

Filling the Empty Spaces

Greeting: And now, in this now, as time begins again for us as a time together this morning, let us make the space for the deeper intentions of Spirit, let us open ourselves to be led, dear Friends.

Hymn 1 on Handout

From Genesis 1: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

From Hebrews 11: Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen.

That first hymn from the Sacred Harp is to a tune called Beach Spring, the living water that just wells up and the words that are in some ways all the evidence of faith, but as the reading tells us: repeat reading 2, then repeat reading 1.

Hymn 2 with verses on Handout

Joys and Concerns

Dear Friends—With Love as the first motion and whether light flows from love, or love from light, may we live in that simultaneity of love and light before time and events, before worry and days and care, before memory, but holding all that is remembered. We have all of the evidence we need nestled in love and light and filtered through the space that we make and that is made for us for first things. Let us be patient, let us be

slow, let us be at home in that garden of all time, that source. Amen. Amon—the Egyptian God of light, the source, the great African word of power with which so many humans still close the essential messages some call prayer.

Hymn 3 Jeffrey plays, then I sing, then everyone twice.

Message:

One of my favorite images in the Genesis passage is the anticipatory moment when God's Spirit is hovering over the waters—at a time before there were waters—so it is obviously a metaphor that in the void and chaos there was the pre-dawn stillness where all became possible. The possibilities for the everything of the universe were in a settled emptiness that was very full. That eternal and infinitely long moment just before the big bang, before existence hurled itself into non-existence, when all of time was about to lay itself into a sequence of events to mark the pieces of time. Pre-time or out-of-time, before the deluge or flood of the cosmos—the power of all power that still shimmers in the background at the farthest edges of what the clearest and most detailed of telescopes can see. That power is still there in the heavens, in the intergalactic media, we look out beyond our sky and see it—are even close to measuring it according to some recent reports, and it is the ancient power the Egyptians knew and taught to Moses so he could write these words that reflect so accurately the order of evolution, the most recent discoveries of the universe, and the reality of space science and particle physics and cosmology. At Pharaoh's court, Moses learned well and brought ancient African wisdom from the beginning of man and the beginning of time to start this newer book that grounds the Judeo-Christian strand upon which a partial retelling makes sense of the narrow western cultural view in

which we live. Those stories comfort and explain beyond the void, but before the book and stories, when in the beginning, before the Word, it was the filling of the space with light. The getting ready—the clearing the path—the making the way—the nothing that would be space in which the light could shine. That spirit over the waters, over the face of the deep--that love from which light would flow precedes time and events. Gotfried Leibniz observed “When you remove events from experience time exists no more. Events are the substance of time.” And Einstein put another way, “Time has no independent existence apart from the order of events by which we measure it”. Before the story, before the word, is the space in which to put the story, the purity of the whole of what the story could be. With every story, from great to small, let first, we pray, before we begin that story or this, before we tell our lives into being, first let there be light.

One of the curious features of Poplar Ridge is the vent, medallion, or wheel, the wooden circle in our ceiling—the gathered circle we all look up to see every time we gather. It is a curious thing, not usually seen in other spaces. I love the strangeness of a circle parsed in twenty, and round it forty empty spaces, to me the typical forty gathered here each first day. The desert emptiness of forty days and forty nights that readiness we seek in order to bear witness to the light. We empty our minds and hearts to listen for that first motion, returning each week to that first day, that void in which to say “Let there be light”. And there is light—the solid hub around which we turn, round which galaxies spin, round which the universe folds upon itself and is revealed. So forty spirit souls gathered and striving to be centered in a ring in which we all sit equi-distant from the center, and yet at the center, with the center in us, reaching in and flowing out, away from events, moving beyond the story-substance of time to no time and all

time, returning to the before-beginning, the Spirit on the waters, the space in which with light and love we let there be. And so we share a turning wheel with love as first motion, a wheel that drives our journey, crafted by Friends who came before, a story starts our time again, but our worship carries us first to the center, to the emptiness, the anticipation, the heart to be filled. The first day as Friends called it, the Sun day, the day of light.

As a child I loved the story of the stars. The years and years ago we see each night—an ancient past, the gorgeous empty darkness pierced by light. Those light years, streaming towards our eyes. Alpha Centauri, our nearest star beyond the sun sends light that takes four and a quarter years to reach us. We see the past—it could have exploded or disappeared now, but we will keep seeing it in the light. So every remembered moment radiates out and exists forever in the light. If we could get far enough away and get a focus close enough in looking at the earth, we would see our past, just as we look up and see the past of all of the power of the universe, truly in the heavens.

When I lived in east Africa among a much larger community of Friends, I learned the importance of the past. Time flows to the past—this moment is now past. The events and days of our life accumulate in the past and each day we make our past richer and more and we renew our past, the well from which we draw. Our past is what makes us new. The future arrives from nowhere, empty and we fill it and send it to the past. The more past we have, the more story and word give us evidence of the things unseen. Our songs this morning sing of all we do that reflects the pasts we seek to make each day. But to make those steps, we go back before beginnings—we prepare ourselves by becoming part of the early human story of explaining beginnings. There are stars whose light began journeying to

our eyes in the days when Moses learned about the beginning and that light from the power of the universe is reaching our eyes just now, tonight. We see his time and pre-time that ancient Egypt knew.

So, that feeling of “home” that is so important in so many gathered Quaker meetings, might just be the feel of home we make when we get ready, when we empty the vessel to return to the start. The home all humans over ages have seen as the start. It is the centering, the emptying that gives us a common home, a way to start again this time with these Friends, here.

Each meeting, each first day, each trip around that wheel, we go to that moment before time began, that shimmer at the edge of the universe each person can detect and make the space in the void where the Spirit moves across the waters hovers over the face of the deep, and we can let there be light.

Worship

Closing Hymn: Valiant for the Truth—in verse 4 we can sing “begun” to rhyme with “every one”

Closing: Dear Friends--May our lives start new each day in hearts prepared before the Word is spoken—open to the anticipatory emptiness of expectancy, the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. As we have sung, so many Friends before us make each moment full and new. Let the fullness of time and the power of all being emerge each day as first day in the space where we can let there be light.

Thanks/Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts

Postlude