

Mahatma Gandhi once said, “The only tyrant I accept in this world is the still small voice within.”

First hymn is Green 147 “Every Time I Feel the Spirit”

Our first reading is a poem from Mary Oliver:

I know, you never intended to be in this world.
But you're in it all the same.
So why not get started immediately.
I mean, belonging to it.
There is so much to admire, to weep over.
And to write music or poems about.
Bless the feet that take you to and fro.
Bless the eyes and the listening ears.
Bless the tongue, the marvel of taste.
Bless touching.
You could live a hundred years, it's happened.
Or not.
I am speaking from the fortunate platform
of many years,
none of which, I think, I ever wasted.
Do you need a prod?
Do you need a little darkness to get you going?
Let me be as urgent as a knife, then,
and remind you of Keats,
so single of purpose
and thinking, for a while,
he had a lifetime.

On this Federal Martin Luther King Jr. commemorative holiday,
here is a quote from the Quaker who convinced King to get rid of
his handgun and follow the non-violent philosophy of Mahatma

Ghandi, Bayard Rustin, who also once said, “To be afraid is to behave as if the Truth were not True.”

Our final reading is also a poem, by the U.S. Poet Laureate, Ada Limón written for the spaceship heading to Europa, a moon of Jupiter: **In Praise of Mystery: A Poem for Europa**

Arching under the night sky inky
with black expansiveness, we point
to the planets we know, we

pin quick wishes on stars. From earth,
we read the sky as if it is an unerring book
of the universe, expert and evident.

Still, there are mysteries below our sky:
the whale song, the songbird singing
its call in the bough of a wind-shaken tree.

We are creatures of constant awe,
curious at beauty, at leaf and blossom,
at grief and pleasure, sun and shadow.

And it is not darkness that unites us,
not the cold distance of space, but
the offering of water, each drop of rain,

each rivulet, each pulse, each vein.
O second moon, we, too, are made
of water, of vast and beckoning seas.

We, too, are made of wonders, of great
and ordinary loves, of small invisible worlds,
of a need to call out through the dark.

Let us share our Concerns and Joys carried in our hearts this morning, voicing them into this community of loving Friends.

(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—Bless us all in the circle of time that is so precious and fleeting while also being so infinite and eternal. Help us see and realize potential, in ourselves and in others, in the earth and its beings, in the universe and its sacredness. On this holiday week end of deep blessing for all people, this celebration of equality, of that of God in every one, help us live that truth and help us all to hear that still small voice clearly as director and direction.

Comfort us in the knowledge that the morning starts at midnight with the stars, in the darkness before the dawn. Keep us steady within the swirling change. Amen

Second hymn Green #241 “Lady of the Seasons’ Laughter”

Message: Dear Friends—This time that our main culture and calendar in the United States calls 2024 has the usual surprise of getting used to writing or typing the new number. It is yet another surprise to be living at a time when the new year is for many a time of dread of more violence, of losses, of more climate extremes, of volatile news and elections and changes. For some of us, we need to consciously shift our frame to focus on the hope of a new year, to must make ourselves focus on renewal and strength and a steady course of trust. What used to be seen as a time of new beginnings and resolutions is not so easy now. I was at a university meeting yesterday where multiple people agreed that we needed positive news and to note recent positive achievements, not as PR for the outside world, but for ourselves and for our support of one another and our community. When one is constantly responding to

criticism and challenge, there need to be sources where one can recharge and gain confidence. Our Love and Light can recharge each other's batteries while we keep an even balance in our hearts between the big picture and the immediate, the tearing down and the raising up.

In addition to stating that "To be afraid is to behave as if the Truth were not True." Bayard Rustin also wrote that "God does not require us to achieve any of the good tasks that humanity must pursue. What God requires of us is that we not stop trying." And he wrote, "When an individual is protesting society's refusal to acknowledge their dignity as a human being, their very act of protest confers dignity on them." Along with "We need, in every community, a group of angelic troublemakers." And finally, the statement, "We are all one - and if we don't know it, we will learn it the hard way." All of these statements of Rustin illustrate his groundedness in the Quaker teachings of his grandparents that he frequently referenced in all of his life and work, and his persistent clarity and determination as one of the main advisors, organizers, and guides to Martin Luther King, Jr. and the movements for justice as a whole. He often referred to the oneness of the human family and also stated, "The proof that one truly believes is in action." It is commitment that shines through above all, and the vision of an interconnectedness of all struggles for justice and all reflections of the human spirit. Our opening hymn today spoke of this irresistible need to act every time we feel the spirit, or every time we hear that still small voice as Gandhi stated, to let it be our tyrant, our director, or how the blessing of the eternal Goddess of the universe guides us through time and the ages, as we sang.

One of those miraculous goddesses is Europa, also the name of a moon of Jupiter that is just a little smaller than Earth's moon, and that moon of Jupiter has an oxygen atmosphere and is believed to have lots of water under the surface. How stunning that our human curiosity has led us to exploration of that space, reaching towards

the stars that also define the new age of our hymn. Looking up, not down. Thinking of the sky as the book of the universe and as the home to heaven and the angels is all part of our human tradition, and in 2024, that journey will be launched, so we are still reaching out even in a year of apprehension. As the poet wrote:

“And it is not darkness that unites us,
not the cold distance of space, but
the offering of water, each drop of rain,

each rivulet, each pulse, each vein.
O second moon, we, too, are made
of water, of vast and beckoning seas.

We, too, are made of wonders, of great
and ordinary loves, of small invisible worlds,
of a need to call out through the dark.”

On our small little earth, we call out to Spirit as well as space. As we hunger for justice and seek to keep our feet on a guided path of hope, let us also provide the positive, calming, cheering words for the journey, even if it is far, even we are not the ones who will reach there. NASA has invited the public to send their names in to be sent out on the journey, engraved on the spaceship, and I did it, not with the sense of being personally grandiose, since thousands of names are going forth, but as a witness to the wonder, a marker of the effort, the hope, the pursuit of knowledge, the striving.

Meanwhile, Mary Oliver opens her poem with the line, “I know you never intended to be in this world”. This is certainly a truth of our particular life’s singularity, but then as bearers of “that of God” there is still also a sense of eternity and purpose and manifestation. Paying heed to the inner Light, we are not following a prescribed plan so much as a direction, as a commitment, and as Bayard Rustin put it, “What God requires of us is that we not stop trying.”

One element of our purposefulness is not to reach a particular or certain goal, but to act together, to seek that solidarity, not to squander our own time and our own little corner of this vast world so that the still small voice is not only heard, but made real and tangible in the lives and work of others. Mary Oliver asks, “Do you need a prod? Do you need a little darkness to get you going?” as she contemplates the shortness of life. In the scheme of things, the era of humans is an overall shortness of time, as we think of the full universe we traverse. As transcendentalist minister Theodore Parker stated in his address to the anti-slavery convention of January 1858 in another time of great division, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” That curve may not even be discernable, but is more an article of faith than measurable, as Parker himself put it. A purpose, not a plan.

This past week, Craig and I were cross-country skiing in Canada along the shores of Lake Superior. One of the things about cross country skiing is that you usually are following a groomed path, following a way through the wilderness, in this case through a beautiful snowy forest along icy, but flowing, creeks. You glide and are guided as you take in the wonder and brave the cold, with companions or alone in the beauty. The journey is the destination. You venture out and make it back. We all have our ventures to take, our commitments to make, our Love and Strength and time to give and to receive. Take courage and take heart, do not fear this unfolding year, for “To be afraid is to behave as if the Truth were not True.” But that still small voice and this vast universe are true.

Closing hymn, Green 247 “Shall We Gather at the River”

Harry Emerson Fosdick wrote this prayer: “Eternal Spirit, who without our asking it hast ushered us into this great generation with its chaotic circumstance and its tremendous issues, help us to measure up to the need of our time—in the spirit of our Lord.”