

Sir Paul Reeves, the former Archbishop of New Zealand wrote:
“God, grant me to be silent before you, that I may hear you, to be at rest in you, that you may work in me, to be open to you, that you may enter, to be empty before you, that you may fill me. Let me be still and know that you are God.”

Our first hymn is Green #179, “There Is a Balm in Gilead”

Our first reading today comes from Mark 10: 13-16. “People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.”

Our second reading is Psalm 23, a psalm of David: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear not evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

An early Quaker, Isaac Pennington, wrote in 1661: “Give over thine own willing, give over thine own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee and be in thee and breathe in thee and act in thee; and thou shalt find by

sweet experience that the Lord knows that and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of Life, which is its portion.”

Second hymn green #252 “Thou That Goest Forth With Weeping”

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—Our cares and concerns, our joy and our happiness are all cared for, are connected and nurtured, and healed and loved in the accepted blessings, the wonder of the open heart. The healing balm, the soothing ointment, the smooth and cooling oil, even the release of tears or laughter, all come within the arms of the sacred. Sharing our fears, giving our thanks, being part of each other’s most important life moments is never an intrusion, is always held in the infinite nature of the divine. Bless us in the fullness of time that is always available, always waiting with joy for the embrace. May we feel that reassuring hand and look into the eyes of trust and welcome, of acceptance and love. Amen.

Our third hymn is green #195 “Wear It As Long As You Can”

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: The story of Jesus and the children is found in almost identical language in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and therefore most likely exists in the earlier source writings for those Gospels. The disciples think that the people bringing children to Jesus for blessings are bothering him or wasting his time, and instead he says, that this open trust and stepping forward for blessing is exactly how anyone should approach the divine, the Inner Light, the sacred. It is the way to receive a blessing. All the readings and hymns today have that message of how things don’t have to be so complicated or overthought or worked out in careful and complex plans. Step forward and be open to the Light. We live in a time of great anxiety, both on a personal level and in wider spheres. It

seems that part of our culture of many options is also a culture of second-guessing and worry about which choices are correct and how will we be judged or accepted. There also seems to be such pressure on each one of us. Another common factor I sought today in our hymns and readings is to foreground the virtues of being dependent, of being cared for, of letting go of a constant need for control or prediction, not in a fatalistic way, but in trust and reconciliation. Surely goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives. Allow yourself to be shepherded.

With an inner Light, with a direct sense of access to truth and with the knowledge that all of us have that equal source and access to God, there is a sense in which no one is actually independent—we are all dependent on that source to navigate the ocean of darkness and the ocean of light. We are also dependent upon each other and that is a good thing. No one tells a child to raise itself or an injured or ill person to heal themselves. We are all dependent upon our community for advice, companionship, basic needs, the shelter of the heart. We need not be self-conscious about going to that source, of needing that blessing, that hand on our head or shoulder, the reassuring nod or hug.

It seems we are in a time of a bit of fear and separation from each other as an epidemic is upon the world. We're told not to touch, to stay three feet away, to be cautious in going out, and to self-isolate or quarantine if exposed or ill. This is practical and good advice, and yet certainly also a sign of sickness, to limit and even cut off social contact. As we stock our pantries and prepare for the possibility of needed isolation, let us also plan our paths to love in that time, our ways to stay dependent, our ways to practice the virtues of dependency. However things unfold in our community or among those we love, remember to also step forward in trust, as an open child, for the blessing. Be ready to be guided. We always walk in the valley of the shadow of death, it defines the human condition, but we are not alone and comfort is near.

We must act in love to protect those around us. A focus on the responsibility not to spread the virus is far more productive than a selfish focus that only seeks not to catch it. Only truly social behavior, attempts to do what is best for all, will lead to the best outcomes. Within that must be the trust in the seed that is planted in each of us, the seed that comes from the divine and responds to the sacred, as Isaac Pennington described it so long ago. “Give over thine own willing, give over thine own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee and be in thee and breathe in thee and act in thee; and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of Life, which is its portion.”

The kingdom of God, however one imagines it or locates it in our experience or beyond, needs be approached with trust, as a child. It cannot be reasoned or figured out or bargained with or strategized. Let it be. Be a part of life and the amazing system of this earth, our mother.

Some of you know of the miracle of Craig’s recent accident. In a freak white-out on Center Road that sent eight cars off into ditches, Craig came to a stop, still on the road. We were on the phone and he put on his blinking hazard lights. I am here, those lights said. I believe the huge plow that bore down on him must have seen those lights through the storm and been going slowly when it destroyed his car. For Craig was uninjured. The blessing was on his head. The rod and staff comforted him and me and all of us, even at the most terrifying moments. Some of you know that his car was a small Mini Cooper, and the plow was an enormous dump truck. Even the first tow truck that was coming to help went off the road.

In another psalm, the verse leads off “I waited patiently for the Lord”. We do not know the future, but we need not fear the future as it comes. Our story will be woven into time in its good time and

let us depend on that, let us see that larger picture of all of us in our many ways being nurtured and assisted. This world keeps reminding us that it is bigger and more powerful and beyond human control. That is why we come together. It is good and natural to be dependent. That is our human story, typically, at both the beginning and end of life as well as many times in between, perhaps all times and experiences, if we are honest with ourselves. Let us be both dependent and dependable. To be in this moment of larger purpose and deeper understanding and to sit and stay in this Light.

Closing hymn is green #250 “Julian of Norwich”

At the time of the plague, Julian of Norwich gave this prophecy: “All shall be well, I’m telling you, let the winter come and go. All shall be well again, I know.”