

Jeremiah 8:4 “Say to them, ‘This is what the LORD says: “‘When people fall down, do they not get up? When someone turns away, do they not return?’”

Our first hymn is Green #272, “George Fox”

“You are a light. You are the light. Never let anyone—any person or any force—dampen, dim or diminish your light. Study the path of others to make your way easier and more abundant. Lean toward the whispers of your own heart, discover the universal truth, and follow its dictates. [...] Release the need to hate, to harbor division, and the enticement of revenge. Release all bitterness. Hold only love, only peace in your heart, knowing that the battle of good to overcome evil is already won. Choose confrontation wisely, but when it is your time don't be afraid to stand up, speak up, and speak out against injustice. And if you follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love, if you shine like a beacon for all to see, then the poetry of all the great dreamers and philosophers is yours to manifest in a nation, a world community, and a Beloved Community that is finally at peace with itself.”— **John Lewis**, [Across That Bridge: A Vision for Change and the Future of America](#)

James Baldwin wrote in an Untitled Poem:

Lord,

when you send the rain,
think about it, please,
a little?

Do

not get carried away
by the sound of falling water,
the marvelous light
on the falling water.

I
am beneath that water.
It falls with great force
and the light
Blinds
me to the light.

Gwendolyn Brooks, the first Black Pulitzer prize winner and African American author and longtime poet laureate of Illinois, first African American woman inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters wrote a beautiful poem called “Paul Robeson”

That time
We all heard it
Cool and clear
Cutting across the grit of the day
The major Voice.
The adult Voice
Forgoing Rolling River,
Forgoing tearful tale of bale and barge
And other symptoms of an old despond.
Warning in music-words
Devout and large,
That we are each other's
Harvest:
We are each other's
Business:
We are each other's magnitude and bond.

Joys and Concerns

Dear Friends—Let us be each other's. Let us live in that mutuality of brothers and sisters, neighbors and friends, yes truly Friends. Let us hear the world calling out to us, calling us in, calling us to

bring the Spirit with us, to bring our hearts to a common place where we can be each other's. Give us strength that we are not overwhelmed by the deluge, the onrushing of crisis and worry and news, of trauma and emotion. Free us to act in the ways of kindness, of meeting needs, of finding the good, of healing the communities of which we are a part, and those who may not yet see us as a part. Help all get up when they fall. Help all return after they may have turned away. Bring us blessings. Gentle, quiet, powerful, and enduring blessings. Amen.

Our second hymn is Green #286 "Who Are the Patriots?"

Message: Dear Friends—The dean of the medical school in the university where I work, George Kikano, is from Beirut and knew war throughout his childhood. We have been working together in recent months to fulfill an ambition of his and of his students, faculty, and staff to design an anti-racist, anti-bias College of Medicine. That's a lot of structural change to work through on many levels. He is also my personal doctor and a kind and funny man of ambition and achievement. He visits Lebanon regularly. His extended family is fine, but all of their houses are gone. In the flash of a moment the destruction was greater than all the years of conflict. It is bewildering and challenging to figure out how to help there in the time of COVID, a time of limited travel, and a time of sudden massive need. The world is in great need. It is not a time for local safe haven and isolation, but of mutual aid, a time to be each other's harvest, each other's business, each other's magnitude and bond.

One of the strengths of our community practice of faith is that no one of us is right or correct or the authority for others. We are grounded in perspective taking, in the multiple lenses and understandings and revelations of the Spirit and to the Light. We share and are inspired, but we also listen—in fact, that is our primary practice, to listen to the promptings of love both within us

and around us. There is no one way that God or the sacred speaks, rather the divine speaks in many and all ways and through the experiences of all. As John Lewis wrote, “Study the path of others to make your way easier and more abundant. Lean toward the whispers of your own heart, discover the universal truth, and follow its dictates.” You and your time and place and heart are a point of intersection with the divine, that makes you shine, and just as across the great heavens, makes you be a navigational star for others, one among the billions, the constellations. That is the only legitimate way to be a billionaire, in the way that we all are.

Then again, as James Baldwin observed in his untitled poem, for some, taking one’s place in the firmament is not so easily done, is not so open a claim or recognized as an invitation by self or others. Artificial light, the glare of staged light and spotlights are all things that obscure the stars. When we are constantly chasing away the dark, we will never see the glory of the fully arrayed night sky. I see that story in his poetic prayer:

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think about it, please,
a little?

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by the sound of falling water,
the marvelous light
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I

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and the light

Blinds

me to the light.

Just to get a little English-professory on you as a scholar of African American literature, in the poem the lines scan: and the light—Blinds—me to the light. Which can be read as those who are professing the light in their way are blinded to the ways that I am professing to the same light, because there is a force placing me beneath it. In this profound season of deeply considering the full social meaning of racial justice in our context as Quakers, I find Baldwin's poem profound.

Our opening reading from Jeremiah poses God's rhetorical questions, "Say to them, 'This is what the LORD says: "'When people fall down, do they not get up? When someone turns away, do they not return?'" presuming that those who are addressed need to be reminded that life is reciprocal, a two way street, a complex give and take, a listening and learning that teaches, a time with room for recovery, for change, for insight, and where the wise avoid having disregard for anyone. Gwendolyn Brooks' poem is named for a man of great talent as both a football All-American and valedictorian at Rutgers, and then earning his LLB law degree from Columbia University while playing in the NFL and becoming a Broadway stage and singing star. And yet, Paul Robeson always used his fame for the people. The audiences that trivialize into a surface sentimentality the rich depth of spirituals, that make a false history of singing and dancing, are split from the poem, from the life:

That time
We all heard it
Cool and clear
Cutting across the grit of the day
The major Voice.
The adult Voice
Forgoing Rolling River,
Forgoing tearful tale of bale and barge
And other symptoms of an old despond.

Warning in music-words
Devout and large,
That we are each other's
Harvest:
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Business:
We are each other's magnitude and bond.

Paul Robeson's mother, Maria Louisa Bustill Robeson came from a prominent Black and mixed-race Quaker family that were leaders in the Free African Society of Philadelphia dating back to the 18th century. Her son warns of us disregard.

And so, in words that truly matter and a life and message that matter, John Lewis concluded for us all, "And if you follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love, if you shine like a beacon for all to see, then the poetry of all the great dreamers and philosophers is yours to manifest in a nation, a world community, and a Beloved Community that is finally at peace with itself." Listen, learn, navigate by the light that shines across the spectrum. The inner light is not heavy, it is not a burden—it is light.

Closing hymn is green #281 "Lucretia Mott Song"

That we are each other's
Harvest:
We are each other's
Business:
We are each other's magnitude and bond.