

Octavia Butler, the prophetic African American science fiction writer of the 20th century wrote in *The Parable of the Sower*, “All successful life is Adaptable, Opportunistic, Tenacious, Interconnected, and Fecund. Understand this. Use it. Shape God.”

First hymn is Green #139 “Creator of All Humankind” (words)

Our first reading is from the 20th Century Bahá’i poet, Robert Hayden: **"Monet's Waterlilies"**

Today as the news from Selma and Saigon
poisons the air like fallout,
I come again to see
the serene, great picture that I love.

Here space and time exist in light
the eye like the eye of faith believes.
The seen, the known
dissolve in iridescence, become
illusory flesh of light
that was not, was, forever is.

O light beheld as through refracting tears.
Here is the aura of that world
each of us has lost.
Here is the shadow of its joy.

Vincent Harding civil rights leader and author of our second reading was chairperson of the Veterans of Hope Project at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver. He authored the magnificent book [*Hope and History: Why We Must Share the Story of the Movement*](#) and the essay [“Is America Possible?”](#) He died in 2014.

“What we need are some signposts, some lights that would, in other people’s lives, help them, some “Live human signposts,” that would help them to see the possibilities for themselves and will open up possibilities that other people can’t see in any other way except seeing it through human beings who care about them. And if we teach young people to run away from the darkness rather than to open up the light in the darkness — to be the candles, the signposts — then we are doing great harm to them and the communities that they have come out of. That whole idea of discipline is one that, clearly, we have cast aside except when we’re talking about technological development or military development. It seems to me that we need, again, to recognize that to develop the best humanity, the best spirit, the best community, there needs to be discipline, practices of exploring, how do you do that? How do we work together? How do we talk together in ways that will open up our best capacities and our best gifts? My own feeling that I try to share again and again, is that when it comes to creating a multiracial, multiethnic, multireligious, democratic society, we are still a developing nation. We’ve only been really thinking about this for about half a century. But my own deep, deep conviction is that the knowledge, like all knowledge, is available to us if we seek it. I think that that determination to find a truly democratic society and to create the truly beloved community, those are things that can be available to us if we’re willing to work with each other and work with the universe on developing them. They don’t come free and easy. They are tough, tough tasks for us to take on.”

Our final reading is from Abraham Lincoln in his address to Congress in December of 1862: “The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise—with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.”

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—Let us move out from the shadows and repetitions of the past and step into the Light that allows us both to know and to shape God. In our quest for spiritual renewal and restoration, to drink at the fountain of the still small voice of calm let it be not an effort of duplication in experience, but of inspiration and a quest for real wholeness for our current context. Help us have the sort of expectations that are open to new infusions of Light, so that we can be disenthralled from what we think may have been and be ready in Spirit for what might be. Bless our becoming. Amen.

Message hymn is Green #154 “Be Thou Our Vision”

Message: Dear Friends—The two hymns we have sung this morning along with our readings embrace both the concepts of seeking comfort, of accepting a reinfusion of peace and calm and a true sense of blessing along with finding an anchored and deeply contextual source of inspiration and vision. Feeling lost and wandering in fear or feeling frantic about needing to find the next thing that needs to be done are both destabilizing and distracting ways to be caught away from the Spirit and to be without a Light to guide us forward, a secure path and a still point from which to navigate change and determine and define direction. In so many traditions and practices, one is asked to start with our breath, to take a deep breath. Join me now in taking a deep breath. And as you exhale, let your shoulders drop. You don’t have to carry the world, you can instead be carried in that sweet chariot. We are here in our meeting house, even on line we are here, at home.

One of the interesting things about our society, what is called the Religious Society of Friends, is the way in which simplicity allows for the full complexity of life and the sacred. By intentionally having many ways to God, the divine, to spirituality and communal love and care, we are each allowed to be fully ourselves and to have experiences of Light and Love that are our own and yet also to do that together. We settle in and let Light lead. It is a mystery how in not defining or definitively describing, we let ourselves be led to the paths that are right for each one. Our collective ritual is a way for each of us to have our own internal and appropriate ritual to our own condition, rather than a prescribed and singular one way ritual. Our opening hymn's words come from a much longer poem published by the Quaker poet, John Greenleaf Whittier in the Atlantic magazine in 1872. This was the height of a highly contentious time of struggle to transform the country after a civil war that left so much to be resolved. I love the use of his full name that allows us to envision the spring, the renewal, the green leaf of the poet, whose artistic purpose is to give us a new perspective. To use words in new ways that drop seeds to sprout in our minds and hearts. In any case, his larger and longer poem is about religious rituals of varied sorts and their intoxicating distractions, and then it ends with these verses we sang about being open and calm. Just a reminder of verse four where he writes "Drop thy still dew of quietness, till all our strivings cease: Take from our souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of thy peace." And verse five, "Breathe through the heats of our desire thy coolness and thy balm; let sense be dumb, let flesh retire, speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire, O still small voice of calm." We have had a week of earthquake, wind, and fire. Let us take another deep breath, and settle our shoulders down.

Robert Hayden's poem on Monet's Waterlilies is specifically about Light, as it was the focus of the impressionist painters. While Monet's gardens at Giverny are stunningly beautiful, he did not paint those waterlilies, but rather the light that came off of those

waterlilies. Our eyes don't touch the objects we see, they reflect and refract the light that bounces off of those objects. And like Whittier, the poet Robert Hayden starts in a context of harried and chaotic news, and then settles to drink in at the font of beauty of this monumental and immersive painting or series of paintings that surround the viewer, and that in its touching human effort at interpretation becomes so much more than water lilies themselves. Just as in meeting, the Light that any of us perceives in our hearts passes through us as people to be transmitted to others, so in art, it is the passing through a person, the humanity of it, that renders it profound, the perspective. Both infused by the artist and then absorbed in the context of the viewer. Hayden's closing stanza, "O light beheld as through refracting tears. Here is the aura of that world each of us has lost. Here is the shadow of its joy."

Just as art can speak to us profoundly, there is a saying among Friends, among Quakers, that we can let our lives speak, that we can be the "live human signposts" that Vincent Harding refers to as so necessary for each of our guidance and reassurance. He found that his mission in later life after the civil rights movement was in not letting the spark and spirit of the movement be lost. But, as Lincoln observed to Congress, when times change, as they constantly do, we cannot just harken back to old solutions or to what we might think of as traditions, we must recontextualize and disenthral ourselves, in his wonderful word. Open ourselves to a vision, rooting ourselves in calm and Love. Our collective and dependent action and natures as a social species have been best at coping with the new, with changed circumstance and human challenges. Humans can always go either way, to turn to the self or to turn to one another, as there are many ways to respond to the world and to one another. Developing morality amid practices of wonder and respect for the planet and one another, amid finding ways for the expression of art and Spirit, have been a part of the

human journey. Hubris and ego, going it alone, are the stories of every great tragedy, while humility and generosity are the ways of the Spirit. Step back, and step into the flow. We are not meant to be efficient, our babies are born helpless, our elders need care, we all need community. There is no one best way, so let us pursue all the ways to love. Let us allow the way for everyone's best self.

The adjectives that Octavia Butler used for all successful life as adaptable, opportunistic, tenacious, interconnected, and fecund, are profound and meant to extend across time and culture and species. Through them and through our lives as lived, as live human signposts, we indicate the ways to Light, to the sacred, to one another, to God. We are always breathing, we are always rebuilding, we are always regrounding and restoring. Do not be discouraged. Lift your eyes to the hills. Calm your fear and seek your vision.

Closing hymn is Green #291 "O Holy City Seen of John"

We close with the comforting words of the prophet Isaiah at the end of chapter 40: "but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint."