on their island of opportunities and look toward another land. There is no other land. There is no other life but this.”

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the author of our opening quotation, was a French Jesuit priest, philosopher, paleontologist, mystic, and teacher whose life in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century bridged science and spirituality in a unique synthesis that continues to inspire and provoke debate. He wrote: “What paralyzes life is lack of faith and lack of courage. The difficulty lies not in solving problems but in expressing them correctly; and we can now see that it is biologically undeniable that unless we harness passion to the service of spirit there can be no progress. Sooner or later, then, and in spite of all our incredulity, the world will take this step—because the greater truth always prevails and the greater good emerges in the end. Some day, after we have mastered the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love. Then for the second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire.”

Our final reading is from the epistle of 1661 written by an early Quaker leader, George Fox, addressing the conduct of everyday life: “So let your lives preach, let your light shine, that your works

may be seen, that your Father may be glorified; that your fruits may be unto holiness, and that your end may be everlasting life. . . And that hath the dominion which doth justly, holily, and righteously speak, act, and think; and this hath the praise of God; and they who do so come to answer that which God requires, ‘to love mercy, do justly, and to walk humbly with God.’ And this is more than all the talkers of justice, righteousness, and holiness, whose life denies what their tongues profess and talk of. For Friends, if ye be not faithful in the outward treasure, and outward mammon, who will trust you with the true treasure? Or who can believe that ye have the true treasure, but that ye speak by hearsay of it?”

Let us share our Concerns and Joys carried in our hearts this morning, voicing them into this community of loving Friends—

Let us hold these expressions from Friends together with those joys and concerns left unsaid in our hearts, and for the many near and far, in Light and love. (Musical Interlude)

Dear Friends—Give us the courage not only to listen deeply to the messages of the sacred in our hearts, promptings in our world, and the leadings that may come from our interactions with others, but to be able to act on them openly and honestly. Help us to cultivate a close harmony of the body and soul, of the heart and soul reflected fully in real context. Help us be the action figures, the enactors of an integrity of intention and outcome. Make us brave and recognizable, with deeds that bless and testify and build more strength in others. Thank you for the many examples of those in front of us and in the past whose lives inspire emulation. Amen.

Message hymn is Green #270 “Ballad of Margaret Fell”

Message: Dear Friends—Isn’t a story song fun? If you have not heard of Margaret Fell or the Act of Toleration that opened the

door to guarantee religious liberty in the United Kingdom, now you have the story along with some incredible rhyming schemes. One thing that the song does not mention is that this formidable woman, as a widow of an influential judge who knew the law, later married George Fox, or he married her, but all around it was certainly two very inspiring and powerful followers of the Spirit who took strong action in the world and certainly forged a partnership of equals. Their lives speak of the equality of men and women as well as of class with a common workman marrying an influential woman of the gentry with an estate. The equality of knowing that there is that of God in every person was not only an assertion and practice within Quaker meetings or in official events and programs, but also in the actual personal lives of actual early Friends. We don't just advocate for a more humane and equitable justice system, but we meet with and correspond with and support those in prison. We don't just protest and write about immigration justice, but we support and befriend the farm workers and others among us who need rides and work and family support. We might think our way into new ways of acting, but we also act our way into new ways of thinking as circumstances demand.

For most of my professional career, as many of you know, I worked in higher education, a place notorious for being an ivory tower of theory and thinking away from the practical world. Being a scholar of cultural study, I certainly value the time spent trying to understand and interpret, but I also worked throughout my career to foreground and value the solid physical and embodied applications and demonstrations of what and how culture is enacted and accomplishes things for all of us and is grounded in the real world. With colleagues at Cornell, I helped write and produce a book titled *The Scholar as Human*, emphasizing the realness of our embodied lives. Many of you know about the course I taught at Cornell on the Underground Railroad where we traveled all over our local landscape as we read the narratives of those who freed themselves and lived here in Auburn and Ithaca,

Syracuse and Sherwood, Rochester and Buffalo, and we also learned of those who are trafficked through these same towns in the present. When I taught at the University of Michigan, I developed a program called the Global Intercultural Experience for Undergraduates that consisted of faculty-led experiences over the summer, while seeking to understand and navigate cultural difference. One of these was led by a prominent engineering scholar of Chinese factory production. He later confessed to me that it was only in leading a group of undergraduate students experientially that he himself first visited a real factory floor in China. Another organization that has been part of my academic career is a program called “Imagining America”, which is about the public humanities--live poetry performance, the interpretation of actual historic sites, the ways music is presented. Grounding these things in the reality of experience and location rather than in the fantasies of a virtual or dictated interpretation. Watching a live play, reading a novel, discussing a film, walking through a landscape are all ways that we put our full selves into the world, not just think about it in our minds or hear about it on our screens. We engage. And this is what George Fox was saying in the quote shared, that your words must also be embodied in an apparent and real meaning, must be enacted. And in the song, his wife Margaret Fell, was certainly an actor whose life spoke to real equity and the live religious presence of the Spirit in all.

This morning, I also shared two quotations from the French thinker Pierre Tielhard de Chardin. One way that many of us seek to deal with contradictions we experience is to compartmentalize them and limit the extent of their interaction. But integrity demands of us that we seek other ways, that we not choose between or waver from one idea to another that both seem true circumstantially, but find a consensus or a synthesis. Part of the challenge of the 250<sup>th</sup> celebration of the U.S. has been the debate about ideals and reality and how one recognizes the difference, and is true patriotism a matter of celebration or holding to account? Chardin’s work was

focused on the interactions between science and spirituality—a point that is relevant to Quakers as we practice what many call a mystical religion of direct Spiritual experience while working to make a difference in the world and live in a meaningful and real community. Teilhard de Chardin’s legacy is that of a bridge between disciplines, a thinker whose vision of a spiritually and scientifically coherent universe continues to inspire theologians, scientists, and readers seeking to understand the interplay of faith, reason, and the unfolding story of humanity. His writings emphasized the interdependence of material and spiritual evolution, positing that human consciousness and social cooperation are critical for continued development, and that evolution is inherently teleological, moving toward greater unity and complexity. As with many Friends, he saw the potential for a unity between humanity and divinity, a Light within that could come to permeate life in the world. An opposite to entropy.

And this is where I like to insert Thoreau, another idealist who was closely wedded to the real and practical and natural world. He not only did the things that he thought about, but he allowed his real and practical experiences to drive his thinking while being part of the large and expansive movement of transcendentalist thought that has elements that can be seen in our readings and hymns today. As he wrote: “There is a season for everything. You must live in the present. Launch yourself on every wave. Find your eternity in each moment. Fools stand on their island of opportunities and look toward another land. There is no other land. There is no other life but this.” The sacred and the everyday, the potential for eternity and the limits of mortality, the ideal and real is all present and is all part of us now in this place. People sometimes talk about having a spiritual practice. Our challenge and responsibility as members of the Religious Society of Friends is that whatever that is for each of us in its practicality and individuality, for each of us it is also our entire life and experience, it encompasses all we do and who we truly and authentically are. Let your light shine.

Closing hymn is Green #180 “There is Nothing I Can Give You”

These words are often attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi to  
‘preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.’