Uncertain in the Light Message for 11th October 2026

"If you see what needs to be repaired and how to repair it, then you have found a piece of the world that God has left for you to complete. But if you only see what is wrong and what is ugly in the world, then it is you yourself that needs repair."
-The Lubavitcher Rebbe of an Orthodox branch of U.S. Judaism.

First hymn is Green #149 "I Celebrate the Inward Light"

A deeply popular Norwegian song from the 1960s by Alf Pøysen supplies its chorus as our first reading:
"You shall have a day tomorrow, that clean and unused stands,
with blank white sheets and fresh new crayons too,
and you can then correct them, errors of the day before,
and you'll face tomorrow's evening with joy.
And if you cannot do it, and all is just as sad,
still the pine-wind shall comfort you just as now:
You shall have a day tomorrow, that clean and unused stands,
with blank white sheets and fresh new crayons too."

Kenneth Boulding was a highly influential Quaker economist of the 20th century who coined the term "Spaceship Earth" and led the development of the fields of evolutionary and environmental economics and was often on the short list for both the Nobel Prizes for Peace and for economics. His wife was Elise, and Craig and I knew their presence at the Ann Arbor Friends meeting. In 1945, he published an astonishing series of sonnets, called the Naylor sonnets based on the following 1660 statement of James Naylor: "There is a spirit which I feel that delights to do no evil, nor to revenge any wrong, but delights to endure all things, in hope to enjoy its own in the end. Its hope is to outlive all wrath and contention, and to weary out all exaltation and cruelty, or whatever is of a nature contrary to itself. It sees to the end of all temptations. As it bears no evil in itself, so it conceives none in thoughts to any

other. If it be betrayed, it bears it, for its ground and spring is the mercies and forgiveness of God. Its crown is meekness, its life is everlasting love unfeigned; it takes its kingdom with entreaty and not with contention, and keeps it by lowliness of mind. In God alone it can rejoice, though none else regard it, or can own its life. It's conceived in sorrow, and brought forth without any to pity it, nor doth it murmur at grief and oppression. It never rejoiceth but through sufferings; for with the world's joy it is murdered. I found it alone, being forsaken. I have fellowship therein with them who lived in dens and desolate places in the earth, who through death obtained this resurrection and eternal holy life."

Each of Boulding's sonnets is built off of a phrase from Naylor, the first is inspired by "There is a Spirit which I feel"
"Can I, imprisoned, body bounded, touch
The starry robe of God, and from my soul,
My tiny Part, reach forth to his great Whole,
And spread my Little to the infinite Much,
When Truth forever slips from out my clutch,
And what I take indeed, I do but dole
In cupfuls from a rimless ocean-bowl
That holds a million million million such?
And yet, some Thing that moves among the stars,
And holds the cosmos in a web of law,
Moves too in me: a hunger, a quick thaw
Of soul that liquifies the ancient bars,
As I, a member of creation, sing
The burning oneness binding everything."

Another comes from the phrase "Nor to revenge any wrong"
"Now I am veined by an eroding doubt,
Insidious as decay, with poison rife.
Is love indeed the end and law of life,
When lush, grimacing hates so quickly sprout?
I thought in ignorance I had cast out

The sneaking devils of continuing strife,
But as the cancer thwarts the surgeon's knife,
So does revenge my sword of reason flout.
But though hate rises in enfolding flame
At each renewed oppression, soon it dies;
It sinks as quickly as we saw it rise,
While love's small constant light burns still the same.
Know this: though love is weak and hate is strong,
Yet hate is short, and love is very long."

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 blessing of hearing the ring of internal poetry in the outer words and worlds of our daily encounters. Let us know our purpose in the healing of the world, the tikkun olam central to Jewish ethics. As we celebrate the inward Light, let the great mystery be with us, guiding and inspiring us throughout all situations and life. Let us be touched with both humility and the confidence that our lives can be manifestations of presence and witness for ourselves and all those around us. Amen.

Message hymn is Green #126 "The Lord Into His Garden Comes"

Message: Dear Friends—As many of you know, I retired from regular paid work at the end of July this year and so have spent the months of August and September adjusting to that reality. I know there are a number of people here who have also been through this phase of life and can relate to the sensation of having such an end to what fills so much of our time, responsibility, sense of self and purpose in our society. It remains common when meeting people

to rather quickly inquire about profession or work or career, though with the visual trappings of age we are often put into the category of retired without having to say it out loud. For most of my career, my Ph.D. was relevant to my work and publications and often appeared in a very un-Quakerly way at the end of my name, though it mostly disappeared in my last job. And so there is this new mode of "putting things away". In the past, when I moved or changed jobs, there were many materials and files and projects that needed to be taken to another office or institution, shared or implemented. Now, what has not been handed over, is mostly done and can be shelved or discarded. That all is work in itself, with plenty more to be done, but I have also spent these two months with a sensation of drifting. The old thing has stopped, but it does not quite feel that any new thing has begun, because of course there won't be a new thing of the same type, most likely.

The adjustment is internal, as I remain regularly busy and have many of the same routines, including the rich responsibility and great joy of bringing a message here each month. The Light is the constant and the grounding, but also the possible source of great renewal, as we sang in our last hymn where the dry vines and desert spring back to life and are revived. I know the irony of singing that hymn at the time of harvest and falling leaves, but it is a reminder that this is only a slumber of the earth, that the Light and Life are still there even as the snow will come. One of the blessings of this autumn of my career is that we are living right now on the shores of a great lake where I walk daily barefoot on our dear mother, the earth. That direct contact, not just walking in sand and water, but sitting on it and lying down on it and swimming in it all as the natural parts of a huge natural process of erosion, of shells and rocks and fossils and tides and sunsets all so tangible and present. The wildlife all around us there and here in New York of similar lakes and trees and farms and seasons. A living world in tender balance, perceived directly and up close. This was the deep tenderness of the incredible career of Kenneth

Boulding, a Quaker economist who saw the world and the way people functioned within it as part of a large system. He stated that economics and sociology, the fields in which he and his wife were recognized, were just pieces not only of the social sciences, but of the humanities and of humanity and a more comprehensive wholeness on this spaceship earth where we might not last, even though earth will.

And so, this academic man of analysis and peace, who had a great mystical experience in 1940, made sonnets out of the testimony of an early Quaker. James Naylor was on his deathbed in 1660 when the statement was recorded. He had been severely beaten and bound and left in a field by robbers on his way to see his wife and children in Wakefield in England and was taken into a Quaker home where he died of his injuries. But he was also a well-known and controversial Quaker who had suffered greatly in prison where he was tortured for a blasphemy that many other Quakers, like the English state, also regarded as blasphemy. All was later reconciled among Friends and so his beautiful dying words were recorded, and they then inspired nearly three hundred years later these twenty six beautiful sonnets. Bolding called them meditations, as the art of poetry forms words into memorable and deep phrases so that meaning can be savored and pondered, reflected and nuanced. In this meeting we are blessed with poets and a night of poetry to come later this month. Organizing my own poetry is one possible and likely retirement task for me.

But the larger task that all of these sonnets and poems and writings are about is the Spirit that looks to heal the world, revive it and bring it to life, redeem as some phrase it, or repair, as is the more common phrasing in the modern Jewish framing. The old rabbinic tradition in the classics and in Kabbalah, had the repair as mystical, as returning sparks of Divine Light to their source through ritual, a divine action to balance and sustain the world among the infinitely many worlds beyond the physical world as well as in relationship

to nature. Now it is mostly seen as social justice efforts, but there is this retention of the mystical art of healing and repair, of an empathy for that which is broken and an energy that can heal. So much of such sensibilities are found within art, within the art of poetry that seeks to evoke feeling and direct experience, much as we seek to evoke Spirit, much as music communicates as we will sing in our final hymn today. This past week, I was sharing with Friends about my experience with the national music festivals of Kenya since one of the Friends on line was on the board of the American Friends Service Committee which held its meeting in Kenya last week, so she was speaking from Nairobi. The way I went from heading a Friends school in Kenya to the national music festivals was seamless in Kenya because Quakers in Kenya are regarded as the musical church. Early Friends were established in Kenya among the most outgoingly musical regions of the country and Quaker attention to local tradition meant that musical expression became a deep part of spiritual expression. Our final hymn recognizes that, surprisingly, in a Quaker hymnal where the English trajectory of Quakers took them far from music for a time.

While drifting in my retirement, a tragedy of a sudden death in August of the Assistant Clerk of the General Committee of the Friends Committee on National Legislation has put me into the facilitation of our collective testimony at a profound juncture in our own nation. Since I have already been serving on the executive committee and have past experience of being Clerk, it was fairly obvious who might be ready and available to step in for the annual meeting this November, but it has a sense of weighty responsibility at a powerful political time. The Quakers of the 1600s stepped into the English revolution, there is always time for the healing of the world, for the repairers of the breach as Bishop William Barber calls all of us to be, and so my retirement is filled and I look to inspiring art and profound meditation as I navigate my ongoing drift. One last image or experience as I am also taken into a focus on our Policy Statement for the next Congress. I was

watching an interview with another macroeconomist like Kenneth Boulding, Yanis Varoufakis, who was discussing contemporary issues this October and the interviewer asked him what he would do if he suddenly had a billion dollars for one day. The interviewer meant to hear more about economic policy or action, but Varoufakis immediately said, "Give it to the children of Gaza", and I burst into tears. Not at all what they were talking about except in the much larger sense of repairing or healing the world.

Closing hymn Green #236 "When In Our Music God is Glorified"

Boulding's sonnet on Naylor's phrase, "In hope to enjoy its own in the end."
"Small flowers there are beside the stoniest way,
And on the seeming-endless journeying
Some breaths of air are sweet, and some birds sing,
And some new goal is reached in every day;
Yet for the unknown end we wait and pray,
When the last knot of this world's tangled string
Is straightened out, and every evil thing
Redeemed in heaven's undisputed sway.
We know not how the day is to be born,
Whether in clouds of glory, tongues of flame,
As once at Pentecost the Spirit came,
Or whether imperceptibly as dawn;
But as the seed must grow into the tree,
So life is love, and love the end must be."