

Last weekend, Craig and I attended a folk music festival in northern Michigan called the Bliss Fest, and every year there are a few sessions there that feature the Dances of Universal Peace, a practice that began after World War I. They are sometimes called Sufi dances, with their origin among Sufis who find sacred dance practice a way to Spirit. This year, within the several songs we learned was this small section: “I feel the Light of ten thousand Angels, softening my way, softening my way to thee.”

Opening hymn is Green hymnal #187 “A Garden of My Own”

Our first reading is Chapter 2 from the old testament Song of Songs: “I am a rose of Sharon, a Lily of the valleys. Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens. Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love. Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love. His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me. Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires. Listen! My lover! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills. My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice. My lover spoke and said to me, “Arise my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me.” My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that

ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom. My lover is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the rugged hills.”

A second reading comes from *The Memorable Works of a Son of Thunder* published in 1672 about what it felt like to be an early Friend, to convert or become convinced as a Quaker back then. Francis Howgill said, “The kingdom of Heaven did gather us and catch us all, as in a net, and God’s heavenly power at one time drew many hundreds to land. We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in; and the Lord appeared daily to us, to our astonishment, amazement, and a great admiration, insomuch that we said one unto another with great joy of heart: “What, is the Kingdom of God come to be with people?” And from that day forward, our hearts were knit unto the Lord and one unto another in true and fervent love, in the covenant of Life with God; and that was a strong obligation or bond upon all our spirits, which united us one unto another. We met together in the unity of the Spirit, and of the bond of peace, treading down under our feet all reasoning about religion.”

For our final reading, here is a short quote from the Buddha, “Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.”

Let us share our Concerns and Joys carried in our hearts this morning. (Friends share)

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—Let us be softened and startled by the love and light of ten thousand angels hovering around, about, and within us all in this garden we tend, this Gaia, this earth. Let us be children of thunder with hearts leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills, ready for the blooming of the flower never seen before that will enrich the world. Let us be led to walk in sacred gardens in a dance of universal peace and a confidence of actual faith, deepened by hope and love. We pray for the value and worth of all and the connection of that value to our collective values and to that of God, to the sacred inner Light, to Love. Amen

Message hymn is on the handout “Pass It On”

Message: Dear Friends, We are at a time of the year that some would call the height of summer in this area, as the produce is coming in, and the lake is warm for swimming, and the days are long in light. For those who are farmers and gardeners, the work that has been put in is literally bearing fruit, even when it is so dry. Mixed into the hopes and expectations for that work there are the pleasant surprises as well as the disappointments. There are both the predictable and the unpredictable outcomes. This year we are subscribed to a farm CSA, community supported agriculture where you receive a bag of produce each week from a local farm. So the predictable thing is that there will be a bag every Thursday, except last Thursday when the truck broke down so we got the bag on Friday, and the surprise on Friday was some wonderfully ripe peaches! I think the modern state of Georgia has been deceiving us that peaches are regional or can't take the winter. After all, right here, neighboring our meeting was the indigenous peach town of Aurora. At any rate, what our readings today all point to is that when you get that wonderful and unexpected ripe peach, savor it. Savor it fully and deeply, not just for itself, but for all of its signs of blessing. Stop with it, tarry a while, because not only will the peach nourish you with its calories and sweetness, but the dwelling in the moment of how the world can give us such a thing as

peaches with no other worries in the thoughts just for that time, that savoring, is a type of true and clear sustenance that we need so deeply. We need that clarity of value and goodness, that hope and goodness of a ripe peach from a farmer we know, we need that time with a good thing. The value of values, the rightness of rights.

I was led this month to a reading from the Song of Songs, which itself is quite a surprising book in the Bible, sometimes known as the Song of Solomon. Because that sense of love that is described is one that the writer mentions must not be forced or purposely enacted or prescribed, it is a love like the messages that arise in a meeting, like those messages of love we offer to one another that are deep and moving and irresistible. In the poetry of that book of the Bible, gazelles, does, stags are all mentioned as both quick and fleeting as well as powerful, and as being both the surprise and the strong blessing. A wild image, but also gazing over the wall and through the lattice, that magic of seeing the deer and fawn in the front yard. There is described the great pleasure of being in the presence of love, and the image of love as being and becoming in the full ripeness of the height of summer, as the lover says, "Arise my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me." Can we dwell in that moment of love, away from the sense of complications and worries, and speak, and listen. Can that love of the lovers also be the love and passion of our faith and care for one another? Can we savor that moment and sensation? Can it sustain us for times of confusion and disappointment and trial?

I mentioned that I was traveling last week with Craig in Michigan, and so, when it came time to pick hymns for this morning, I was doing so without a hymnal for reference. I wrote to both Claire and Susan Deacon and said that I wanted to use "A Garden of My

Own” the opening hymn we sang today, and I know that the book sometimes lists the hymns by first line and that is a hymn where the title and the first line are different, so I wrote to them that it has a first line something like “There’s a place where seeds are scattered”. It turns out that the actual first line is “There’s a place where dreams are gathered.” And then the hymn says that there’s a soil where seeds are sown. So, my memory was pretty good in pulling up that first line, and I like that I got the sense of the poetry correct in how ‘there’s a place where seeds are scattered’ and ‘there’s a place where dreams are gathered’ have all the right vowel sounds and rhyme. However, the telling difference is in the full realization of the good thing, of gathering the dreams--my busy mind had gone to the work, the process, not the outcome, the running stag and the mountains, not the love, the ordering and picking up of the bag from the farm, not the delicious peach, the singing and the writing and the greeting, and not the grounded sense of faith and Spirit in meeting. We need both, of course, and as I said, I was not wrong in my memory—I was pretty close to right. But I could have sat, at least briefly and fully in the good, in the product, in the love, in the faith, and savored it to recharge, to build and to dream. Many of us have two gardens. One for the fruits and vegetables, and one for the beautiful flowers. Both should be weeded and tended, both have work and needs, and you can gather from both, but one is also there just to look at, to sit in, to smell and savor and just be. We have to remember that garden and gather those dreams for our ever-wakeful world.

Part of our travels last week involved a long train ride, where they call you for dinner in the dining car to tables for four and seat you with whomever they choose. We had two other table partners who did not know each other, who were traveling alone, and Craig and I shared with each other later that in the initial introductions, we both had a little internal pause, that thought of “this could be a long dinner”. And then we each opened up and shared and found topics of mutual interest and amusement and were one of the last tables to

leave our seating time. We will not stay in touch and are not likely to ever see one another again, and yet all four of us were reminded how to have pleasant conversations with strangers for over an hour and a half, to stay in the moment we were in and find community and move away from judgement and make the best not only of the situation, but of one another. Then too, there are still white table cloths and three courses served with a glass of wine and a stretch of time over a long track through the countryside. We can make the fellowship for the journey. We can share.

I think of the final reading today from the Buddha, that lighting one candle from another does not in any way take time or resources or strength away from the first candle, like happiness, it just provides more light. When those early Friends got together, when they were swept up in the net of Spirit as the children of thunder, as Francis Howgill describes, “And from that day forward, our hearts were knit unto the Lord and one unto another in true and fervent love, in the covenant of Life with God; and that was a strong obligation or bond upon all our spirits, which united us one unto another. We met together in the unity of the Spirit, and of the bond of peace, treading down under our feet all reasoning about religion.” No reasoning, just savoring the walk in the sacred garden together. “We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in.”

Closing hymn is Green hymnal #236, “Joy is Like the Rain”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote, “Silently, one by one, in the infinite meadows of heaven, blossomed the lovely stars, the forget-me-nots of the angels.”