

“What is love? What shall I say of it, or how shall I in words express its nature? It is the sweetness of life; it is the sweet, tender, melting nature of God, flowing up through God’s seed of life to the creature, and of all things making the creature most like unto God, both in nature and operation. It fulfils the law, it fulfils the gospel; it wraps up all in one and brings forth all in the oneness. It excludes all evil out of the heart, it perfects all good in the heart. A touch of love doth this in measure; perfect love doth this in fullness.” Written by Isaac Pennington in 1663.

Our first hymn is #26 from the Green book, “Praise Creation Unfinished”

Our first reading is from the first chapter of Genesis: “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. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light ‘day’ and the darkness God called ‘night’. And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. And God said, ‘Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.’ So, God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse ‘sky’ And there was evening and there was morning—the second day. And God said, ‘Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.’ And it was so. God called the dry ground ‘land’ and the gathered waters God called ‘seas’ And God saw that it was good. Then God said, ‘Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds’ and it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds

and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.”

Our second reading is from a 1989 statement from 11 Quaker scientists: “It is often supposed that science and religious belief are incompatible. Indeed, a dichotomy does exist between some traditional views of God’s interaction with the universe and science’s perception of natural laws. If we only use God to fill the gaps wherever a rational explanation has not been found, God’s role must diminish as scientific understanding grows. A ‘God of the gaps’ is inevitably a rather small God. However, the immanence of God in our world may be appreciated through science as vividly as through the arts. Many scientists daily experience God through their work: in the elegance and sophistication of natural design or the beauty and harmony revealed in certain theories. The growing body of scientific knowledge demands a continuous re-thinking of what is meant by ‘Creator’ but our greater understanding magnifies rather than diminishes our appreciation of God. Science and religion have much in common. They are communal activities and involve a search for some greater truth. The sharing of ideas is fundamental to both. The discipline of science can make a valuable contribution to religious thought; critical honesty, the willingness to abandon old ideas and modes of thought when fresh insight demands it and the centrality of experience as an arbiter of truth are as important in one as in the other. In both the scientific and religious searches for truth, the implications of current beliefs are explored to see where they lead. Beliefs are not just safe ledges in an uncertain reality, but rather handholds from which further heights can be reached.”

Our second hymn is #1 in the Green book “All Things Bright and Beautiful”

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—Knowing God is Love, we pray that the infinity of God be always the nest in which we are secure, from which we never fall, the leafy and dry burrow that shelters from the snow, the crook of the arm that envelops us as a protecting parent, even as a trusting child. Hold us, dear Light. Give us the security we need as we venture forth. As everything constantly changes in our time-bound world of incidents and events, where one thing leads to another, let us know the reliability of the constant, the one, the true, the sacred. There is a still point in this turning world, a star by which we navigate, that shines in eyes and hearts and is spoken and shared among us in silent worship and in testimony. When the direction of things is not always better, we still can know that which is Best. Bring it forth. Let it guide us to converge with each other in the place of the Divine. Amen.

Our next hymn is #27 in green “Eternal and Infinite Source of All Grace”

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear friends—For a number of years, Poplar Ridge Meeting has been participating in the Clergy Letter Project annual Evolution Weekend in early February, as part of a movement to demonstrate that there is no inevitable conflict between science and religion, and no cause for division and confusion in domains that can complement and support each other. Though I am in my fourth year of bringing regular messages to this meeting, this is the first time I am speaking in relation to this particular larger national effort, though in my very first programmed message to meeting, in August of 2014, I brought a related message as my testimony. My academic work is in culture and the humanities, where we often seek to uncover and present the transcendent. The national theme for this event this year is “Our Shared Humanity” with the

observation that with so much attention on the closely aligned issues of racism and immigration, religion and science together can help us foster more welcoming and just communities. Both science and religion insist on grounding in deeper truths and on probing the larger 'why' of circumstances, and on what is changeless and replicable. Quaker religious experience, direct and personal and intrinsic to all people of every culture and seeking, is often described as both experiential and experimental. God is real. God is here. God is Love. We know this in our meeting. When we think about a Quaker meeting, it is not so much about meeting with each other, but rather about all of our mutual meeting the Light, meeting that of God. That is what we are meeting.

Martin Luther King Jr once said, "If we are to have peace on earth our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional, our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation; and this means we must develop a world perspective". In the modern understanding of evolution, we know that each new biological being is a variation on a theme and is shaped, and is more or less successful, within a context. These contexts are also always a variation and unique to the individual. Adaptability and the adaptations are not in any way automatically positive nor are they necessarily progress in a climate of constant flux and change.

Dr. Pamela Conrad, a pastor in Maryland and geo-physicist observes: 'In a dynamic universe, everything is in motion. This assertion isn't merely theory; it's verifiable by empirical observation. As a person of both science and faith, I recognize this dynamic state as evidence that the medium in which everything resides is God, and I attribute this energetic movement as not only a consequence of the mechanics of the stuff in the universe, but also a function of the medium in which it all resides. It is comforting to speculate that the invisible and rarified environment that I've always thought of as "space" isn't vacuous nothing, but rather something tangibly enervating and life-giving enough so that

every constituent of the universe is dancing-vibrating with possibility. The spectroscopic evidence of this motion is awe-inspiring, and prompts one to recognize that when it comes to the physics of "stuff," relationship is everything. In a crystal, the proximity of one atom to another and the intrinsic properties of each element determine the geometry of relationship, and in turn, the geometry of relationship determines the way the atoms vibrate!

If material and motion affect relationship, and relationship between bits of matter feeds back to affect subsequent motion, changing the behavior of the material, evolution is a necessary consequence!

Motion and relationship change through time. Each relationship leads to the formation of new materials, and as the materials become more complex, new behaviors and properties emerge. This IS evolution, broadly stated. Evolution is so much more than the story of the biosphere, or in particular, humans. It is the story of minerals and planets, of all creation, and when we fail to grasp the broader understanding of evolution as an emergent property of a dynamic universe, we miss a valuable opportunity to speak to people of faith about the consistency of scientific (empirical) observation with a doctrine of creation that celebrates the Divine Gift of motion and relationship.'

It's time to think much more broadly about evolution as a universal process and a consequence of residence within the medium of the Divine. Love was the first motion, when the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters before creation. In science, we search for the unifying theme, the constant, the process, and we do the same in our search for Truth and compassion, for the inner Light that is an eternal background and support and context and presence.

One evolutionary dilemma for some is in the development of the human species, when in that natural selection does the soul emerge or the inner light? I think that in the considerations I've raised, as

well as those raised by Pennington on love, the Quaker scientists, and the Clergy Letter Project, the Light has always been there. Many of us experience it deeply as part of nature, in the natural world as Claire shared last week, including the cosmos and the stars, and therefore God and that of God in each one is the context of evolution, not necessarily as only a part of, or as a development within, the unfolding process.

In the Genesis narrative, I have always been struck by the way in which the order described so closely matches the order described by science—that it all started as energy, then a formless planet developed as solid and atmosphere, earth and sky, then seas and land, the forms of life, and so on. But as the Gospel of John wrote of the Christ, ‘In the beginning was the Word’ and that always leads me to that first Word, of ‘Let there be Light’. I sometimes think one can take the creation story backwards to get closer to the Divine. That humans, while all holding the essential element of the Light, can stray from the sacred, but if one goes back through the other animals of the sixth day, to the birds and creatures of the sea of the fifth, the sun and moon of the fourth, the sea and land and mother Earth of the third day, the Sky and heavens of the second day, one gets to the fundamental, the Light of the first day, and before time, the Spirit of God about to make the Light as it hovers over the waters. Science is about patterns and process and understanding the way things happen. Enveloping and undergirding, and preceding, and transcending, and guiding, and loving all of this universe, telling us to love one another, is Light.

Our closing hymn is #2 in the Green, “All Creatures of Our God and King”.

Closing: 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.