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Friendsview Sermons

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Friendsview Sermons

By Arthur O. Roberts

Introduction

Most of these messages were delivered at the Friendsview Retirement Community midweek meeting. A few were spoken at the Sunday worship at the Health Center, or used as morning devotions in the dining room. Because of these different venues some duplication of theme and poetry citation occurs.

Several of these messages were adapted from earlier sermons preached on various occasions over the past several decades, some of which are included in my book *The Sacred Ordinary* (Barclay Press, 2006).

I feel greatly privileged to have been offered this opportunity for Kingdom ministry at Friendsview Retirement Community, which has been our home since December, 2003.

The sermons and talks are arranged by date of ministry.

Patience

Friendsview mid-week meeting , July 7, 2004

Introduction:

A doctor's client is well named: "a patient"— one who waits in the waiting room, dutifully filling out forms, waits to meet the doctor, endures sundry painful procedures, lines up at the pharmacy to fill the prescription, waits for the bills to get paid, and most importantly, waits for healing to occur.

I struggle to be patient, particularly when a process takes longer than what I think it should, or could, and I can't speed it up. What the Spirit speaks to me may be a helpful to you.

Patience is a spiritual virtue. The Bible is filled with godly exhortations to be patient, whatever happens. The "whatever" bothers me. Like other virtues patience is sharpened by adversity. It's not difficult to be patient if nothing or nobody riles you. But through adversity, patience is developed. Where do we find adversity? Everywhere—in circumstances and in people, including those we love, and in ourselves.

In a Bible search on the words "patience," and "patient", I found many verses. Most New Testament references are from the Apostle Paul. Now this guy was a type A personality if there ever was one! Although he didn't feel sorry for himself, Paul did on occasion list all sorts of aggravating and life-threatening circumstances, such as shipwrecks, stoning, escaping over a wall, people who left him in the lurch, opponents who perverted the Gospel and impugned his motives, and imprisonment. His list makes mine seem petty, although I've learned that little things often irritate more than big things. A toothache may challenge faith more than a wind storm—or a family crisis. As a proverb states, "it's the little foxes that spoil the vines." (Song 2: 15) So consider with me some Scriptural exhortations about patience.

Wisdom increases our capacity for patience

- Prov. 19:11 "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense"
It's good to be magnanimous although easier in some circumstances and with some people than otherwise. We're supposed to get wiser as we get older, and if we handle our

experiences well, we do. But retired folks have to help each other not to become crabby, complaining about this and that to compensate for not being actively engaged in the workaday world.

- Eccl. 7:8 “the patient in spirit are better than the proud in spirit.” Hmm. I guess our egos sometimes make patience difficult—for others as well as for ourselves. I have to sort out whether I’m being stalwart for truth or just stubborn, whether principle is at stake or vanity. Whether ego or Deo has the keys to my mind. How about you?
- We accept what happens with grace even when it hurts, when we are humbled. Sirach . 2:4 reads “Accept whatever befalls you, and in times of humiliation be patient.”

God’s patience instructs us in righteousness

Isaiah the prophet-statesman became exasperated with Israel and figured God must be even more so. He wrote “Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also?” (Isa. 7:13) Patience isn’t just rolling over and being crushed by evil, or putting up with every sort of nonsense. Patience is about holding fast to truth without wavering, but not using ungodly methods in doing so.

If Jesus can throw the rascals out of the temple, I surely can cheer the effort. But then I recall Isaiah kneeling awe stricken before the Almighty, and hand to my mouth I want to make sure I’m hearing the Divine voice correctly before I judge others. I recall Calvary and wonder about my capacity for cross-bearing. Suffering, it seems, comes with Kingdom territory, but vengeance belongs to God. I’m not the Almighty’s sheriff, but I am part of the Church, and prophetic speaking is included in the Gospel mandate.

James, the brother of our Lord, commended the prophets (James 5:10): “Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.” One who would be God’s voice for truth and justice must be patient—take the long view, and not be arrogant. Patience includes tenacity for truth, not indulgence of evil.

As beneficiaries of patience; we should reciprocate

Paul uses himself as an example (1Tim. 1:16), “. . . I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.” God is patient with misguided idealists and

zealots of very stripe in the hopes that they, like hard-headed Saul, will be converted and turn their energy in the right direction. Most of us have suffered from hard-headedness in one way or another, and upon receiving God's mercy we're ready to make patience a virtue. The late Charles Beals once rightly reproved me for an impatient attitude: "Arthur, has it ever occurred to you that you might be wrong?" Paul wrote young Timothy: "You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, *patience*, love, endurance." (2Tim. 3:10) Like Paul, we can urge younger folks to be prepared in season and out of season to correct, rebuke and encourage --with great patience and careful instruction. (2Tim. 4:2)

Jesus prayed, "forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing" and suffered at the hands of those who reviled and abused him. Jesus' disciples should expect some flack from evil folk, and have patience with them. At least we're not suffering persecution like some of our Christian brothers and sisters in many parts of the world.

Paul teaches us that patience is a fruit of the Spirit. We need several kinds of fruit for physical health. For spiritual health we are offered nine kinds, according Gal. 5: 22: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

The writer of Hebrews links patience to active faith (Hebr. 6:12) and declares that laziness fosters impatience. "We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."

Understanding God's purposes helps us be patient

This means learning God's purposes in the trials that we experience, and also God's purposes for the cosmos itself. The resurrection is the bond that holds together "what's in life for me?" and "where is the universe going?" Job asked (6:11)". . . what is my end, that I should be patient?" It was mostly God's presence, not God's answers to the problem of adversity, that satisfied Job. And will satisfy us.

James and Peter admonish us similarly, James writes (5:7-8) "Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth,

being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.” Patience lets us know that the Lord is already near and that, whatever our future in a cosmos with billions of galaxies, the new heavens and new earth have already begun in our hearts, and in our communities of faith. And tempestuous Peter, who ought to know from experience, writes (2Pet. 3:9) “The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.”

Patience under adversity is a common Scriptural theme:

“Patient endurance” is a frequent expression. In the parable of the soils Jesus said that even when God’s seed is sown in good soil it bears fruit only through patient endurance. (Lk 8: 15)

- Paul added that patience in suffering brings spiritual triumph when framed by joyful hope and prayer Rom. 12:12. Joyful hope and prayer—now there’s a recipe for dealing with adversity! It’s a bit of a stretch for us, isn’t it?

Patience is the first characteristic of love

In that beautiful tribute to love, I Cor. 13, the first characteristic is patience. “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant.” Surely if we are to love others as ourselves, then we must be patient with ourselves as well. If God waits, so may we. This chapter is often read at weddings, a reminder that marriages are strengthened when a man and woman are patient with each other, and homes become secure when patience is the context for the family. I think this is true of extended families as well.

Patience sustains good relationships with others

Scripture counsels us to be patient with lazy folks, students, the timid (“faint hearted”), the weak (1Ths. 5: 14), the poor who ask our help (Sirach. 29:8), and those whose minds fail them (Sir. 3). “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient.” (2Tim. 2:24)

Conclusion

So, let us demonstrate patience in all circumstances and in respect to others. Let us also be patient with God, and with ourselves. The resurrection of Christ is God’s pledge to us that

truth and love will triumph. In this life; in the next. Keeping in step with the Holy Spirit is what I want to do, and if patience is part of the rhythm, that's what I will strive for. Will you?

Living for the Lord in the month of August

*(poems are from *Let the Spirit Soar*)*

Joyful hope

Rom. 12:12 "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. "

Rom. 15:13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Why so Auspicious?

What's so grand about this dry
summer month, why so auspicious
it has been dubbed august?
Could it be these days signify
the glorious virtue of hope?
For sure, hope helps us to cope!

August is waiting, with hope.

Hope for good harvests of food,
for rain once again to sustain
the earth whole--to cool the hot soul,
it's a yearning to resume learning,
a desire for higher purpose this year,
so without fear we go with the flow.

August is waiting, with hope.

Looking to the Hills- and beyond

Ps. 121:1-8 "I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come?

My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.

He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore."

Summer Décor

In August chlorophyll production
Slows and practically shuts down.
Keeping lawns and gardens verdant
Is difficult—when it's apparent
Summer décor features brown.

The month of August tests our patience.
But nature's inventory still
Offers green in our fair town.
So if brown tones make you frown,
Just look around, look to the hills.

Faith in difficult times

James 1:2-6 "My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind."

Dry Times Sonnet

August is when grass along
roads and in our yards is brown.

Within our usually green town
the creeks that commonly flow strong
are now a trickle, and their song
is nearly silenced, muted down
to faint decibels of sound.
Right has given way to wrong
and life to death, so it appears.
But appearances are deceiving.
Push aside your doubts, your fears;
these dry times are for believing
that latent in the earth
the good awaits rebirth.

Bearing good fruit

Eph. 5:6-11 “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be associated with them. For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light — for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”

Periphery and Center

Scabby or bruised rind makes
fruit unpalatable. Likewise
rot concealed within the core.
Anarchists spoil the good life

at society's creative edge
and tyrants at its moral hub.
Whether it is apples or towns
The good life requires health
At periphery and center.

ABC's

Friendsview midweek meeting, May 8, 2005

(adapted from *The Sacred Ordinary*)

Today is Father's Day. I want to be more inclusive so I'm turning it into Parent's Day! So, a verbal bouquet to parents! We all have parents, from the youngest of us here in worship to the oldest. Some are living; others are not. Some are nearby, some far away. I enjoy looking at the framed pictures of my father and mother. Momma and papa look a bit stiff, but then ninety years ago people had to hold a pose while a hooded cameraman took the picture. The pictures were taken at the time of their marriage. It's been sixty-six years since my father died from a sudden attack of pneumonia, and left a teenage boy bewildered and heartsick. Sulfa or penicillin could have saved him. Papa was sixty-six years old. Forty-one years ago my mother died in Friendsview Manor, in Newberg, Oregon, where we now reside. She was 81, younger than I am now. She sort of faded from various ailments and slipped off to her heavenly home one night. I like to remember my parents when they were younger. They were good parents, and I loved them. I thank God for my parents and look forward to seeing them in heaven. They were faithful in the words of our scriptural text from Psalm 145: 4, which reads:

One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

My parents passed the torch of faith to us their children. How? In various ways. My Quaker father set an example by saying grace at meals, by reading the Bible and the Congressional Record each evening, by humming hymns to the hogs while slopping them, by being honest in business and generous with neighbors, by being passionate for justice, and by taking us to Sunday school and church each week, by teaching us buy quality stuff but not too much of it, and to avoid debt. My mother worked in the home, cheerfully, taught Sunday school classes, taught us to say our bedside prayers, and encouraged our spiritual growth. Reared a Presbyterian she drilled us with a Reformed catechism. I recall one line from the Westminster confession: "the first duty of man is to honor and glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." We memorized Bible passages and read good books. Mom was a loving person. I remember being disciplined sometimes, never in anger, always in love. My parents differed on some issues. Papa was more patient than mom with people who did dumb things or were slow paying for the hay they bought from us. It was a good home, and I tried to convey this to our own family. My parents stood in a succession of generations that passed the covenant of Christian faith to the next ones. On my father's side, staunch 17th century

Welsh Quaker farmers with names like Bevan and Ellis had suffered fines for not paying taxes for state-supported ministry, so they sailed for William Penn's colony where they found religious freedom. On my mother's side stood a succession of Mennonite and Reformed believers. In the middle of the nineteenth century two orphaned Jansonius brothers left a crowded Holland and came to the new world to farm its rich soil. One was my great grandfather. In subsequent generations, spoken and then prayer languages changed from Welsh and Dutch to English. America became the land of the covenant as God-fearing descendants of these Welsh and Dutch ancestors trekked westward, from the Atlantic to the mid-west; from the mid-west to the far west.

I expect these reminiscences have started a train of thinking in your mind. I hope so. How was the Christian faith passed on to you? How have you passed the Christian faith on to the next generation? To help us ponder these questions prayerfully, I've printed for our worship today the ABC's of the Bible. At my mother's insistence, I learned these when I was eight or ten years old. The first four I remember, the rest I've had to reconstruct. We will read in unison a few at a time, and then I'll comment. After we've completed the alphabet let's have a bit of Quaker silence, for you to ponder *your* pilgrimage of faith. Prayerfully consider how your parents, or someone else's parents, passed the Christian faith to you, and how you are passing the torch of faith to the next generations. Then ask God how together we can tell succeeding generations the good news of Jesus Christ and God's kingdom, on earth and in heaven. This is a challenge to us all, because "selling cool", manipulating tastes and values, is a multi-billion dollar industry. Powerful forces are stuffing other stories into the eyes and ears, down the nostrils and mouths, and into the muscles of our children, grand children, and great-grand children. It's not easy for one generation to witness the mighty acts of God to the next one. But the Holy Spirit is greater than the spirit of this world.

The ABC's of the Bible

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3: 23 **[basic theology]**

Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. John 1: 29

Come to me, all you that... are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28

Do to others as you would have them do to you. Luke 6:31 [basic Christian morality]

Every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. Matthew 7: 17

Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17

God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. Galatians 6:7

Honor your father and your mother. Exodus 20:12 [basic attitudes]

In everything by prayer and. . .thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. Philippians 4:6

Just as water reflects the face, so one human heart reflects another. Proverbs 27:19

Know that the LORD is God. It is he that made us, and we are his. Psalm 100:3

Love the Lord your God with all your heart. . . and your neighbor as yourself. Luke 10:27

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth. Psalm 100:1 [basic discipleship]

Now is the acceptable time. . . now is the day of salvation! 2 Corinthians 6:2

One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. Psalm 145:4

Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart. Psalm 111:1

Quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouting of a ruler. Ecclesiastes 9:17

Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Psalm 51:12

Search me, O God, and know my heart. . . [basic prayers]

Test me and know my thoughts. Psalm 139: 23

Under his wings you will find refuge. Psalm 91:4

Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity. Psalm 26:1

Wisdom is better than jewels. Proverbs 8:11 [basic admonitions for the good life]

Except the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Psalm 127:1

Young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing. Psalm 34:10

Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today. Luke 19:5 **[basic invitation]**

Meekness

Friendsview midweek meeting Oct. 5, 2005

Scripture: Matt. 5: 5. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

Intro. Meekness has had a bad rap, connoting nerdy, hen pecked little men or mousey women, dominated by others, objects of scorn or pity by strong folks.

So these words of Jesus can trouble us unless we delve deeper into their meaning.

First, let's look at other scriptures focusing upon meekness. From Psalm 37 we read these words cast in pastoral imagery.

3 Trust in the LORD and do good;

 dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

4 Delight yourself in the LORD

 and he will give you the desires of your heart.

5 Commit your way to the LORD;

 trust in him and he will do this:

6 He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn,

 the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

7 Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;

 do not fret when men succeed in their ways,

 when they carry out their wicked schemes.

8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;

 do not fret—it leads only to evil..

10 A little while, and the wicked will be no more;

 though you look for them, they will not be found.

11 But the meek will inherit the land

 and enjoy great peace.

In describing judgment upon Jerusalem, the prophet Zephaniah wrote this about meek people *as the saving force* for all cultures.: chapter 3

12 But I will leave within you
the **meek** and humble,
who trust in the name of the LORD. . .
They will eat and lie down
and no one will make them afraid.

Here is no Milquetoast cowering under a blanket, but the saving force for humanity. The apostle Paul understood the gentle power of meekness *that affirms truth strongly but demonstrates sensitively to the needs of others*. In 2 Corinthians 10 he wrote:

By the **meekness** and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you—I, Paul, who am "timid" when face to face with you, but "bold" when away! I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world. For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

In 1912 Charles Rann Kennedy wrote a play about the crucifixion of Jesus. The title, "The Terrible Meek." It played for decades-- a pre-courser to last year's "The Passion"

Here's a good definition of meekness, from Sherwood Wirt:

The meek of whom Jesus speaks are those who have chosen to heed the voice of God and to place themselves in the center of His will. They have followed their Savior to the Cross and have put their lives upon the block. In their obedience they have shown the *capacity to take it*. Meekness, says Archbishop Trench, is "an in-wrought grace of the soul, and the exercises of it are first and chiefly towards God. At the Cross we see the God-centered quality of meekness. Jesus Christ, who seized the

initiative from Herod, from Pilate and even from John the Baptist, now obeys His Father's will to the yielding up of His life. The Cross teaches us a definition of meekness that will keep us from ever being bothered by this word again: *we must be nothing, that God might be everything.*

(*The Cross on the Mountain*, "When the Last are First" p, 34)

Some maxims about meekness

John Climacus (7th century)

Meekness is a mind consistent amid honor or dishonor.

Meekness prays quietly and sincerely for a neighbor however troublesome.

Meekness is a rock looking out over the sea of anger.

Meekness breaks the waves that crash upon it, and stays entirely unmoved.

Meekness is the bulwark of patience, the door of love,

Meekness is the foundation of discernment.

Meekness guides a religious community.

Meekness checks frenzy and curbs anger.

Meekness works along side of obedience.

Meekness is an imitation of Christ, a shackle of demons.

Meekness is a shield against bitterness.

Meekness is a minister of joy.

(adapted from *The Ladder of Divine Descent*, step 24 (*Classics of Western Spirituality*, pp 214ff)

Jesus is right: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Remembering

FVRC Health Center, Jan 1, 2006

(published also in *The Sacred Ordinary*)

The rainbow signifies that God remembers the creation and so should we

Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and **remember** the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth." So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth." Genesis 9:15-17 (NIV)

The Faith Community reminds us how God delivers people from bondage.

But for their sake I will **remember** the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am the LORD.' "Leviticus 26:45

Through the Messiah, Israel's experiences as a people of God, as promised to Abraham are offered to all peoples. The Church is witness to this new covenant

Prayer involves sharing our memories with God

Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love **remember** me, for you are good, O LORD Psalm 25: 7

Note the wonder of divine forgiveness. Removes guilt, atones, sanctifies

On my bed I **remember** you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Ps. 63:6

... keep his covenant and **remember** to obey his precepts, Ps, 103:18

Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced Ps. 105. 5

Let gratitude be a major aspect of prayer.

Spirituality includes remembering Jesus: birth, life, teaching, death, resurrection

Orthodox Christian churches celebrate Christmas January 7, which happens to be my birthday, so I'll share a bit about how some Eastern Europeans celebrate the nativity.

The Macedonian Orthodox celebration begins the evening of January 5th. Children go from door to door singing Christmas carols, heralding the birth of Jesus, and receiving fruits, nuts and candy. Later in the evening, people gather around a bonfire and converse about the past year and the year to come.

The following evening is the Christmas Eve, when a traditional oak log (badnik) is brought to the home. This log is cut by the father of the household while the table is being set for the Christmas Eve supper. The dinner usually consists of baked fish.

The oak log is cut into three pieces, representing the Holy Trinity. A member of the family receives a piece and places it on the fire [exchanging] a greeting: "Good evening and happy Christmas Eve").

While the log is being placed on the fire, the mother and the grandmother gather the children together into the room where the dinner is to be served. Each person carries a bundle of straw from outside, and together they spread the straw on the floor, to make the atmosphere more like that when the night Jesus was born. The house is decorated further with oak and pine branches, representing the wish of the family " health strong as oak, and with a life long as that of the oak." (adapted from <http://faq.macedonia.org/>)

Egyptian Christians (Coptic) celebrate the three year stay of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus in their country. Ironically, this flight to Egypt for safety reverses the Moses led flight away from Egyptian bondage. I wrote a poem about the trek of the holy family to Egypt

Egypt. To and Fro

Clip clop, clip clop,
Clip clop, clip clop,
clippity clip clip clop
plods the brown donkey
through the dark night.
Clip clop, clip clop,

Clip clop, clip clop,
clippity clip clip clop
plods the brown donkey
toward the dawn's light.

Tick tock, tick tock,
Tick tock, tick tock,
tickity tick tick tock
plod harried persons
through the dark night

Tick tock, tick tock,
Tick tock, tick to
tickity tick tick tock
God leads the faithful
toward the dawn's light.

(from *Look Closely at the Child*)

Celebrating the Resurrection: He is not here; he has risen! **Remember** how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee (Luke 24:6). Yes, we remember the crucifixion—how Jesus died for us. Let's remember also the completed salvation story—the resurrection and rejoice in its hopeful message.

Swings in Heaven

I went past a school ground today.
Boys and girls were playing. Recess.
I wanted to stop and watch but figured
somebody might think, is that old coot
a predator? So I drove my pickup slow.
Looked at little kids on swings
and teeter totters, or jumping around.

Lord, I hardly remember what it was like
to shoot marbles, skip rope, play tag.
Made me pine for the past, Lord.
Wouldn't mind being a child again.
Are there swings in heaven?
(from *Prayers at Twilight*)

Spirituality includes remembering others, gratefully, prayerfully

Jesus chided the disciples: "Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you **remember**?" Mark 8: 18. Basically we remember how Jesus summed up our obligations: love God; love others.

I thank my God every time I **remember** you. Philippians 1:3 Paul to co-workers.

. . . night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. 2Tim. 1: 3.

Consider this great-grandmother's reflections about family:

The Really Important Things

Lord, today I'm looking at old albums,
pictures of my children. Here's my boy
with his little red wagon, and there's
the girls in the look-alike dresses
I made them one Easter. Cute, aren't they?
Oh, they're grown up now, grandparents
themselves. But they love me as much
now as they did then. Some things change
but other things, the really important things,
remain. You hold us all in your hand, Lord.

(from *Prayers at Twilight*)

God's Comfort

Friendsview mid-week meeting, April 23, 2006

(adapted from *The Sacred Ordinary*)

OT Scripture Reading Psalm 119: 50, 52

My comfort in my suffering is this:

Your promise preserves my life.

I remember your ancient laws, O LORD,

and I find comfort in them.

Job learned to distinguish the difference between curious consoling friends and God's reassuring comfort. And the Psalmist understood that God's truth offers comfort throughout life.

NT Scripture Reading 2 Corinthians 1:3-6 (NIV)

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.

Introduction

Did you notice how often the word "comfort" was used in the Scripture reading? Eight times. This reading challenges me. I find it difficult to receive the rich significance of that word because of childhood associations with a warm, fuzzy blanket, referred to by my mother as a "comforter." Is that term familiar to you? Well, the word has suffered further erosion of meaning in our culture. Here are some examples. Parents ask small children are you "comfy"? We label certain edibles "comfort food." Euphemistically we dub public toilets "comfort" stations. Can we redeem this badly battered word and glean from it valuable insights about our walk with God? Our Scripture text helps us do this. It's a familiar one.

Scripture Text: Psalm 23: 4 “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they *comfort* me” (NIV)

Fortunately, during my childhood two things helped preserve integrity for the word *comfort*. The first was having memorized this Psalm and recognized from its pastoral setting a message about God’s care. Secondly, from studying Latin I learned that the word “comfort” means “with strength”. In the varied circumstances of our lives, God deals with us “with strength.” Given this denotation of the word, let’s receive from these Scripture passages truths about God’s comfort.

First, name the darkness

The New Revised Standard Version uses the word *darkness* instead of “shadow of death”. This equally valid rendering reads: “Even though I walk through the *darkest valley*, I fear no evil; for you are with me: your rod and your staff—they comfort me.” In beautiful pastoral imagery, the 23rd Psalm indicates that like a good shepherd God uses a rod to protect us and a staff to guide us in troubled times, in the darkest valley.

Dark valleys vary. Some troubles happen because of natural circumstances, like floods and storms and fires. Others arise from the ignorance, thoughtlessness, or malice of others. Some we heap upon ourselves. “How could I be that stupid” we mutter, and try to extricate ourselves from a mess we’ve gotten ourselves into. Some arise from the condition of life itself—a journey into an unfamiliar future beset by limits of knowledge and strength.

Sometimes these troubles are physical. We are on an unfamiliar road in a downpour and we’re not sure where the edge of the road is and what’s around the bend. We’re scared to a point of near panic. Or we’re overworked and exhausted. Or we bash the car into a tree and remain crippled by the accident. Or we suffer chronic pain of from a stroke that darkens our lives day after day. At Friendsview we know about this dark valley.

Sometimes our troubles are mental. Facing adverse family, health, or job related circumstances we’re unsure how to proceed, what choices to make, what words to say, what actions to take. We’re not sure how to cope with troubled relationships: with family, with co-workers, with neighbors. Maybe financial problems keep us awake nights figuring

how to cope. For us oldsters the clock of time tolls louder as life's valleys loom darker. The darkness becomes, indeed, a shadow of death.

Sometimes our troubles are spiritual. These are the hardest to cope with, Glittering temptations to sin assail us, or funky doubts nag at us; sometimes it seems the prince of darkness has snared us in his slimy hands. Maybe we're guilt-ridden for having hurt people and we can't shake the shame, so we mask it to protect the ego and then, alone with ourselves, feel even guiltier. God seems hidden by the darkness, until in despair we cry out: "God, I need your rod to protect me; I need your staff to guide me!" Then the Compassionate One stoops down beside us in the darkness, takes us by the hand and leads us through the valley of the shadow of death. How assuring to hear Christ's words to us as well as to those first disciples: "I will not leave you comfortless" (John 14: 17-19 JKV).

For some of our brothers and sisters in difficult places the darkness is all three: physical, mental, and spiritual. Consider the agony a member of the Christian Peacemakers Team, Tom Fox, went through before he was tortured and murdered in Iraq this past March. Consider the stress of hostages facing similar fate. Consider the loneliness and fear felt by Abdul Rahman, the Muslim converted to Christ who fears for his life, even in exile from Afghanistan. Consider the trauma of parents unable to offer their children sufficient food or medical aid. Paul's testimony about comfort arose from real life troubles. God strengthened him all the way to *his* heroic martyr death, as God has for thousands of people in our own times. So when Paul writes about God's comfort he knows what he's talking about. And so did the Psalmist, who had his own darkness to grope through.

In all our dark times we move forward with fear and trembling, calling out to our Shepherd for protection and for guidance. We pray for, and receive, God's comfort. It was said of Jesus "he was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4: 15). On the Cross Jesus bore our burdens, with his stripes we are healed. His triumph over death brings us assurance. In the words of Paul, in Christ "we are more than conquerors;" nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God" (Romans 8: 37-38 NRSV). Yes, in the world we will have troubles, but Christ has overcome the world. Christ leads us through the darkness into his glorious light.

Second, consider how the rod of God comforts

What do they look like, these wolves who would destroy us? And how does the rod of God protect us from them? Some who prey upon God's flock are human predators who would harm us with physical force or manipulative guile. Some are faceless corporate structures, the "powers of this world", commercial and/or cultural forces that could destroy us, body, mind, and spirit if we stray from God's fold. The rod of God protects us by alerting our minds, especially through prayer, to *see* wolves (even those in sheep's clothing), by quickening our consciences when Satan comes in the guise of an angel of light. The rod of God raps *us* with guilt when *we* do wrong, when we succumb to the lure of the wolf hidden in the psyche. God's rod drums out metric joy when we do right! The rod of God protects us by judgments upon worldly evil. God is not mocked. Evil collapses into a dark hole from its own weight. In the end, right prevails. History is God's story. Thus God makes even the wrath of men to praise Him. In the midst of violence and war this is difficult to discern, but we hold this truth in faith, hope, and love. Jesus' resurrection is God's pledge to us that in this life, as in the next, Light overcomes darkness, Jerusalem the Golden arises from the Babel's ashes. The rod of God strengthens; it comforts me, does it comfort you?

Third, consider how God's staff comforts

In the Psalmist's imagery God's staff directs us to good pasture and clean water. I take this to mean God nudges us to read the Bible, to pray, to feast on good art and literature, to use our senses to interact with God's creation, through gardening, making things, or relishing rainbows and tide pools. In short, God's staff guides us rightly to use of our bodies as temples of His spirit. We are comfortable when such spirituality occurs.

God's staff helps us discern the work of the Spirit in others. God taps us on the shoulder, as it were, when out of personal pique or rational concern, we're about to bolt the flock, forsake community, or rend it by snobbery or manipulation. The apostle Paul wrote perceptively: "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15: 5-6 NIV).

God's staff directs us to the needs of others, whether physical, mental or spiritual.

God's staff points out the good paths within a tangle of competing ways by which we can walk along with others in love and in truth, and with prayerful discernment offer through word or deed a testimony to the Christ we love and follow.

When I am very old and cannot walk,
come sit with me awhile, and talk
of paths where we have strolled
together, or apart.

When I am very old and cannot see,
could you read the Bible, maybe,
or a cherished book
to give light to my heart?

When I am very old and cannot hear,
do not shout, just stand quite near
and touch me while you speak,
so I can feel your words.

When I am very old and out of touch
with what used to matter much,
be patient, hold me then,
as once I held you.

When I am very old and do not know
even that you come and go
about my lonely room
your love will keep me true.

When I am very old, your love will guide
my body and my mind and soul
across the bridge of years
to Life, and calm my fears.

(from *Messengers of God*)

Such is true empathy. The world looks for ways to divide and conquer. Jesus' followers look for ways to let God conquer and to unite the world Christ died to save.

God's staff guides us through time and space always in the direction of the eternal Kingdom, consonant with the words of Jesus: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10: 16). My dear friends, ours is, indeed, a *comfortable* Gospel! April is a turbulent month, not just storms that roil the ocean and blast the land, but storms within society that lead to violence and wars. Look forward with me to May, when trees are fully leafed and flowers brighten the landscape. This poem may be for you, "Let the Spirit Soar"

Something there is about this May
that nudges me to jump for joy!
If once again I were a boy
I'd vault a fence each lovely day
just like I used to do . . . oh, well,
as around the town I stride
I now feel real good inside—
Heaven triumphs over hell.
So, I'll sate my soul with beauty
of budding roses and a boon
of sunlit daisies. I'll do each duty
humming a remembered tune,
and let the Spirit soar
like seagulls on my shore.
(from *Let the Spirit Soar*)

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord,

Some of our brothers and sisters face persecution, even death, for their Christian faith.

May your rod protect them, may your staff guide them.

Some of our brothers and sisters face debilitating illness, in the shadows of death.

May your rod protect them, may your staff guide them.

Some of our brothers and sisters face poverty, financial ruin, or dislocation.

May your rod protect them, may your staff guide them.

Some of our brothers and sisters struggle within webs of corporate evil.

May your rod protect them, may your staff guide them.

Some of our brothers and sisters are assailed by regrets over bad choices.

May your rod protect them, may your staff guide them.

Some of our brothers and sisters are caught in a whirlpool of depraved culture.

May your rod protect them, may your staff guide them.

Lord, some of our brothers and sisters are bruised in spirit and assailed by doubts.

May your rod protect them, may your staff guide them.

Lord, some of our brothers and sisters grieve over hurtful actions inflicted upon them.

May your rod protect them, may your staff guide them.

Lord, bring comfort to these brothers and sisters. Forgive, restore, comfort them.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Rejoice

Friendsview mid-week meeting, Sept. 12, 2007

1. Rejoice during times of adversity

“Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matthew 5:11-13 TNIV”

My Welsh ancestors had property confiscated to pay state church taxes; perhaps yours suffered this, too. We reap the harvest of those who through the Christian centuries, at high personal cost, witnessed prophetically for God’s truth and way of life. As an academic I’m particularly sensitive to the current literary attack upon Christianity by socio-biologists, an assault more subtle and effective than Islamist extremists who want to wipe out the infidels, more seductive than Bin Laden’s appeal for all to covert to Islam. I think of people in Southeast Asia, and in certain Islamic countries where Christians suffer for Christ. I recall how the prophet Jeremiah was ridiculed for voicing God’s judgment upon unfaithful Israel. I recall Isaiah’s vision of the peaceable kingdom during a time of imperial power. Think of the valiant South Korean Christians who went to Afghanistan as medical missionaries, and, earlier, seven into Iraq. Rejoice in their witness, martyrdom for some, release for others. Persecution can mean that one is heeding the Voice of the Shepherd. Rejoicing is more than a cozy emotional feeling. It’s an appropriate spiritual response to and confidence in the Lord’s work. Perhaps the hardest kind of adversity is to be ignored. Rejoice that in a time of adversity, faithful folks are making a prophetic witness in word and deed to God’s truth. The heavenly reward is theirs, and ours, now and in eternity.

2. Rejoice in times of effective witness

“Notwithstanding in this **rejoice** not that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather **rejoice** because your names are written in heaven. Luke 10:19-21 KJV-

As an author I’m always pleased when spirits of ignorance, deceit, confusion, despair, and uncertainty are brought under subjection to truth, and hope is kindled or renewed through what I write. I’m glad that sometimes my words serve as vehicles for others on their faith journeys. The other day I received an appreciative note from niece Linda Wilhite Walker.

On each anniversary of their marriage thirty-five years she and husband Marvin read the maxims I presented to them at their wedding. A few years ago a former student, Randy Butler, long-serving pastor of the Salem Evangelical Church, found through my book *Exploring Heaven* God's consolation in a time of grief at the loss of a son. During this past year I have been privileged to be his mentor in a George Fox doctoral program and to observe how his words, spoken and written, are blessing others. When Robin Jennings, an Episcopal minister in Kentucky read my book on heaven, it clarified and emboldened his proclamation of Resurrection power. He and his wife visited us last year. For a dear relative whose husband abruptly left her we have been a channel for a rich encounter with Christ, bring peace and a forgiving spirit. You have your own stories about effective witness.

I've observed how effectively many of you, my wife included, *demonstrate* love and truth to staff persons who so lovingly serve us. Jesus words are a warning, however, not to stumble into the pit of egocentric pride-- "look at me, look what I've written, look how I've helped others, look what I've given to missions,"-- but rather constitute a charge to give glory to God whose redemptive power comes through our hands, our smiles, our hugs, our words. As St. Francis said to be "an instrument of His peace." So, let's just rejoice that our names are written in the Lamb's book of life. I need this reminder; perhaps you do.

3. Rejoice over redemption of the lost

"Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ' Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ¶Luke 15:5-7 (note parables about a lost coin, and a lost son).
--

When we pastured in Kansas City Missouri many years ago, our church welcomed and befriended an electrician smitten with an odoriferous, and isolating, sweating malady. This lonely man found release from despair through the loving ministry of our church, and gratefully rewired the sanctuary as his gift of thanks. Rejoice, a lost sheep was found!

Let us rejoice in the Inner City Ministry of Fred Newkirk among the down and outer street people of Long Beach, rescuing drug addicts and other broken folks from the pit of despair and death. (Here's a picture of a couple hundred at a camp. Show picture)

Rejoice with me in the conversion of Francis Collins, a world renowned scientist, head of the genome project, who under the hand of God through faithful witnesses, including the writings of CS Lewis, moved from atheism to agnosticism to theism to saving faith in Jesus Christ, and is answering the scoffers in his book, *The Language of God*. Collins, like many other scientists, affirms that the God of creation is also the God of salvation. Rejoice, a lost son has come home. Rejoice in Isaiah's litany of praise: "you shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." (Isaiah 55:11-13)

4. Rejoice in times of sorrow

Said Jesus to his disciples on the way to the cross. "Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will **rejoice**, and no one will take away your joy." [John 16:21-23](#) TNIV

In anguish, Job avoided anger at God. In faith, instead, he exclaimed "though He slay me yet will I trust Him". He went beyond asking why. Enfolded in the arms of God Job exclaimed "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." I still recall my grief at the loss of my father when I was sixteen. It was God's presence, not philosophic answers then that renewed my faith and let me rejoice in my father's presence in life and in heaven. "I will see you again," says Jesus, who blends his tears with ours in times of grief at the loss of our loved ones. God also spoke peace to me through the thoughtful act of a Greenleaf miller, Mr Crew, who responded to my grief by taking me as his boy to a father/son banquet. How much we need each other when we walk through the shadow of death! This is true Christian community and we find it here at Friendsview, don't we. We can rejoice in times of sorrow.

5. Rejoice in shared kingdom efforts

Do you not say, 'There are still four months and *then* comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' John 4:35-37 (NKJV)

We witness sowing and reaping in our churches, at George Fox University, around the world, in China, Russia, Latin America. Revival in Burundi and Rwanda is a time of reaping seed sown earlier been by valiant missionaries and Christian leaders. It follows waves of remorse and guilt for terrible tribal warfare. A contrite spirit is always a condition for revival. Must we suffer in order for this to occur in America?

Last week Marvin Mardock forwarded this information about China. "According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, ten thousand Chinese become Christians every day. That's 70,000 a week. At the time of the Communist takeover in 1949, there were 4 million Christians in China. Today, there are an estimated 111 million. Thanks, Marvin,

Right now in Europe and North America we are experiencing a time of planting in soil made barren by two generations of unbelief, prosperity, and imperial burdens. It requires patience, prayer, faith, insight, and hard work to make such soil arable. We can rejoice that although efforts to improve the soil and plant the Gospel may not bear fruit in our lifetime, they will bear fruit!. We can rejoice that others will reap where we have sown. Sowing and harvesting are both occurring. Praise God!

"Again, I say, rejoice!" In a time of silence before our leader conducts our community praise and prayer time, let's engage in personal reflection. Ask the Lord to lift you out of the doldrums and let your heart rejoice, whether in the midst of adversity, active witness, redemptive harvest, sorrow, or experiences of sowing and reaping.

January: looking back, forward. A mix of sadness, joy, and hope

Friendsview mid-week meeting, January 2, 2008

Doorway Month

Ah, January is the doorway month,
signifying to us new beginnings.
As, mythically, two-headed Janus shows,
getting started can be quite perplexing,
directions are neither easily understood--
nor effortlessly followed. Wisdom requires
looking back as well as looking forward,
for motivations can be very tricky:
am I tenacious or just plain pigheaded?
socially concerned or power hungry?
Does the path I've followed hitherto
truly take me where I ought to go?
Yes, January is the doorway month.

Alone

It's not too difficult to be alone
nestled in a niche of solitude
within secure, well-tested, circles
of family, friends, and neighbors
(circumferences of love).
They offer space; they set the mood
and place to be oneself, creatively,
dependably, authentically.

At other times it's hard as stone
to be alone. Stormy circumstance
can breach peripheries of soul,
turning customary paths to ice.
Yes, it can be chilling to the bone
to be alone, chaotically alone.

At such frigid times a friendly touch
becomes a message from Above;
and an encouraging word
from one true friend may suffice
to trigger an Epiphany so strong
it rights the wrong, dispels the gloom,
ends turmoil, enables one to stand
alone, but no longer lonely!

(from *Let the Spirit Soar*)

About New Year Advent reflections

Eastern Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas January 7, so enter with me into their joy in honoring the Incarnation at the beginning of the year. We don't need tinsel and trees, but hearts and minds open to the wonder of God's gracious gift to the world. Historically the twelve days of Christmas followed the birth. In folksong "On the eighth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me Eight maids a-milking" which allegorists insist refers to the Beatitudes. It makes more sense to recall that on the 8th day Mary and Joseph took the baby to the temple. That could be about now, Jan. 2. (poems mostly from *Look Closely at the Child*)

Pondering the Incarnation

The shepherds

what sort of ponderings went on in their minds in the weeks and months that followed Jesus birth?

“Terror and Glory” (LCC p. 20)

Angels have a way of appearing
unexpectedly to people who tend
their tasks diligently, accepting
inconveniences and discomforts
as conditions of responsibility,

who overcome routine's tedium
by easy conversation, which belies
private reflections and a shared
but unarticulated wonder
at the mysteries of the night.

People who hear God's news are not
preoccupied by fickleness of sheep
or problems of forage and predation.
Common tasks instead are windows
on the world's terror and its glory.

And when such ordinary people
overcome the terror of God's touch
to test at Bethlehem this glory,
they find angelic revelations true:
humanity's Savior has been born.

Anna

Old church widow woman,
osteoporotic octogenarian
puttering about the premises
hunched over and hardly noticed,
attending every temple function,
doing those essential small tasks
that are wrapped unremarked
in long custom and tradition.
Largely taken for granted
and unobserved was she,
like a frayed and faded altar cloth.

Not wholly unobserved, however,
not wholly unnoticed, I must add.
For Anna had this tenacious, and
(as one generation told another,
eccentric) habit of reading signs
as right for the Messiah
and exhorting folk to prepare
for the new age Isaiah foretold.
A bit of a pest, people thought, one
to be put up with in deference
to her distinguished family
and her advanced years.

But when this long praying woman
held in her stiff and bony arms
Mary's child, and said "this is the one,
Jesus is our Messiah," then people
listened, they saw, they believed.
After that they referred to Anna
not as hunched old church woman,
but by her rightful title, prophet.

Simeon

Pleasant, but simple, they said of Simeon,
not in touch with things, too spiritual.
He's always hobbling happily about
talking to himself, or praying maybe.
Oh, sure, he's friendly, showing up
unpredictably as the Spirit moves.
He will discuss history or theology
with anyone, anytime, anywhere,
quoting Bible verses from memory
and gesticulating with his cane.
In Simeon hope bubbles joyously,
like a brook in springtime.
A stooped, smiling, old codger
with sparkling eyes of a child.

That's what they said about Simeon
until he showed up at the temple

the day Mary and Joseph brought
baby Jesus. Then the old man's eyes
danced, his face flushed in ecstasy,
and his voice got strong. Lifting Jesus
high above his head he said to Mary
and to Joseph and to all the rest:
"I see Israel's glory here, this child
will be the Gentiles' light,
the world's salvation.
Now I die in peace."

Later, remembering Simeon,
they said, oh yes, he's that cheerful
old saint who held the baby Jesus
in the temple that momentous day,
and said, "here is your Messiah!"

The magi, their thoughts on the long trek home

Returning (p. 33)

"We've seen the Child! You were right,
Melchior. So were the ancient prophecies.
To think we discovered the Messiah!"
"And to think Divine Presence
chose a star, Caspar, to show us where
to find him, despite our muddled faith."
"Like Job said, God can loose Orion's cords,
can guide the Bear and its children.
He just borrowed one to herald Messiah."
"Like Job, I'm tongue-tied in divine Presence,

while the morning stars sang together
and all the angels shouted for joy."

"Reality surely does exceed imagination;
More stars and worlds exist than can be seen,
and Light is our key to understanding them.
"Yes, my friend, and more truth to be received
by human minds divinely enlightened
than what we ever dreamed of or imagined."

"Herod was like Nebuchadnesser, wasn't he?
Kill the scholars who can't or won't bend reality
to their whims. I'm glad we slipped away."

"Had we been smart like Daniel, and as daring,
we might have helped Herod face the future
peacefully. Did we jeopardize the Messiah?"

"Herod is jealous, insane, a schemer;
he would kill the Child. God clearly warned us
to get out. Joseph fled with the holy family, too."
"Really! They must have left before dawn, too.
Are they ahead of us? Will we meet in Babylon?
The solstice festival could honor Jesus' birth."

"No, they fled to Egypt; our gifts help them.
Daystar hides now in the west, but one day soon
we'll see this heavenly Light in the east arising."

The family on the long donkey trek to Egypt

Egypt, To and Fro (p.35)

Clip clop, clip clop,
Clip clop, clip clop,
clippity clip clip clop

plods the brown donkey
through the dark night.

Clip clop, clip clop,
Clip clop, clip clop,
clippity clip clip clop
plods the brown donkey
toward the dawn's light.

Tick tock, tick tock,
Tick tock, tick tock,
tickity tick tick tock
plod harried persons
through the dark night

Tick tock, tick tock,
Tick tock, tick tock,
tickity tick tick tock
God leads the faithful
toward the dawn's light.

The two year exile in Egypt

"One Egyptian Night" (p. 28)

Mary, I've got news for you,
we can return home.

Herod is dead.

Joseph, that is good news,
we've been gone so long.

Are you sure?
About Herod? Yes, tonight
an angel of the Lord
confirmed it.
Where shall we live?
Nazareth perhaps.
Oh, why Nazareth?
Archelaus may be okay,
but I'd rather keep
our distance.
To protect Jesus?
Sure, our special child.
And God's special child. . . .
It's such an awesome,
joyful trust.
I'll carpenter again,
In a few years Jesus
can help me!
Joseph, I've got news for you.
Oh, what is it?
I'm pregnant, Joseph.
Are you sure?
Sure I'm sure,
No angelic voice needed
to confirm this!
What good news!
Jesus needs brothers

and sisters.
And we need other children.
I love you, Mary!
I love you, Joseph!

The rest of us

Cut from the Mountain (p. 62)

Look closely at the Child.
Bethlehem's baby, snuggling
close to Mary, is a stone
cut from God's mountain,
rolling down through time.
Look back across millennia
through Daniel's eyes.
Envision the truth-crushing
of empires carefully crafted
out of clay, out of bronze
and silver-- old nations,
recent and current ones,
corrupt ones, decent ones.
Even golden Babylons
cannot stay God's power
to destroy and to redeem.
See Christ as the stone
cut from God's mountain
rolling down through time,
establishing a Kingdom
that stands forever.

"Let There Be Light!"

(from *Heavenly Fire*, p.154)

God said, "let there be Light!"
and from this space/time word,
in a billion billionth of a second,
the cosmos burst forth and packed
dark nothingness with bright energy
configured into star-filled galaxies,
in one of which (at least) a small planet
swarmed with living creatures, including
humanity stamped with divine likeness,
intelligent, purposeful, testing the boundaries
of freedom to be co-creators with God.
The recorded struggle reveals a mixture
of good and evil, the joyous and the tragic.

Again God said, "Let there be Light!"
and through the womb of a woman
in an obscure Mediterranean village
a Child burst into our space/time world.
God's word made flesh dwelt among us.
We name this word Jesus, whose brightness
dispels the darkness of human sin
and portends a cosmos resplendent
with unimaginable glory as we creatures,
crafted in the divine image, choose
to build by the Creator's blueprint.
Does this Word, this Light, still shine?
Sure it does! Oh, yes! Yes! Yes!

Receiving the Scriptural message: The Word Became Flesh

John 1-14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only [Son], who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (NIV)

Prayer: to be like John, witness to the Light

Blessed are the Peacemakers

Friendsview, mid-week meeting, January 28, 2009

My friends, hear what Jesus said to his disciples, and by his Spirit speaks to us today. I read from Matthew 5.

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
- Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
- Blessed are the **peacemakers**, for they will be called children of God.
- Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

It's clear Jesus wants us to be like salt to preserve life, to make it palatable; to be like light, showing paths to the good life. Tonight we focus on this beatitude, "Blessed are the peacemakers. A Latin term *pacificari* literally means to make peace. A "pacifist" is one who makes peace. Does this word throw up a red flag? Do you think pacifism only refers to refusing military service? If so, this illustrates how meanings get bungled when words are simple but implications complex.

Consider a more inclusive approach. If you reconcile quarreling neighbors or family members, aren't you a peacemaker—a pacifist? Sure. If you legislate or vote for justice, isn't that pacifism? Sure. And if you proclaim God's grace in such a way that a penitent sinner finds forgiveness aren't you making peace? Of course. If you help a hurting neighbor, aren't you a peacemaker? If persons acting with your prayerful and financial support negotiate a settlement between Israel and Palestine? Yes!

It's easier to apply Jesus' words to interpersonal rather than to international relationships, but Jesus doesn't draw a line between private and public peacemaking. Jesus didn't make peacemaking easy for us. He didn't say, oh, well, my teachings don't apply to the Holy Land, or the Beatitudes don't apply until Jesus returns. He didn't limit neighbors to folk in our town or nation. Fortunately, Jesus did offer us his Spirit—to be with us forever.

A couple Sundays ago some of us watched Rich Swingle's one-man dramatic portrayal of how John Woolman. This 18th century New Jersey tailor's quiet but tenacious faith in Jesus stirred Quaker and then Christian consciences a long way toward ending slavery. Woolman followed Jesus' beatitudes, and that's why he became exemplary. Consider his character.

- * He was poor in spirit, humble, self-effacing.
- He demonstrated empathy, mourning over the pain of others.
- So meekly did he assert his convictions that even slave owners knew it was God's spirit rather than Woolman's that touched their consciences.
- A hunger for righteousness led him to act on principles, not just talk about them.
- He was merciful and compassionate to everyone, and to God's creatures.
- In purity of heart he saw God, and the kingdom God wants on earth as in heaven.

So, he became a peacemaker and suffered for it. But he served as salt in a tasteless culture and light to a dark world. The jewels in his heavenly crown are thousands of persons lifted from bondage, thousands of persons made sensitive to how justice fosters peace. A nation willing to accept pluralism. A bi-racial president of the United States.

Three principles guide our peacemaking: follow Jesus, bear the cross, and wear the crown.

First, to be a peacemaker means following Jesus.

It means sharing widely the good news of God's grace to family and friends. It means making Jesus' prayer to God our own: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as in heaven." It means loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and neighbor as oneself. It means holding to a single standard of truth ("let your yes be yes and your no, no"). Following Jesus means demonstrating compassion-- clothing and feeding the destitute and the damaged. It means cherishing children and protecting them from exploitation.

Following Jesus means acknowledging that God has made of one blood all persons— we are all kinfolk, whatever our skin color, gender, physical shape, nationality, or language. Jesus calls us his friends rather than servants because we know his agenda.

Second, to be a peacemaker means bearing the cross. Bearing the cross does mean suffering loss because of commitment to Jesus Christ. It hurts to be ridiculed or smugly patronized for being a zealous Christian. To bear the cross means to endure subtle cynical cultural pressure to scrap your faith and get on with “the real world.” Cross bearing for scholars currently means coping with a torrent of atheistic clamor, indulged by a hedonistic culture.

More importantly, to bear the cross means sweating out one’s own Golgotha, anguishing about how to confront evil without using evil means to do so. To bind up broken bodies, broken hearts, broken families, broken communities, broken nations--and not get burned out doing so. For us retired folks cross-bearing includes support for peacemaking ventures, like missionary, medical and service agencies teams, groups such as Christian Peacemakers, Mennonite Service Committee, World Vision, who bring compassionate healing to impoverished people. Cross bearing means being bold for peace, personally, socially, politically, without becoming self-righteous and censorious, combining a burning zeal for truth with an intense love for people.

Cross bearing means losing, if not your life, at least some dreams for the peaceable kingdom where you live. In sorrow and anguish you may see only halting steps toward peace in complex situations like entrenched African tribalism, inner-city gang chaos, drug entrapment of family members, economically depressed places. “Darkness at noon” may mark our family circle, our community, our nation. Sometimes evil taunts us. We feel its greedy thorns in our minds, its spears in our hearts. Drained of self we can only cling to God and cry out with Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. . . . I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

If you follow Jesus you bear the cross. Remember the old hymn, “Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free? . . . no, there’s a cross for everyone, and there’s a cross

for me. Fortunately, Jesus has not left us alone. The Spirit Jesus sends enables us to bear the cross. The cross isn't God's final word, resurrection is. Thus my third point.

Third, to be a peacemaker means wearing the crown.

Paul wrote to Timothy: "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day --and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:8)

To have a clear conscience lifts a heavy burden doesn't it? Doing right even if we suffer brings joyous unity with our Lord Jesus Christ and with saints past and present, Woolman included. Beauty marks the road of holiness. The creation glows before our eyes when we express love toward God, toward neighbors, and to earth's creatures, when we work for peace among nations—including Abraham's quarreling children. The universe, as Paul said, groans under a burden of human sin, awaiting redemption. And then comes awards day, when God says, "well done, good and faithful servants, enter into my joy!" Having glimpsed the New Jerusalem, excitement increases with a promise of a cosmos renewed in righteousness- and our continued presence in it. No more tears, no more sorrow. Such is the resurrection promise. This is our guiding light. Do you wish to be a peacemaker? Do so in the strength and wisdom of God's spirit, valiant for Truth. Follow Jesus. Bear the cross. Wear the crown.

Teach us Lord

Teach us, Lord, your ways of peace.

Within the home direct our hands,
our words, O Christ of Galilee.

Let our home heed your command
to love--a kingdom province be.

Teach us not to build on sand
but to build on rock faithfully.

From all fears give full release,
in your truth, by grace, we stand:

teach us, Lord, your ways of peace.

Teach us, Lord, your ways of peace.

At work and in the marketplace,
where money is exchanged, and speech
and goods, let us see your face.

May we be fair, Lord, each to each.

Let love leave everywhere a trace
of Golgotha. May justice reach
to everyone so wars may cease
and we are one, by your grace.

Teach us, Lord, your ways of peace.

Teach us, Lord, your ways of peace,
within the structures of the state
in which we share a common life.

From lies and prejudice and hate,
from tyrannies of left and right
deliver us. Teach us to await
love's sure victory over strife,
to labor so that wars may cease.

Your kingdom in our midst create.

Teach us, Lord, your ways of peace.

Teach us, Lord, your ways of peace
within the church: for this we pray.

Together we will truly bring
our lives to you. Lord, lead the way.
O Christ, be prophet, priest and king,

so once again the world may say
'they really love each other'. Sing,
yes, sing with us of love's increase,
the end of war, of your new day.
Teach us, Lord, your ways of peace.
(from *Heavenly Fire*)

Friends, in our prayer time let's include prayer for all those persons in Palestine, in Israel,
and elsewhere, who seek paths of peace in this beleaguered land.

"The Thing with Feathers"

Friendsview, mid-week meeting. May 6, 2009

(adapted from *The Sacred Ordinary*)

Poet Emily Dickinson wrote:

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without the words
and never stops at all.
And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.
I've heard it in the chilliest land
And on the strangest sea,
Yet never in extremity
It asked a crumb of me.

Collected Poems (Courage Classics, 1991, p. 100)

Our text is from Paul's second epistle to the Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 16-17 (NIV):

"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement *and good hope*, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. Faith in Christ is ground for *a good hope*."

What is hope, this thing with feathers, that perches in the soul? That quality for which faith in Christ is the ground? An old hymn says, "My hope is built on Jesus' blood and righteousness".

1. *Hope is a kind of prayer without words.* It is a yearning that spans the gap:

between what we have now and what we may acquire,
between what we know now and what we will learn,

between what our circumstances are now and what they may become,
between where we are spiritually now and where we will be,
between who we are now and who we may become.

2. Hope is fear flipped over to catch God's Light.

Hope has a dark side, which is fear, just as love has its dark side, which is hate, and faith its dark side, which is doubt. When fear and hate and doubt prevail, the result is despair. When hope, love, and faith triumph the result is joy. Hope is breakfast time for the soul! Life spreads out ahead of us at the dawning of the day-- luminous, full of excitement, danger, risk, maybe catastrophe, but mostly of promise. Hope trusts the Light of Christ to overcome darkness.

3. Hope means trusting the power of God's Spirit to bring about the good.

Acknowledging ignorance, hope trusts the Spirit to teach truth. Admitting weakness, hope turns to God, and to God's people, for help. Confessing sin, hope accepts God's forgiveness and God's sanctifying power. Hope believes God has a better way for people to live than in political, economic, or psychological confusion. Hope gives courage to find that better way. Hope makes us eager to remedy the misery that ignorance, weakness, and sin inflict on others-- and on ourselves. Hope lets us see God's Kingdom present now, as the Divine milieu in which we have our present as well as future being. Hope inspires us eagerly to heed God's signals through sense, reason, and intuition. We can learn from sheep dogs.
(trials next week at Scio, OR)

Sheep Dogs Trials

See how eagerly they obey the shepherd's voice,
racing to fetch sheep from a distant field,
to bring them through designated gates, and,
within time limits, into a pen, upon which
the master shuts the gate, enfolding the flock.

If the master calls "lay by!" they crouch down to avoid
frightening the sheep. "Away" and "come-by" tell them

to circle the flock. "Get back!" settles spooked ones.
How well they've learned shepherding nuances:
"stand", "take time," "lie down", "slow down", "in here",
"walk up," "that'll do!" Occasionally a rebel bolts
from the others and must be brought back,
oh so patiently, without scattering the flock.
May I as adeptly heed the Master's voice!
(from *Heavenly Fire*)

What are your hopes?

1. *General hopes.* Health, vitality, safety, food and shelter, pleasurable activities of work and recreation, adventure, knowledge and skills, mental lucidity. Being kept from foolish decisions, and from sinful thoughts and actions. Acceptance by others, recognition for who one is as well as for what one does. Courage to give and receive love. An acceptable level of interaction with family and neighbors. The ability to be alone and at peace with oneself. And supremely, the reassurance that, indeed, Christ is Savior and Lord. These are our general hopes.

2. *Family hopes.* Kinship as a community of faith. (Luther said the home, not some monastic cloister, is the sacred place). For young people, that homes they set up will be holy places, not arenas of conflict. For us older folks that our grandchildren and great grandchildren will know Christ as Savior and Lord, that they will love each other, that they will handle adversity with fortitude. That they will rise above hardships, to cherish learning and shun prejudice, to become effective members of society and loyal members of the Church. To accept themselves and others as children of God. That they will succumb neither to greed nor to despair. That those who have turned away from active faith may return to the Lord. Hope teaches us patience, like seagulls teaching their young to fly. At Yachats we had as neighbors a seagull pair: Gertrude and Joe. Here's my poem of tribute to them.

Gertrude and Joe build a nest on a neighbor's roof
and each year raise a nestling there. How patiently
this seagull couple together feed, protect,
and nurture each year's fuzzy bundle of feathers,
and in a few months teach it to fly off the roof
out onto the rocky shore. Sometimes older siblings
fly back home to visit, to pester mama for food,
and to check out the latest family addition.
We like to check out this family also.

"One generation commends your works to another;
they tell of your mighty acts," wrote the Psalmist.
Human nestlings need patient nurture, too.
Each year little ones enter our families,
our communities, our churches, our world.
Gertrude and Joe remind us how important it is
to nurture the "next generation" in love and truth,
so as young adults they can "fly off the roof"
and cope wisely on our world's rocky shores.

(from *Heavenly Fire*)

3. Social Hopes: The election of Barack Obama to the presidency has been a phenomenon of hope—his own, "audacious", he dubbed it-- and that of citizens. What are these social hopes? At best these: For a more just society in the United States, and elsewhere. That corporate and public leaders will demonstrate high moral standards. That tribal and ethnic violence will diminish. That nations will find stable social structures and engage in mutually beneficial sharing of global resources. A cynic says the stock market is moved either by greed or by fear. I say it's more effectively moved by honesty and hope. Hope is crucial for recovery from economic hard times. What do we hope for? That for-profit enterprise will be marked by integrity, not greed. That non-profit enterprises such as

Friendsview Retirement Community, schools, George Fox University, and service agencies, through good stewardship, will succeed in their ministries.

4. *Spiritual Hopes For Others.* That a spiritual awakening will occur. Our world suffers greatly from the effects of sin—specifically now from the sins of greed and lust for power. It's time to fear the Lord, for penitence, for acceptance of Divine pardon and empowerment. Pray for spiritual revival in our nation and in the world. May our churches present the gospel *in its fullness* through clear and forceful *proclamation*, loving covenant *fellowship*, and compassionate *service*. All three! Proclamation, fellowship, service.

5. *Personal Spiritual Hopes.* Assurance that the Gospel is not a hoax invented by well meaning but duped people. That I can affirm my Christian faith firmly and lovingly against open or subtle ridicule, against being deemed irrelevant, against academic *and* pop atheist militancy. That I won't succumb to subtle sins that blindside me, that I won't blow it morally. That I can trust a just God and I don't have to be the final judge of anyone. That truth is strong; that love works, that faith reveals the mystery of life. That heaven is something more not less than the life we now experience, that it isn't just a euphemism for quality of life, or for being memorialized beautifully. Pray about your personal spiritual hopes. Flip your fears over to receive God's Light!

Conclusion. Hope walks hand in hand with God like a child who knows she belongs and that she is cherished. Hope insists that Christian discipleship makes a lot of sense, that life's a good journey. As the artist of the human spirit, hope sustains personal faith and keeps society stable. When skeptics would close the book on life, hope opens it to a new chapter. Hope peps up a tired body and restores a jaded spirit. Hope smiles at a puzzled mind and says, "c'mon, you can find a solution!" Hope has sharp eyes. It sees the fallen, beaten, and broken ones and quickly gets stronger brother, love, to help pick them up.

And, when that last enemy, death, approaches, hope keeps faith right on course. Hope gives one strength to walk that last dark valley into the Light of Eternal Morning. In the words of an old hymn: "On Christ the solid rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand." Lord, I'm on the rock with you! And my friends here are, too!

The Day of the Lord

Friendsview midweek meeting, 8-5-09

(adapted from *The Sacred Ordinary*)

We call Sunday “the Lord’s day.” But the Biblical term “the day of the Lord?” has a deeper meaning, and it’s this: *in the course of life individually and corporately some times are especially momentous*. The Greek term *kairos* signifies divine visitation—a crucial testing time, when God says “listen up, find the right path!” Recently swarms of locusts hit Utah—“the worst ever”—like a fire—destroying everything green in their path! Only the seagulls were happy. This scourge happens every decade or so. I remember these “Mormon crickets” in Idaho as a youth, recall a crunchy sound as we drove over them! Hear what the Bible says about the “day of the Lord.”

Joel used a locust invasion to depict the “day of the Lord.” The eighth plague against Pharaoh, ironically, now threatened Israel! Hear what the old prophet said:

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near — a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come.... Before them the land is like the Garden of Eden, but after them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them. . . . Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. (Joel 2: 1-3, 12-13)

Here’s what Peter wrote about the *ultimate* “day of the Lord”, compared to which interim troubled times like swarming grasshoppers and economic recessions pale in significance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and *hastening* the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, *strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish.* (2 Peter 3: 11-14. NRV)

Peter asks, “what sort of persons ought you to be?” and declares that *our faithfulness actually hastens* the coming of that day when the cosmos will be reconstructed for a redeemed people.

We’ll consider the Day of the Lord *first as judgment upon nations, then upon individuals, then as spiritual awakening, and finally as the wind up of earthly affairs at the return of the triumphant Lamb of God.* Keep before you Peter’s admonition to be found by the Lord at peace.

The Day of the Lord is judgment upon nations

Amos wrote: “Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light....?” Ezekiel (30:3) proclaimed that the day of the LORD is “a time of doom for the nations” (5:20). Well, for most of our adult life *our world* has teetered on the brink of disaster. Thomas Merton perceptively articulated the significance of our whole post-atomic bomb era. He writes:

We are living in the greatest revolution in history—a huge spontaneous upheaval of the entire human race. . . a deep elemental boiling over of all the inner contradictions that have ever been in man, a revelation of the chaotic forces inside everybody. . . . All the inner force of man is boiling and bursting out, the good together with the evil, the good poisoned by evil and fighting it, the evil pretending to be good and revealing itself in the most dreadful crimes, justified and rationalized

by the purest and most innocent intentions... And so we fear to recognize our *kairos* and accept it. (*Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Doubleday Image Books, 1968, p, 67)

With Merton, let us acknowledge *our* Day of the Lord. Let penitence replace arrogance as we sing, "God Bless America." Let's acknowledge the struggle between good and evil within our nation, as Christian compassion conflicts with arrogant selfishness, as concern for truth contends with cultural deceit.

This prayer poem voices concern for technology running amok.

Lord, it scares me what scientists are up to.
Like tinkering with DNA. Are they going to make
artificial people soon, designed for social slots?
Super athletes, super warriors, super nerds?
Clever devils? Ruthless rulers? Powerless peons?
Your will is supposed to be done on earth
as in heaven. Is this stuff on your agenda?
Seems to me it could be hell on earth.
Or am I missing something?
(*Prayers at Twilight*, Barclay Press, 2003)

But let's not wallow in gloom. Like recurring grasshopper plagues, it's been this way before. Nations fall, nations rise, God's word abides. What can we Americans learn from our dark times? From economic recession, an energy crisis, global warming, world hunger, personal and corporate crime, wasteful luxuries and vulgar art? *Let's* ask God how more faithfully we might witness kingdom values in our nation—integrity, compassion, honesty, good stewardship of the earth and its technologies. Let's offer troubled citizens hope and the peace of Christ. Our nation, too, is part of a world Jesus died to save. Lord, show us how to shine the light of truth amid dishonesty and to exhibit the leaven of compassionate love amid selfishness.

The Day of the Lord is judgment upon individuals

During momentous eras we, personally, stand at a bar of judgment, to check our pretenses and evasions, our complicity in that icy sea of sin that puts all ships in peril. When God's voice calls through the storm it's time to repent for sins committed, and for subtle sins of pride. Let the Lord burn away the fog of self-deception (yes, even we old folks can be self-deceived). May our day of visitation mean seeing ourselves as God sees us, and maybe as others do. It's a time to prostrate our selves before the Lord, as Joel said, to plead His grace, to open ourselves to a fresh baptism with the Holy Spirit. This poem expresses such contrition.

Confession

Lord, I understand confession
is good for the soul. So here it is.
For one thing, I talk too much:
adroitly shoving others aside
to gain center of attention.
I say and do dumb things;
I clown around and poke fun
at other folks-- a boorish critic.
Actually, I'm the one laughed at,
the wacky, bumbling one.
I'm disappointed in myself.
I'm concerned about my reputation,
So I scrounge for public approval
instead of seeking truth about myself.
Deliver me from stupidity, Lord,
so I won't feel ashamed anymore.
Forgive me. Heal me. Love me.
Help me to converse graciously

with neighbors and friends,

to love others, and myself,

with integrity. Amen

from Heavenly Fire)

The Day of the Lord is a spiritually awakening time for individuals and groups

Following America's civil war, penitence fostered spiritual and social reform. Christian colleges proliferated. Mission zeal flourished. Truth and love joined hands. After World War I. Herbert Hoover, a Newberg-nurtured boy, led the largest relief effort in history and set a pattern for social agencies to apply Jesus' call to be neighbor to ones in need, wherever they are. During the dark times of World War II, a Quaker economist, Kenneth Boulding wrote:

God is always redeeming His world, in ways that we often do not recognize, and out of the very depth of the misery of our time there will come a reawakening of His love in the hearts of millions of His prodigal children, a new springtime to the weary earth. Let us press forward to that time; let us do more, let us anticipate it in our own lives. . ."

--"The Practice of the Love of God." (William Penn lecture 1942 Phil. YM, p. 31)

After World War II and successor wars, morally quickened consciences affirmed common bonds among nations, so the Berlin wall crumbled, colonial despotism diminished, the cold war thawed. And, wonder of wonders, racial equality has been affirmed--what a remarkable turn-around in our life-time! A nuclear holocaust is held in check by international accords. Poison gas at Hanford is being destroyed. Hutu and Tutsi Christians in Africa transcend horrendous inter-tribalism violence to affirm a common humanity. Does Jesus' summons to pray for enemies apply to *other* countries? Limiting love to one's nation can be even more threatening than limiting ethical responsibility to one's tribe or language group. If North Korea and Iran are national enemies, shouldn't we pray for them like Jesus told us to? Let's pray that national leaders find paths to peace and justice, that trade and sports events replace warring competition. In current economic hard times we do witness increasing neighborliness. Community gardens flourish. Officials seek ways to

provide better health care. On Sunday's we pray, "thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." May our lives on earth be guided by this exhortation. That's important in *our* day of darkness, because moral standards and applications need to be re-established on heavenly principles. We pray that the church will be renewed and will draw wayward one's into it, that younger generations recover awe before the Almighty and follow Jesus as Lord. This poem expresses that yearning:

When I was young we kids were afraid of hell.
Now, it seems, young folks are afraid of heaven.
They can't imagine anything more exciting
than their affluent life style. Skiing every Sunday.
Shopping at the mall. TV celebrity shows.
Making scads of money, getting stock options.
They don't fear you, Lord, they ignore you.
Maybe a depression would do them good.
Or a service stint in Somalia. I know, Lord,
when you're young heaven talk is taboo,
too gloomy, too threatening. Was for me once.
But I wish they would learn soon that fear
of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

-from *Prayers at Twilight*

The Day of the Lord signifies the end of earthly time and the onset of eternity.

Today's Scripture readings envision a wrap up of earthly existence and renewed righteousness. For individuals, death marks transition from earth to heaven. So any *present* crisis helps us live more faithfully and to acknowledge the eternal significance of life with Christ. Loss, tragedy, trials, and death of others alert us to this truth. Paired prayers in this poem, "George and Bonnie" illustrate the point.

George speaks first:

Lord, there's this waitress at the diner
where I eat. Bonnie is big and brassy,
doesn't take any guff. She dyes her hair red
and her lips are puckered up from smoking,
but she has a good heart. Has coffee with me
when things are slow. Lonesome. Her hubby
beat her up and fled to Mexico years ago
and left her with this handicapped son to raise.
Well, Billy drowned in the river last week.
Sad. So I hugged her today and said, honey,
in heaven Jesus will make Billy whole
in his mind as well as in his body.
She needs you, now, Lord.

Bonnie speaks next:

God, there's this old guy who shuffles in most days
about four. George wears high pocket pants,
an old plaid shirt and red suspenders. He orders
a hot dinner sandwich and coffee. Drools a bit.
Had a stroke I imagine. Lonesome. Used to play
catch with Billy sometimes out behind the diner.
After Billy drowned, the guy said he'd pray for me.
Never had anyone talk to me like that before;
so I kissed the old codger on the forehead
and said, well dearie it can't hurt me none.
And now I learn the old guy is dead. So here I am,

praying best I know how. Mostly I want to know,

Lord, has George found Billy yet.

-from *Prayers at Twilight*

The Day of the Lord signifies cosmic reconstruction

The great Day of the Lord signals a renewal of the earth itself, indeed, re-creation of the cosmos. A Jesuit anthropologist, Teilhard de Chardin, pictures how things build up to climax in cosmic history:

One day, the Gospel tells us, the tension gradually accumulating between humanity and God will touch the limits prescribed by the possibilities of the world. And then will come the end. Then the presence of Christ, which has been silently accruing in things, will suddenly be revealed—like a flash of light from pole to pole. . . . Like lightning, like a conflagration, like a flood, the attraction exerted by the Son of Man will lay hold of all the whirling elements in the universe as to reunite them or subject them to his body. (*The Divine Milieu*. New York: Harper & Row, 1960, pp. 152-53)

Jesus' resurrection assures us we'll have a part in the new creation. This steadies us to live faithfully in Jesus' kingdom *now*. We've glimpsed God's blueprint of the future, and it's great!

Conclusion

Divine visitation produces awe. We clap hand to mouth, like Job of old, and listen to what God says. We heed Zephaniah's words: "Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is at hand; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice, he has consecrated his guests". (Zephaniah 1:7).

I like that! The Day of the Lord is more than judgment. You and I are invited to be God's guests! To sit at His table, to sleep in His house. From ashes of disaster comes new growth.

From chaos, order; from failure, success, from death, life. In Christ we triumph over adversity. My dear friends, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Could this be your day of visitation? If so, find forgiveness! Assurance! Peace! Joy! As an early Christian wrote: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." (Hebrews. 3:15) Don't brush aside the Spirit. Pray, rather, "speak, Lord, I'm listening. Renew a right spirit within me." Maybe you can resonate with the poignant plea in this old-timer's prayer.

Lord, many years ago you came to me
in a conversion experience so vivid
it's recalled now with tears of joy.
"I have decided to follow Jesus," I sang,
"no turning back, no turning back!"
It's still the song of my soul.
But I don't feel very spiritual now.
Concerns about property and health
nag at me. Is there some vision
of heaven, some touch of your Spirit
to bless these twilight years?
A heavenly touch would help, Lord.

(Prayers at Twilight)

Yes, Lord, a heavenly touch would help!

Hallowe'en

Friendsview Mid-week meeting Oct 28, 2009

(adapted from *The Sacred Ordinary*)

Scripture Text: Ephesians 2:8-10 (NRSV here and in following texts)

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Halloween is coming. Saturday. Time to stock up on corn candy! Why do we celebrate it?" Well, many centuries ago Christians began setting aside days to celebrate their spiritual heritage by honoring exemplary followers of Jesus, martyrs like that young mother Perpetua after whom an Oregon cape is named, and heroes of the faith like Augustine and Patrick. Well, there got to be so many saints that the holidays cluttered the calendar and work schedules. So in the eighth century Pope Leo III initiated a practice of setting aside *one* special day each year to honor them all. "All Saints Day." November 1. (A wise move: beatified saints now number more than 10,000!). A couple centuries later, Odilo, a French monk, peacemaker and exemplary friend of the poor, set aside November 2 as an "All *Souls* day" to honor *all* loved ones who had entered heaven. The word "hallow" is like our word 'holy', so Halloween is the evening before the special holy day.

What about the weird stuff: "trick or treat" threats, scary costumes, witches on broomsticks, impish mischief? Well, pope Leo and monk Odilo chose that time of the year when pagans celebrated the end of harvest and the beginning of a new year. In a bold stroke of cultural adaptation, an ancient pagan festival filled with fear of the underworld was transformed into a celebration of Christ's triumph over malicious powers- real and imagined. (Once people know that "things that go bump in the night" don't exist or can be rendered harmless, they can poke fun at them). So rituals were developed to dramatize how Christ overcomes the darkness that plagued superstitious pagans, witnessed by martyrs, and by ordinary folks triumphant in heaven. In playful drama demons symbolically ran wild in the darkening night (in our youth the script called for tipping over

the neighbor's privy—a practice parents frowned on); but in the morning *Jesus Christ's sacrificial death and life-giving resurrection triumphs over everything evil, false, and ugly, and blesses joyous believers with what's good, true and beautiful.*

Symbolically in Hallowe'en rituals Satan's tricks are foiled by Jesus' treats. Threats of violence are met and overcome by generous deeds of love. On Halloween we say "good riddance!" to evil and we honor all who have triumphed over demonic power, death, hell, and the grave.

3 All Saints Day has gotten so secularized that the significant and triumphant part of the holiday has been neglected. Witches and weird costumes are more easily merchandized than white robes and dragon-slaying saints. The evening is celebrated more than the morning. We mustn't let Wiccans re-paganize Odilo's day, nor merchants skew its message! On Saturday let's ponder evil forces around us, not ghosts hiding in haunted houses, not only obviously demonic evils like sadistic sexual abuse of children, but also colorfully costumed demons that corrupt culture, commerce, and governance. Ponder also how subtly Satan's minions can lurk *in the dark side of our egos*—Satan disguised as an angel of light-- and ask God to lavish healing grace upon us, to deliver us from evil, whether these are evils from without or evils from within, to show through us the triumph of the Cross and the Resurrection. Then on Sunday, Nov. 1, 2009, let's recall with gratitude *all* folks (famous or ordinary) who "fought the good fight" against demonic powers and with all the saints now sing "glory to the Lamb!"

In a way the church is partly to blame for perverting these ceremonies. Honoring the dead became such a big thing in the medieval church that bishops, more entrepreneurial than Biblical, devised a money-raising scheme based upon heroes of faith. They sold indulgences. You see, people knew their departed dead weren't nearly as holy as martyred saints. They also were taught that most folks faced heavy-handed purgatorial cleansing – years of it maybe-- before they could enter heaven. On All Souls' Day one might visualize a dear departed uncle being whipped by the angels month after month in a celestial woodshed to punish him for rascally deeds earth-side. It was a way to beat the hell out of him. But priests had a solution for distraught families: why grieve over such harsh punishment when for fifty bucks you could purchase an indulgence to shorten the

purgatorial sentence and speed errant uncle Joe through the pearly gates? How better show charity than by digging into your pockets to help some poor soul, sobbing on the brink of hell, to enter heaven with no more purgatorial delay? Such indulgences were possible, people were assured, because over the centuries saints had left such an enormous legacy of holiness that clergy could dole out *surplus merit* to morally challenged folks. One top salesman was Tetzel, who unctuously intoned this little advertising jingle: “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, so soon does a soul from purgatory spring.” Such a purchase was called an indulgence, and indulgences raised money for church building projects.

This money-raising scheme outraged a thoughtful monk, Martin Luther, and Tetzel’s jingle really ticked him off. In holy fury Luther penned and tacked on the Wittenburg church door 95 reasons why selling indulgences was an abomination in the sight of God. Number 86 reads:

“Why does not the Pope, whose riches are at this day more ample than those of the wealthiest of the wealthy, build the Basilica of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with that of poor believers?” (May be accessed through the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Internet, op. cit.)

The Reformation was born. So, on Hallowe’en let’s remember Leo, Odilo, and Luther, yes, and “telemarketer” Tetzel, and rejoice that we’re saved by grace, God’s gift. When on Saturday evening kids in kooky costumes call “trick or treat”, let’s just stuff goodies in their bags and rejoice with them that God sets us free from Satan’s tricks, whether cloaked in pagan darkness, academic degrees, or clerical robes. And thank Luther for recovering to the church a clear doctrine of God’s grace.

Hear again our Scripture text (Eph. 2:8-10):

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

Consider with me some Implications of the text

First, we are saved by grace through faith. Salvation is a gift. We can't earn it. There is no such thing as surplus merit available for anyone to dispense: minister, counselor, parent, spouse. Not even church martyrs like St. George. This was not George Fox, as my Baptist friends might think, although I'm ready to nominate him, but a Roman soldier under vicious Diocletian. He became a Christian and was beheaded for his faith. He became the legendary dragon slayer. In his way, George Fox was too, climbing Pendle Hill, legendary site of demons, to call people back to Christ. Think of the many Christians around the world recently who lost their lives by persecution. Heroes of faith have no extra holiness to bail out less spiritual folks. Sainly souls do inspire us; on occasion they may even kibitz over our shoulders and nudge us to be strong soldiers for Christ; but we can't borrow from their banked goodness, either for this life or the next.

Second, we're all called to good works. I said earlier we can't earn salvation; but we can, and must, follow the way of life God has prepared, a life of moral integrity and faithful witness. Christ leads all of us. There is no spiritual elite authorized and empowered to do Kingdom work so the rest of us can goof off. Martin Luther rightly called for a priesthood of believers, by which he meant that each of us is a priest—serving one's neighbor through the vocation with which he is called. His father was a blacksmith, Martin a professor. Whatever our vocation or avocation, we are called through our lives to love God and others. Luther insisted the home is the hallowed place, and celebrated it himself by marrying a nun, Catherine. The egghead theologian marveled at the beauty of physical love. When their first child was born he joyously washed and hung the diapers on the clothesline. Neighbors chuckled at this, but the former monk said, "let them laugh, the angels in heaven rejoice."

What we celebrate this weekend is the wonder at how God's grace infuses ordinary life: work, play, marriage, socializing. Homes and communities become sanctuaries for the Holy Spirit, places where God dwells with us, works with us, plays with us, loves with us, suffers with us, yes, dies with us, and shares resurrection with us.

Third, through grace we recover the divine image stamped upon us in creation. That image is to be spiritual beings, creative and holy in body and mind, loving God and neighbor and caring for the cosmos. The Kingdom life God has prepared for us pertains both to this life and the next. The Lord's prayer includes this phrase: "thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Did you notice where the comma went? Let's do it again: "thy will be done on earth (comma) as it is in heaven."

The apostle Paul, soon to lose his life for the Gospel and to become one of the first of the honored saints, offered young Timothy some good counsel. Here is what he wrote:

I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully. As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2Timothy 4:1—8)

The first Sunday in November is "Reformation Sunday", honoring that momentous time when the Church recovered its balance and affirmed the triumph of Christ over all the devils on earth or in hell. This year it coincides with "All Saints Day" It is said that in his spiritual struggle, Martin Luther the monk once threw an ink bottle at the devil who was taunting him? Did he hit or miss? I don't know, but I know what Luther found, and trusted: Christ Jesus, who didn't miss triumphing over evil, in Luther's time, and doesn't miss that victory now in Newberg on Hallowe'en, 2009. Let this weekend be a happy Hallowe'en, a thankful "All Saints day" a grateful Reformation Sunday, and a prayerful "All Souls' Day"! The next time all three festivals will occur together like this is 2015.

I conclude with words from Luther's hymn: "A Mighty Fortress is our God."

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us: we will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us. The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo! His doom is sure, one little word shall fell him. That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth; the Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with us sideth; let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill, God's truth abideth still, His Kingdom is forever. Amen!

Friendsview morning devotions, Feb 22-28, 2010

Note: This week's devotions consist of poems based upon Galatians 5: 22.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness."

Day One: "the fruit of the spirit is love. . ."

Scripture: Romans 13: 8 reads: "let no debt remain outstanding except. .. to love one another.

Love is such an easy word to say,
rolling resonantly off the tongue
as emotions surge and prompt the brain
to affirm somebody or some thing,
whether family, friend, art, or apple pie--
or whatever brings you satisfaction.
It seems that love will lend its intonation
so broadly that it is quite difficult
not to focus on wants instead of needs,
to move beyond aesthetics into ethics.
The call to love summons us to deeds:
to be the healing, serving, hands of God.
Will you display this Spirit-nurtured fruit,
today by demonstrating love for others?

(used in *Quaker Life*, 11/09)

PRAYER: Lord help us to be sensitive to the needs of others whom we meet today,
fellow residents, staff, townspeople, family, strangers. In Jesus name,
Amen.

Day Two: “the fruit of the spirit is joy...”

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 1: 8

“though you do not see him now... you are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy... .”

Happiness wants easy paths on which to walk.
But joy strides on roadways smooth or rough.
When life's path gets hard, joy just hangs tough
and clambers on and on. Joy doesn't balk
at howling winds, hot sun, or pelting rain.
Health, friends, family, tasks: these things
bless life's journey. Incredibly, joy sings
when hard trekking brings much pain.
Exult in the wonder and beauty of God's world.
Taste joy along life's path, whatever the terrain.
Celebrate this day with flags unfurled!
Sing for beauty of the earth, so heaven driven,
awaiting Christ's cosmic re-creation,
for us sinners gloriously forgiven!

Prayer: Lord, we rejoice in the beauty of creation, in the beauty of usefully engineered instruments and appliances, in the blessings of loved ones, in the wonder of salvation now, and in heaven. In Jesus' name,

Amen

Day Three: “the fruit of the spirit is peace. . .”

Scripture: Philippians 4: 6-7 “with thanksgiving present your requests to God.
And the peace of God . . will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

There is a “peace that passes understanding
down in my heart, down in my heart . .!”
so sang we children in a rhythmic lilt
so many years ago. It is still true!
When the blessed Holy Spirit guides,
turmoil ebbs and ceases within the soul,
graced by Gospel leaven and light
within our world of diverse and contending
tribes and tongues and ethnic groups.
Nourishing fruit comes from the tree of life
flourishing along that sparkling river
in the present and coming City of God,
and its leaves supply balm
for the healing of the nations.

Prayer: Lord we relax now in your peace. We pray that today we might become for
someone an instrument of that peace. In Jesus’ name,

Amen

Day Four: “the fruit of the spirit is patience. . .”

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1: 10-12 “We pray ... you may live a life worthy of the Lord. . . being strengthened So that you may have great endurance and patience...”

Frequently I find it difficult to wait,
when fussy folks slow down the queue,
when red-tape bogs down corporate tasks,
when sickness spoils well-crafted plans,
when people blithely spurn my advice
persisting rather in their judgments.
But the Lord is teaching me to wait.
Patience, I am learning, has rewards:
sweet as strawberries picked red-ripe
from a verdant garden and savored slowly
on some glorious summer morning.
That’s what it’s like when I admit
how patiently God waits for me.
Is that how it is with you?

Prayer: Lord help me relax now in your presence. I lay before you those things that try my patience, that bug me and make me crabby. Teach me today how better to cope with them, and empower me to do so. In Jesus’ name,

Amen

Day Five: “the fruit of the spirit is kindness. . .”

Scripture: Colossians 3: 12:

As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with. . .kindness,

A young man patiently holds open a door
for a somewhat tottery old couple.
Quick smiles are exchanged as they enter.
An octogenarian lady tutors a school-boy
learning to speak and write English.
A motorist stops for a stranded driver,
lends a phone, stays until help arrives.
Do these people love each other?
Not intimately, of course, not sacrificially.
They just demonstrate simple kindness,
a “good Samaritan” form of love.
Isn’t it praiseworthy that in everyday life
strangers unpretentiously heed Jesus’ call
to love ones neighbor as oneself!

Prayer: Lord, help us keep alert today for opportunities, graciously *and* unpretentiously,
simply to be kind to others, with words or smiles or helpful actions. In Jesus’ name,

Amen

Day Six: “the fruit of the spirit is goodness. . .”

Scripture: Ephesians 5: 8-9. “Live as children of the Light (for the fruit of that light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.”

As a virtue goodness gets a bad rap.
Who wants to be a “goody-goody”?
To be consensually but excitedly wicked
seems to confer coveted celebrity status,
providing handy—if lame-- excuses for folks
to engage in culturally acceptable sins.
The sweetness of this fruit, alas, turns sour
when Christians encrust its connotation
with superficial legalisms. Forgive us, Jesus!
But this virtue’s luscious taste haunts us.
We want *others* to be truthful, to be honest
to respect our bodies, minds and covenants.
Goodness makes the common life workable.
Shouldn’t we cherish this gift of the Spirit, too?

Prayer: Lord, may our actions today point people not to ourselves, but to you as the source of whatever actions are right, and true, and good. In Jesus’ name, Amen

Day Seven: the fruit of the spirit is faithfulness. . .”

Scripture: Proverbs 3: 3-4, “let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. [Sheep dog trials occur each May at Scio, Oregon, offering lessons in faithfulness]

See how eagerly they obey the shepherd’s voice,
racing to fetch sheep from a distant field,
to bring them through designated gates, and,
within time limits, into a pen, upon which
the master shuts the gate, enfolding the flock.
If the master calls “lay by!” they crouch down to avoid
frightening the sheep. “Away” and “come-by” tell them
to circle the flock. “Get back!” settles spooked ones.
How well they’ve learned shepherding nuances:
“stand”, “take time”, “lie down”, “slow down”, “in here”,
“walk up,” “that’ll do!” Occasionally a rebel bolts
from the others and must be brought back,
oh so patiently, without scattering the flock.
May I as adeptly heed the Master’s voice!
(from *Heavenly Fire*, Barclay Press, 2007)

Prayer: Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit may we be kept consistently faithful, unwavering in our Christian beliefs, consistent in action within the circles of family, friends, country, and the larger world community. In Jesus’ name.

Amen

Visions and Dreams

FVRC Mid-week meeting, March 17, 2010

Scripture text: Acts 2:16-18 (New International Version)

...this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¶ 'In the last days, God says, ¶I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¶ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, ¶and they will prophesy."

Introduction:

This text describes Pentecost--that wondrous day when Jesus' disciples received the promised baptism with the Holy Spirit—and the Kingdom of God was launched, cutting across cultural and linguistic barriers and enriching the world. We here today are beneficiaries of that vision as it was carried forth by faithful and discerning men and women across the centuries. The Church is the witnessing community to that vision.

One of these visionary persons is Patrick. Today is Saint Patrick's Day. We honor this one who had a vision of bringing Christ to the Irish. Born in Scotland about 386, as a sixteen year old Roman Britain from a Christian family Patrick was captured and sold by raiders to an Irish druid priest, as a slave to tend his flock of sheep. Patrick escaped to Britain six years later, matured as a very Spirit-led Christian. God gave him a vision of returning to Ireland to evangelize the pagans who had kidnapped and enslaved him- returning good for evil like Jesus said to do. Consequently he was commissioned by the Roman church to be an apostle to the Irish. He developed a pattern of traveling missionary-evangelists. Sometimes they worked singly, at other times in groups. Dubbed the Irish *peregrini* they evangelized Ireland, the Falkland Islands, Scotland, Germany, perhaps even Iceland. Irish monks established schools that through the dark ages preserved Christian and other manuscripts from the early centuries. There is a book, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, by Thomas Cahill, that appeals to the pride of Irish descendants, but does support its claims that key documents of the Greco-Roman world were thus preserved for posterity. Patrick

died March 17, 460—some 1650 years ago. Now the anniversary—St. Patrick’s Day-- is a major festival, with parades and bagpipes. The Shamrock festivals include wearing of the green. The shamrock is a three-headed clover Patrick used to explain the mystery of the trinity. Sometimes a good metaphor is better than pages of theological explanation.

The hymn we sang, “Be Thou My Vision,” honors that call to faithful Christian witness. (Written in the 8th century, it was translated from old Irish into English in 1905 by Mary Byrne, music provided by Eleanor Hull a few years later).

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.
2. Be Thou my Wisdom, Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee, Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

3. Be Thou my battle-shield, sword for my fight,
Be Thou my dignity, Thou my delight.
Thou my soul's shelter, Thou my high tower.
Raise Thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.
4. Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise;
Thou mine inheritance, now and always;
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my Treasure Thou art.

So much for Patrick’s vision as young person. Hear now his dreams as an old man. (From the *Confession of St. Patrick* , Christian Classics Ethereal Library.)

56. “Behold now I commend my soul to God who is most faithful and for whom I perform my mission in obscurity. . . may it never befall me to be separated by my God from his people whom he has won in this most remote land. I pray God that he gives me perseverance, and that he will deign that I should be a faithful witness for his sake right up to the time of my passing.’

As an old person this, too, is my dream: to be a faithful witness right up to the time of my passing. Is that your dream, too? I hope so.

A. What about our Visions?

In 1652 George Fox, nudged by the Spirit, climbed up Pendle Hill, in England, where he had a vision of a people to be gathered to the Lord. By the end of that century a hundred thousand people had been gathered by Fox and some sixty young itinerant evangelists into a vibrant community of faith. Hungry seekers became redeemed finders, zealous to follow Jesus, to be part of that peaceable kingdom envisioned so long ago by the prophet Isaiah and set in motion by Jesus. My Welsh ancestors were part of that community of faith. Some of yours were, too, perhaps. As a youth under the Spirit's nudging through local Friends elders, and especially pastor Milo Ross, I entered into Fox's vision and began a preaching- teaching writing ministry. One of my visions: that the college named after the 17th century Christian reformer would become a major force for Christian witness in the world, and that Quakers world-wide would recover the vitality of that original vision.

What have been your visions? For some of you Patrick, or Martin Luther, or John Calvin, or John Wesley, or Menno Simons, or Francis of Assisi, or Roger Williams may have been the visionary whose legacy you inherited, along with those fired-up apostles at Pentecost noted in our text. Or perhaps it was a local pastor, like Milo Ross for me? Or an evangelist like Billy Graham. Or a compassionate saint like Mother Theresa. How did such historic witnesses to the wonder and power of the Holy Spirit offer you a vision for your life? And how have you passed that vision on to others?

Let's now enter into silence before the Lord. In this silence remember and contemplate in gratitude those particular visionaries, now part of the church triumphant, through whom the Holy Spirit captured *your* mind and heart years ago and guided *you* on your appointed Christian journey.

B. What about our dreams?

Here is one for us oldsters: that the Holy Spirit will inspire our grandchildren and others of that generation, to escape the powerful clutches of cultural domination, to accept the fire of God's redeeming grace in their own lives, and then to join others of their generation to renew the Christian community of faith. To renew it both in the power of truth and in power of loving service. Dream with me that new visionaries on fire with the Holy Spirit will witness Christ's kingdom in word and deed in powerful and convincing ways. In

America, all over the world. Among the poor and oppressed. Among the affluent and entrapped. Among the complacent middle class. Among persons everywhere.

Friends, some young folks *are* answering our dreams. Some by showing integrity in their jobs, whether teaching school or roofing houses. Some by faithful evangelistic witness to their friends. Others by missionary work amongst tribal people—translating the Bible or installing sand filters to provide clean water. Here's an inspiring—and challenging--example: In the current issue of *Mission Frontiers* (March-April, 2010) is an article by Ted Dekker and Carl Medearis entitled, "Loving Bin Laden—what does Jesus expect us to do?" These earnest Christians describe their meetings with Hezbollah and other radical Muslims, and with Israelis, with whom they pondered the words of Jesus accepted by Christians, Jews and Muslims, "love your neighbor as yourself, "and "love your enemies". Wow! What a Pentecostal vision! It may not make much difference immediately in the war-minded world, but such prophetic boldness will do more than military might in the long run to prevent a century of catastrophic war amongst contending faiths. The vision of John the revelator inspired these courageous Christian peacemakers. John notes faithful followers of Jesus—from every social affinity circle: "tribe, and language and people and nation" (5:9), "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony," writes John (12: 11). Christ's faithful followers. "Blessed are the peacemakers" says our captain, Jesus, "for they will inherit the earth." (Matt. 5: 9)

The Holy Spirit didn't close up shop after sending forth Patrick, Francis, Calvin, Luther, Menno Simons, George Fox, John Wesley, Billy Graham and your pastoral nurturers. Pentecost continues in the hearts of George Fox students across the street, and in young folks all around the world. In faith, then, we oldsters dream of a spiritual reformation sweeping our nation and our world. Friends, it has begun. The vision of a people to be gathered to the Lord *is* being rekindled in the hearts of many youth. Thanks be to God!

Trees as Icons

Friendsview, mid-week meeting, Feb. 9, 2011

Scripture: Psalm 1

Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.

That person **is like a tree**
planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.

A related text: "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon." Psalm 92:12 (NIV)

Introduction

Wood is such a part of lives—such a basic building utility, source of good food like apples, pears, filberts-- that we easily take the source—trees—for granted. In the Bible trees are good icons, not pagan idols, No; they are creation substances *through* which God sustains us, and reaches us--- call them angels clothed in bark. Consider their witness to the Creator

- 1) as an example of strength,
- 2) as a consecrated place,
- 3) as a place to meet Jesus,
- 4) as a symbol of God's redemption, personal and cosmic. (Their iconic story begins in Genesis and concludes in the book of Revelation).

As we consider each of these ways trees reveal truth, rummage about in your brain for how certain trees in your life served to convey God's truth to you. Were icons for you.

1. The tree as example of strength

There are hundreds of oak species around the world. Historically, from Greeks attributing oak-like strength to Zeus, to current parlance, "sturdy as oak," that species has been and continues to be a symbol of strength—like the animal analog—"strong as an ox." The oak not only signifies physical prowess but also strength of character. I remember as a lad wrapping my hands around my father's biceps and admiring his physical strength; but more importantly I remember his strong character—no moral shortcuts—and at his memorial they said of papa, "he was a good man whose steps were ordered of the Lord". He was like a tree planted by streams of water. Perhaps some of you, as do we, drive along local roads in the countryside, among other sights admiring oaks growing in fields and along roadways. Have you observed how some stand alone--beautifully symmetrical-- at other times in a cluster community-- while others patiently cope with mutilation by utility companies more eager to protect transmission lines than verdant beauty? Like strong people who demonstrate the beauty of grace-shaped, Spirit-filled lives. Even in the aging process.

2. The tree as a special place

Recall some special trees in your life. I picture a catalpa tree in our Pleasant Ridge yard in Idaho. Under its branches we played croquet with neighbor kids. We buried our beloved dog Ted beneath it. I recall, also, a catalpa tree in the nearby schoolyard that we children climbed at recess time, to sit in its spacious lap. Someone had planted it years earlier when an acre notched out of the homestead our parents bought had been dedicated for a public school. The building is still there. In what is now a daycare center migrant children climb that special tree like my school buddies and I did eighty years ago. The redwoods I provided for the campus a half century ago mark George Fox as a special place where under divine anointing I ministered for decades. Some stand along the path to the auditorium. They are special to me.

There is a Biblical model for the tree as a special place. In Hebron one still stands, 5000 years after God met with Abraham under its branches. It's where Abraham and Sarah received the angel of the Lord after laughing at promises of a son in their old age, but accepted the divine call to raise up a community of people obedient to the Lord. This father of nations built an altar there: a monument to God's covenant with humanity. (See Genesis 13: 18). God also met Moses there at the oak of Mamre. Joshua, following Moses, reaffirmed the Abrahamic covenant under this tree. Hear what the Bible says. (Josh 24: 24-27) And the people said to Joshua,

"We will serve the LORD our God and obey him." On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. **26** And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up **there under the oak** near the holy place of the LORD. "See!" he said to all the people. "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God."

Some years ago the Russian Orthodox church built a monastery nearby to mark it as a special holy place for Christianity. That oak tree has been dead since 1995, but its twisted trunk testifies to its significance in human history. Maybe some you have been there. (As a side note: there is an organic farm "Oaks of Hebron" located near Hempstead, Texas).

An oak tree symbolizes a meeting place with God, a designated holy place-- an altar of commitment. So when next you check out an oak tree on our campus, or while driving around the countryside, reaffirm your devotion to the Lord—renew your covenant.

3. The Tree as a special place to meet Jesus

Our biblical model is Zaccheus, (Luke 19) scrambling up a sycamore tree to check out this Galilean teacher everyone talked about. This tree was probably a variety of fig—nothing special, just a handy ladder for a short guy with lots of gumption. You know "the rest of the story!" Spiritual transformation. There is a Sycamore Tree United Methodist church in Tennessee. It's motto: "a place to see Jesus" I like that! Check them out on the web. These Christians seem eager to live up to their motto.

My special tree is the pine, specifically the pines bordering Idaho's Payette Lake along side the conference grounds at Quaker Hill, in, a place where Jesus called to me one summer evening over seventy years ago and I left the altar in that rustic tabernacle to walk among the shore pines, full of joy, breathing in their sweet aroma.

The specific place isn't as important as the encounter. Maybe for you it's not a tree but some other identifiable special place where you met Jesus in a special way. Ponder now some special spot—or occasion—where, like Zacchaeus, Jesus invited you to jump down and meet with Him. A spot that marked a turning point in your life. Maybe your spiritual path has been more steady. In any case ponder now in silent prayer how in sundry times and places your path has been marked by rich experiences of Jesus' presence.

4.The tree as symbol of God's redemption, personal and cosmic.

The first book of the Bible shows Eden ruined through human disobedience. We live in that fractured world, and with our fore parents know the subtlety of sin—the curse of the fall. Scanning the news confirms this human condition daily. Whether the trees in the garden were apples and pears, or metaphors for the Creator's challenge to human obedience, we too have been barred from the garden of the Lord. We rejoice in Jesus, crucified upon a tree, who forgives our sins, and offers the Holy Spirit to sanctify and bring us back through the flaming sword to an Eden restored, first in our personal life, then in our communities, and at the end of this age in a redeemed cosmos—a heavenly Eden. The final book in the Bible gives us a verdant picture of Eden restored. I read from Rev.22:1-3 (NIV ©2010.)

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.

God is gathering us, "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" as John so perceptively puts it. We witness now, in part, the healing leaves of God's grace in our own lives, and in the lives of others who long for and work for God's will to prevail—on earth as

in heaven. Singly and together we labor toward that end. Gratefully we acknowledge how creation sustains life and will continue to do so in heaven. We savor the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. With wonder and awe we look forward to that day of cosmic restoration. New heavens and new earth. As the ancient prophet Isaiah envisioned “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (11:9 KJV)

Finding Joy

Friendsview Mid-week meeting May 25, 2011

What is Joy?

- *spiritual elation, related to, but not dependent upon external circumstances.
- *emotional exuberance accompanying satisfying experiences or activities,
- *emotional radiance arising from peace with God.

Joy derives from God's creative, redemptive, and glorified order. Let's consider each.

Joy in the Created order:

Joy arises from relishing God's creation. The Psalmist wrote " . . . you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy." (Ps. 65:8) and again: " . . . , the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy." (Ps. 65:12)

For us Friendsview folk, a walk in the canyon, or a drive among St. Paul farms or across Chehalem mountain offers joy. So do resident gardens, our landscaped campus, and floral arrangements that grace the lobby and the dinning hall. Thomas Merton said "Every blade of grass is an angel singing in a shower of glory;" (*Raids on the Unspeakable* 1964 p. 196). If a blade of grass how much more a rose? A blossoming tree? A flaming sunset? A rainbow? A frisky squirrel? A soaring bird?

Artistry is an avenue for expressing and accessing joy. For philosopher Aristotle, (in *Poetics*) *art is imitation*, utilizing form, color, and rhythm. He considered it *natural* and right to delight, and to find meaning, in works of imitation. Consider landscape paintings. Framed ones hang in our hallways (I wish there were fewer 18th century scenes). In our apartment we have an eastern Oregon painting by Frank Tuning, a relative of some of you, a coastal scene by the late Stan Putnam, of Portland, and paintings by an Aymara artist whose name I can't decipher. We also prize photos of visited scenic places such as New Zealand's Milford

Sound. I post some on the computer screen. These honor the creation and its human caretakers. They bring joy.

Leo Tolstoy considered art "*The language of emotion*". "To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced and having evoked it. . . by. . . movements, lines, colors, sounds, forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others experience the same feeling--this is the activity of art". *Good* abstract art does this. Crafted objects do, too (we marvel at Divonna's quilt and Gene's carved creatures). Poetry evokes emotion. Like this one: "Five Quick Queries":

Have you smelled sagebrush in the morning after rain?

How long ago did you drink water from a spring?

Your hands, what gratifying memories do they hold?

Your ears, what satisfying words have they been told?

Did you ever see an eagle on the wing?

(from *Heavenly Fire*)

Our Puritan ancestors, suspecting the arts of devilry, banned some for Christians, ostensibly to give God—not ego-- the glory. They had a point—the arts can corrupt. As a result, however, the ugly and the mediocre got elevated over beauty and excellence. But redemption includes the restoration of the divine image in humanity *and* a right use of creation. We are to be co-workers with Christ in tending God's creation. Creative artistry is not just music like "The Messiah" or frescoes on the Sistine Chapel, or poetry that frames truth with fire, but also human- crafted things that ease burdens and delight the senses—like well-designed cars, tools, bridges, clothes, cuisine, furniture. Sanctification binds aesthetics to the work of the Holy Spirit, avoiding extremes of glitz and grunge. The senses—smell, hearing, taste, sight, and touch- are antennae for receiving God's messages. Sanctified senses discern and share God's creativity. Christ leads us back through the flaming sword into God's garden, where simplicity blends with elegance, prayer with play, and artistry with worship.

Joy in work. Doing competently any job involving created stuff brings joy. Check your memory bank for some wonderful work experiences. During our years on the Oregon

coast we lived near a Job Corp, where youth learn trades. I recall how these youth would inform visitors, "I am a plumber, "I am an electrician, " or "I'm a chef." Martin Luther would be proud of them for understanding ordinary work as vocation—a call to serve others through useful labor. In 1998, I concluded a commencement address to Job Corp graduates with this poem (from *The Sacred Ordinary*):

Satisfaction comes in many ways,	Most fun provides an afterglow
in sports, good food, vacation days,	of joy, but some can leave a trail
time spent with friends, or books,	of tears. One pleasure never fails
by enhancing our, or others, looks.	to satisfy: a job well done,
Such pleasures come and go.	a job well done!

What about play? An old Westminster catechism asks: 'What is the chief end and duty of man?' and responds thus, 'to glorify God and to *enjoy* him forever.' Play is joyful, often social, activity. Play accents intrinsic over instrumental values. When we play, body, mind, and spirit unite in a way that honors creation *and* human community. I think this includes Scrabble, jig-saw and cross-word puzzles, ping-pong and pool.

Joy in the Redemptive order:

*A word count from the NRSV of the Bible lists 220 usages of the word "joy". Adding cognates such as happiness and pleasure brings the number to 390.

* Wrote the Psalmist: "But let the righteous be joyful; let them exult before God; let them be jubilant with joy." (Ps. 68:3)

* Said Jesus: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matt. 13:44)

Stanley Hauerwas rightly identifies God's revelation as the supreme basis for joy: "Joy is a simple willingness to live with the assurance of God's redemption." It is not some

spontaneous feeling, no blithe ignoring of tragedy, not shallow optimism. "It derives from finding our true home among a people who carry the words and skills of God's kingdom of peace." *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame, 1983, see pp 146ff).

Affinity circles are all blessed by redemption: families, neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, towns, retirement homes. Examples of joy in redemption: the burden of personal sin lifted, fellowship in the family of God, smiles and hugs from loved ones and friends, occasional spiritual ecstasy, watching God redeem the lives of folks among us. Especially spiritual restoration of family members. Forgiveness is beautiful. The Amish gave the world a lesson in this a few years ago by offering forgiving love to the family of the one who had murdered several of their school children. Remember? In table devotions this morning, Ralph Beebe recalled a less-publicized story of a Quaker family that lovingly led to Christ the imprisoned rapist who had killed their daughter. North of Sheridan, and its penitentiary, the coast highway intersects a road named for that family: Payne Road. Have you seen it?

A poem, *Yeah, I'd Like That*", depicts the wonder of redemptive joy: It's about a World War I veteran, maybe like my father-in-law who grumbled once: "If old men had to fight wars they'd find other solutions."

Lord, I don't travel much anymore.
Went to the Columbia ice fields last year,
But most of the scenes I view now
are inside my head. Some are vivid,
like seeing that dirty trench near St. Lo,
the red blood spurting from my leg,
and that German boy's face—
before I blew it away. I never talk
to anyone about this, except you, Lord.
Maybe I'll meet that boy in heaven.

That would be okay. We'll recognize
and forgive each other, and maybe you
will give us constructive work to do
together, somewhere in the cosmos.
Yeah, I'd like that!
(from *Prayers at Twilight*)

Joy in the Glorified Order. In heaven the Creator blends human creativity and the natural world, providing an enhanced cosmos freed from pollution and constraints of sin. As pictured in the Revelation, the New Jerusalem juxtaposes the finest of nature and human civilization—for the redeemed from every tribe, tongue, nation and people: nature and civilization in splendid harmony. I conclude with words from *Exploring Heaven*.

Human intelligence has harnessed energies for creative enterprises that bring health to the body, delight to the mind, and joy to the spirit. Human stewards of the earth now probe inner and outer space.... They yearn to be co-creators with the Divine. Purified in heaven from the curse of sin, (and adapted physically to multiple planetary systems), creative humanity will join the Master Architect in cosmic reconstruction.

What the cosmos restored in righteousness will look like materially, and how it will incorporate our earth, human artifacts, our solar system, our galaxy (and the billions of others . . .), we cannot say. We *can* infer that through creative application it will embody the classic longings of the heart: the good, the true, and the beautiful; and that humanity will share in shaping God's own dreams-- dreams for the peaceable kingdom.

Dear friends, amid pains and aches of aging, and separation from loved ones, keep your faith fixed upon Jesus, who gives us joy, joy in the created order, joy in the redemptive order, and holds open the garden gate to joy in the glorified order.

Praying for Children

FVRC Midweek prayer meeting,, Sept. 7, 2011

Introduction

School is starting. So, let's focus our thoughts and prayers on children and youth—those within our own family circle, and also others. This poem paints the picture for us.

Seen in September

I see the children at highway stops
waiting for the yellow school bus.
One morning sparkling dew heralds
a lingering summer sun; another dawn
signals fall as rain drips from trees
and glistens on bright young faces,
faces of sleepy headed older kids
and jumpy, wide eyed, younger ones.
Flashing red lights warn me insistently:
be careful, stay well behind the bus!
So, stopped, I salute the children.
Third millennium people they are--
these kids dressed in trendy clothes
and wearing shoes that cost too much.
And I wonder as I watch them,
what sort of citizens will they be?
I wish their parents and teachers well.
Wisdom is not easily conveyed
from one generation to another.
I recall my childhood school days,
greeting the teacher, saluting the flag,

and singing "My Country, 'tis of thee,
sweet land of liberty. . .," sentiments
germane to this and every mountainside.

(from *Let the Spirit Soar*)

Scripture: *Jesus' parable of the seed and soil (from Matthew 13: 3-8, 9-23, NIV) guides our thoughts and prayers for these children. Listen to what Jesus said:*

A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Let's relate this Scripture to the children of our families and friends.

Seed on the Path It is difficult for seed to grow on packed ground. How does Satan snatch away the seed of the Gospel from children? In brief, through secular perceptions of reality that ignore that the earth is the Lord's, that a good life is more than social adaption and being happy, that love has altruistic dimensions. Young minds can get tramped down hard

by entrepreneurs peddling all sorts of ego-stroking things, by superficial but seductive images of masculinity—brawn and bravado, and femininity— smart and sexy. Young eyes and ears get monopolized by nonsense. Succumbing to sin gets easier when benumbed minds conclude that preacher talk is too vague, and religious stuff is incomprehensible.

Pray for teachers and parents to provide children with a *supporting context of knowledge*. Our children of all age levels need strong intellectual support so their minds receive God's seed in permeable soil, enabled by Divine grace to grow. Let's take time now for silent prayer for school age children, their parents, and their teachers. Pray that children returning from summer camp, exuberant in faith, may become intellectually grounded in God's truth, revealed in the book of Scripture and in the book of nature. Remember the chorus, "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back." Pray this for them.

Seeds falling on rocky ground. Here the parable teaches that without good rooting plants can't weather adversity. In New England and elsewhere in the world neighborly farmers get together to remove rocks from their fields and use these hard stones to build walls. These walls protect young plants from the wind, from predators, from trampling, and from bickering over boundaries. After rocks are removed mulching adds tilth to the soil, so plants can thrive, even where the climate is severe and conditions harsh. Is this what Gospel fellowship is about? *Together* clearing stony impediments from hearts and minds, so God's Spirit can bring spiritual growth? Protecting against winds of adversity—even persecution? Converting hard circumstances into occasions of divine triumph? Converting rocky times into blessed times? Yes, that's what church is about. In our deepest suffering God is present with us. Resurrection, not crucifixion is God's final word. Is it important that the Church clears the cultural fields for the young and the young in faith? Yes. Yes it is!

Pray for school age youth in your family or friendship circle, especially those new in faith, that they will weather adversity—broken homes, sickness, debt, sensory overload, ridicule, violence. Pray for churches to clear these stones and turn them into protective walls.

Seeds crowded out by thorns. Here Jesus teaches that cares of the world and lure of wealth and power can destroy what God has planted. True spiritual awakenings increase that trust and moral integrity so basic to communal order. But culture can turn idolatrous,

corrupting the very seedbed for wisdom. *Such idolatry starts with pride and is fed by self-gratification.* Worship of created things--whether of nature or human artifice--is idolatrous. Satan posing as an angel of light, wrapped in alluring garments of prosperity, lures the ego. Imperceptibly pride of life begins to diminish awe before the Creator. Self-gratification subtly supplants worship of God. It may come in the form of social, academic, athletic or professional achievement. When pride and self-gratification replace consecrated service to others as markers of community, Kingdom plantings get crowded out. Without Gospel sunlight these divine plantings increasingly succumb to disease and decay. When this becomes widespread society rots: governance gets corrupt, the economy flounders, the arts degenerate, literature titillates instead of inspires, music collapses into noise and entertainment into vicarious violence. Education struggles to teach values of any sort (even tolerance) and is reduced to programming data into young brains. Kingdom plants don't flourish in such a thicket of thorns. Pray for young adults in your family or friendship circle, those across the street at George Fox University, or at other colleges, and young folks just beginning their careers and families, that as followers of Jesus they will keep truth and love linked together, and bearing fruit for the healing of the nations.

Good ground. When family, church, and peer groups rightly nurture children the ground is fertile. We *all* experience threats to faith, by being trampled on intellectually, beset with troubles, or crowded by worldly cares. So *we* too need the Holy Spirit to *sustain* the productivity of *our* soil. Whenever in a contrite spirit we accept God's forgiving grace, and let Christ empower us, in company with other believers, faith is restored. Doubt yields to belief. Despair yields to hope. Indifference yields to a passionate love for God and for others. Like water, love enables seed to grow in good soil. If children and youth have eyes and ears attuned to *God's* truth revealed in creation, in Scripture, and by the voice of Christ within and among them, their generation will flourish and bless the world.

Today was GFU serve day—1500 students and staff demonstrated Christian servant-hood throughout the area. Rejoice, my friends, that God has planted good seed in the soil of our youth. Pray that older persons—parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, relatives, teachers, coaches, will faithfully tend this garden of the Lord.

Stormy Weather

Friendsview Midweek Meeting, Nov. 30, 2011

Hymn: "A shelter in a time of storm"

Introduction: We'll get to the Scripture text shortly, but first some pertinent observations. Weather is a frequent conversation item, especially this time of the year. Observing it and chatting about it makes us aware, indirectly, that the earth is the Lord's and that some things in life are not under our control. Coping with stormy weather reinforces our common humanity. Fascination with weather is evidenced by the many idioms we use, as this poem illustrates.

Fair Skies

Hi, Joe, thought I'd phone and shoot the breeze a bit.

Glad you called, Mac. I've been under the weather.

You 're generally on cloud nine, Joe. What happened?

Well, a foggy funk hit me like a bolt out of the blue.

Joe, come rain or shine, life goes on; you'll cope.

Yeah, my friend, I will. How's your writing project?

Not so good, Joe. Hit a cold spell, I guess.

Mac, you're a good writer: fair skies await;

words will flow, publication will be a breeze.

Joe, with my editor I can't throw caution to the wind.

A fair-weather friend, eh? Mac, I gotta run.

I'm in the garden and it's raining cats and dogs.

I'm heading for the tool shed.

Any port in a storm is it? Okay, bye, Joe!

Bye, Mac, your call brightened my day!

Beyond the power of weather to enliven language, seasonal rhythms possess metaphoric power to convey insights about life, as depicted in the following poem.

Foliage Isn't Everything

Why alders strip their leaves each fall
and stand around stiff and bare
through cold and rainy months
while conifers proudly flaunt
their lovely coats all year long
is something a botanist could elucidate
at some length, patiently ignoring
my poetic anthropomorphism.
Maybe it's all about symbiosis
in a healthy biosphere.
It looks as though some things,
and some people, apparently,
sacrifice more to common good
or just have more to give than do others.
Or does social inequity
fashion them into givers and takers?
But maybe there is more
to giving and receiving
than meets the eye:
perhaps a nexus of needs and goods
reciprocally exchanged?
Or losses that redemptively
mulch the soil for growth?
In folks as well as forests
foliage isn't everything.
(AOR from *Let the Spirit Soar*)

Scripture Matthew 14: 22-35 This episode in Jesus' ministry followed the feeding of the five thousand.

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

I don't know what *outer* storms you may have encountered. Our family experienced the Columbus Day storm of 1962. Remember it? I recall speeding down Rex hill while trees twisted and fell. When I reached our Springbrook home our family fled to the basement just before an oak tree crashed into the living room. Whew! We were scared, and grateful to be alive!

I don't know what *inward* storms you may have encountered over the years and how you coped. But *you* recall them! Your response was probably somewhat like good old Simon Peter: faltering faith crying out for a helping hand from Jesus. Reflect upon those storms for a bit and breathe a prayer of praise to God for having weathered them, and became stronger for it.

We oldsters experience stormy weather emotionally. I remember George Thomas saying “being old isn’t easy.” In the winter, days are short but hours seem long. For us the climate often might suitably be dubbed “heavy weather”—not just physically achy days and sleepless nights but emotional cold spells lacking the warm glow of spiritual ecstasy, icy winds of anxiety over many things: health, frailty, loneliness, lack of productivity, family members straying from the faith. We oldsters experience gales of grief over loss of loved ones. We miss the glow of grandkids who years ago sat on our laps while we read stories to them, but who now are scattered around the world, busy adults, with their own family affinity circles.

Thankfully, throughout the stormy times of our lives, ghosts of the past did not terrorize us, the waves of hard circumstances did not swamp our boats; for we heard Jesus’ voice bidding us to come. And we obeyed. Were we fearful? At times, yes, but we reached out and grasped his hand, and found peace and safety. So, dear friends, on our lake of life here at Friendsview, buffeted by waves of doubt or surging depression-- faith tested by various sorts of heavy weather— just more tightly grasp Jesus’ hand. I close my message with this prayer poem:

“Lord Save Me!”

Jesus, how gently you chide my lack of faith
when I flounder and begin to sink:
oh, no, *I* cannot walk on water!
How lovingly, my Lord, you grasp my hand
and haul me up onto the boat
to waiting friends. You calmed the storm!
I trust you, Jesus. I will follow you,
however wild the weather
on the lake, or in my heart.
Yes! Oh, yes I will!

Perhaps tonight you need silently to pray: “I trust you, Jesus. I will follow you, Yes! Oh, Yes I will”. Let’s just do that now. Amen.

Before we enter into corporate prayer time, I want us to sing the three verses of an old hymn, "Be still my soul." Our musicians will lead us. Note especially a phrase in verse two, "the waves and wind still know his voice...." That, my friends, is good news! Peace and Joy!

A Call to Holiness

Friendsview midweek meeting, May 30, 2012

(adapted from *The Sacred Ordinary*)

"Be perfect," said Jesus, "as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5: 48). Jesus' words shine like a spotlight in the face; they penetrate like a siren to the ear. If we cover our ears the Divine voice trumpets within. If we wrap darkness around our souls, the Light shines through cracks in our psyche. Shall we turn away? No. We respond to Jesus' call by opening hearts and minds.

The *good*, the *true*, and the *beautiful*-- like doves from Noah's ark these concepts circle us searching for solid ground in a soggy world. If you hunger and thirst after righteousness, Jesus promised, you will be filled (Matt. 5: 6). Resist, and life darkens with despair. Heed the call, and life brightens with hope.

In decades following the American Civil War a hunger for holiness fostered revival meetings. Under strong preaching by evangelists—women as well as men-- penitent Methodists and Quakers knelt at altars weeping for sins, and rose to cry "hallelujah" for God's cleansing power! Penitent Presbyterians trekked to "deeper life" conferences. Folks cleaned up sinful lives and redirected energies to evangelism, missions, and social justice. Christian colleges blossomed like daffodils in the spring. Society stabilized.

Zealous to distance themselves from "carnal Christians," these folks, however, after a while came to dub themselves "holiness people." Sounds smug, doesn't it? It was; and slowly—during years many of us retired folks were growing up-- revival fires smoldered to ashes. Emotional warmth lingered, but within the contemporary church holiness isn't stressed. "Feel good" spirituality is. Why?

For reasons internal and external. The holiness movement floundered when proponents' failures become conspicuous. People got blind-sided by subtle temptations. Rather than repent, they rationalized sins as mistakes, or justified them by distorted Bible interpretations. Legalism flourished. For example, scrupulously tithing income but being chintzy with employees. Christian experience got programmed rigidly—first get saved and later get sanctified. Some took too legalistic an anti-cultural stance. Books were acceptable, movies weren't. Stylish apparel was okay for men, but women had to look dowdy. A focus on scruples rather than virtue harmed their testimony.

Discerning how to be “in the world but not of it” is always a challenge. For some folks material success--better jobs, higher status, new houses—became stumbling blocks. Loyalty to God's Kingdom got skewed into nationalistic fervor by folks opposing “worldly” jewelry. *Their* children junked the dress code but attacked worldliness in cinema, dance, and pool halls. *The grandchildren* met the cultural challenge by tacking Christian lyrics onto rock music and wearing grungy clothes to church.

Accommodating to a scientific mind-set, some Christians interpreted *certain* Bible language too *narrowly*. To keep the Bible infallible they scrounged for evidence, dinosaur tracks in Texas or wood fragments on Mt. Ararat. But then, alas, they interpreted language about values *too figuratively*, treating Jesus’ moral teachings as hyperbole, as if God sets the moral clock ahead so laggards will arrive roughly on time; or they postponed the Beatitudes to a millennial future. (Honoring the Bible means rightly discerning truth as conveyed through its several literary forms, fact, parable, metaphor, etc.).

Secular calls to perfection compete with Jesus’ call. Voices and images tug at us in advertisements. Are we asked to be holy? No. We’re asked to be clean, lean, well toned, and pleasant. Honing body and psyche to perfection is a high-ticket item. Physicians and therapists patch up the blemished. Euphemisms sanitize evil. Thus adultery becomes “relationship”, the enemy a “target,” civilian casualties “collateral damage,” and greed “business smarts.” Appearance supplants substance. A relativistic culture deems living virtuously more antisocial than being mildly sinful. Heroes are gloriously flawed. They point guns at us on TV, they lie, they seduce. The “powers that be” resist Christ’s triumph over their sin management programs. The state clings to power, business to greed, tribes to ethnicity, and culture to literary tales extolling struggles between good and evil. Psychology challenged Biblical claims for triumph over sin, a doctrine basic to historic church teachings. Ritually confessing sin every Sunday—or during Lent—seems easier than answering Jesus’ call to holiness. In a culture touting tolerance and egocentricity as prime virtues, churches find it easier to focus on fellowship rather than doctrine.

Consider a new call to holiness. Does God just forgive sin without delivering from its power? No. The Gospel witness is weakened by churches “preaching up sin to the grave,” by what Bonhoeffer dubbed “cheap grace.” *The Gospel proclaims victory over sin, inward and outward, deliverance from its power as well as from its burden of guilt.* The dark side of V human nature is abundantly evidenced. *That folks don't have to be trapped in this sinful condition is the good news Jesus brings.* Consider the different ways God delivers us.

Holiness is a part of conversion. True conversion means facing up to God and saying 'yes'. The rebel surrenders to a forgiving God. The self is transformed by the Spirit's power. As Paul said, we put off the old self and put on the new, "created in true righteousness and holiness." (Eph. 4:21-27) Considered this way sanctification makes sense. Good attitudes and right actions flow from cleansed heart. We are enabled not to sin. The sanctified self is a continuing recipient of God's baptizing power to redirect one's will to what is good. *How this occurs experientially isn't important. That it occurs through decisive response to God is important.*

Holiness is spiritual discipline. Through prayer, contemplation, Bible study, and service, the Spirit shapes us into Christ-likeness. Such discipline is to the soul like exercise to the body. Under the Spirit's power temptations to sin are resisted and right paths are discerned. Devotional writings ancient and modern affirm this. Richard Foster's books urge ordinary folks to match monastic fervor in *ordinary* life ventures, by a *right use* of money, sex, and power, so that the body truly becomes a temple of the Spirit.

Holiness infuses aesthetic creativity. Our Puritan ancestors, suspecting the arts of devilry, tried to exclude aesthetics from spirituality. So the ugly and the mediocre got elevated over the beautiful and the excellent, ostensibly to give God the glory. But sanctification also means restoring God's image in humanity. With the will sanctified we become co-workers with Christ in caring for, utilizing, and renewing the cosmos. We study prayerfully God's other book—nature—and respond creatively.

Revelation pictures the New Jerusalem as a very livable place, the artificial and natural in harmony, God and humanity working together. Artistry is not only oratorios like "The Messiah", frescoes on the Sistine Chapel, or poetry that frames truth with fire, but also artifices that ease burdens and delight the eye—like bridges, floral arrangements, and a host of wheeled devices. Sanctification binds aesthetics to the Spirit, avoiding both snobbery and grunge. The senses- smell, hearing, taste, sight, and touch- receive God's messages, enabling us to be creative. The Spirit leads us back through the flaming sword into God's garden, where simplicity blends with elegance, prayer with play, art with worship.

Holiness includes right conduct. Clean hands *are* linked with pure heart. Holiness is love in action as well as attitude. In saying, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48), Jesus intended love to be for neighbor as well as self, for stranger as well as kin, for the unjust (upon whom God's sun also shines) as well as the just. It's the way of the Cross. Jesus' resurrection offers hope. The Spirit's baptism provides power.

Holiness isn't for show. It's to empower upright living by ordinary people in diverse cultural settings. It's for folks of every age, for you and me, calling us to be light in a dark world.

How the Kingdom of God Flourishes

Friendsview mid-week meeting, January 2, 2013

Hymn: “We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations”

At mid-week meeting five years ago I spoke on a Christmas theme, recognizing that some world Christians celebrate Jesus’ birth on January 7. Today, however, the focus is upon the impact of Gods’ gift upon humanity. Call the message “How the Kingdom of God flourishes.” Yes, there’s much evil in the world: infidelity of public leaders, mass murder, theft, enslavement, and abuse of power. Evil dominates the news. Scandal sells. TV ads picturing stupidity and destruction grab our eyes and ears. The Dec. 21st doomsday scare is over. So let’s focus on good news. Scripture offers guiding words.

Scripture: Ponder Jesus’ parables of mustard seed and yeast. (Matt. 13: 31-33,)

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.” He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

The Mustard Seed parable shows how God’s Kingdom grows in the garden of the world. First picture that seed as a small group of men and women, living in a corner of a pagan empire, who, inspired by the resurrected Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, faithfully proclaimed the Gospel. Then ponder how through two thousand plus years the world has been blessed as folks came to Christ. The disciple Mark went to Egypt, Thomas to India, Andrew to Slavic peoples. From a cluster of congregations gathered to Christ by Paul and associates, churches in what are now called Greece, Turkey, Italy, France, Germany, Russia and other European nations, grew and flourished. Over time a Christianized Europe arose from shambles of the Roman Empire. In the 5th century a released Christian slave, Patrick, returned to native Ireland to preach Christ; his zealous missionaries evangelized Britain. Several centuries’ later European Christian émigrés

shaped the course of history in North America. Scholarly followers of Jesus such as Roger Williams, William Penn and Jonathan Edwards gave Kingdom direction to a new nation, whose goal was to offer “liberty and justice for all”. We are heirs of that legacy.

A 7th century Persian Christian, Alôpen, trekked the Silk Road to China to share the Gospel, welcomed by a benign ruler. This Asian witness, interrupted by hostile regimes, resumed in later centuries through ministry of missionaries from Europe and America. After decades of repression, since 1980 phenomenal growth has occurred. (Currently there are about 100 million Christians in China). The world’s largest Christian congregation is in South Korea, the Yoido Full Gospel Church, with nearly a million members organized into an expanding circle of cell groups. In recent centuries, African and Latin American nations were evangelized by thousands of missionaries. There are now more Quakers in Africa than in Europe and North America, more in Bolivia than in England. Other Christian groups could report similar data.

That small group who witnessed the risen Lord took seriously his command to “tell Jesus’ story to the nations”. So have their followers. John the Revelator (chap. 7) envisioned a multitude, “from every nation, tribe, people and language,” standing before the throne and before the Lamb. It’s happening, right before our eyes! The Bible has been translated into nearly three thousand languages; Wycliffe people are working on remaining minority ones. The tiny mustard seed has grown into a tree with branches spreading globally. Currently there are over two billion Christians, a third of the world’s people. Yes, growth has been marred. Gospel treasure is held in earthen vessels. Christians too often have been ignorant, misguided, or arrogant. Sometimes they slaughtered each other over issues of power, territory, or theology. Often they got trapped in social systems that hinder good and foster evil. Sometimes subtle anti-Christian culture snares believers. Evil continues to wreak havoc. But that’s another story. On January 2, 2013, in words of the hymn we sang, we celebrate God’s great “kingdom of love and light.”

Leaven. Consider some ways the Gospel has enriched the world. Jesus’ second parable depicts how nations have been impacted by God’s Kingdom through the testimony and actions of Jesus’ followers who take seriously his call to be in the world but not of it. Yeast works in different kinds of dough. Bread (like people groups) varies in form: rye bread,

raisin bread, wheat bread, etc. Some are tastier, some more nourishing. Bread has been dubbed the staff of life. Breaking bread together signifies human community. The action of yeast is so much part of our diet we don't give it much thought. Scientists can explain its chemistry. I'm content to use Jesus' imagery to illustrate how Kingdom faithfulness makes the social order morally, spiritually, and aesthetically palatable and nourishing, how God's Kingdom leavens that global loaf we call civilization. Like salt, as Jesus said, his followers give flavor to life. Biblical justice and mercy have blessed the world.

Consider how the Gospel permeated a collapsing empire, as Jesus, not Caesar, became honored as Lord, and how this leavening brought vitality as tribes segued into nations. Scholars such as Augustine and Aquinas-- and rulers like Charlemagne-- discerned that all truth is God's truth, and education flourished. A monotheistic understanding of an orderly creation laid a foundation for science, and for the arts. The concept of "commonwealth" displaced autocracy and plutocracy in many countries. Luther proclaimed the "priesthood of believers" --every Christian a minister to neighbor-- and ministry multiplied. Calvin taught that *all* labor, whether with tools, words, or notes, is a vocation—a calling from God. Such faithful stewardship honors the creation, aids governance, supports commerce, provides health care, and enriches culture. Christian insights about work and ministry have blessed the world, giving dignity and economic stability to ordinary folks. Guided by Biblical principles, our government affirms "inalienable rights": life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. (Declaration of Independence) Along with other countries, America has been richly blessed by Gospel leaven.

The Quaker demonstration of ethical integrity in business fostered a banking system that has benefited the world. In the 19th century, John Bright, a member of the British Parliament, inaugurated the secret ballot, and joined an American brother in Christ, John Woolman, to put their nations on paths toward abolishing slavery. Think how far our country has moved, by applying kingdom ethics, to affirm the dignity of all persons. While pastor of a church in Kansas City in 1950, I was booed at a community gathering when I affirmed the right of a black couple to buy a home in our neighborhood, and told assembled folks I visited them and found them to be fine folks. When you were children could you have envisioned a person of color serving as our president? Or a woman as secretary of

state? Or as church superintendent? Rejoice in compassionate care organizations founded and sustained by Christians, such as Habitat for Humanity, Heifers International, the Mennonite Central committee—and many others. Christian leaven works its power in deeds of love and through words of truth.

Christians leaven the socio-political order. We don't always agree with political policies, but patiently we work for Kingdom principles: justice, mercy, and integrity. Freedom keeps nations open to Gospel leavening, although persecutions can strengthen Christian witness and lead to penitent renewal. (This is happening in Africa). Christians try to be loyal citizens even if some policies and actions fall short of Biblical standards. As loyal opposition we pay taxes even if government sanctions conduct we deem wrong (for example, for me, capital punishment, the Iraq war, same sex marriage). We can't segment morality: one ethic for government, one for corporations, and one for individuals. *But we let the leaven work!* Sometimes options seem limited to choosing a lesser evil, what Bonhoeffer, during World War II, dubbed "tragic moral choice." We trust Kingdom leaven to be active despite deficient or partial human applications.

Paul wrote Christians of Colossi "all over the world this gospel is bearing fruit." (Col. 1: 6) If then, how much more now! Truth and love leaven the world. Stakes are getting higher. Technology ramps up options for both good and evil, offering solar panels and smart bombs. Our world may face heightened violence, ecological disasters, and possibly nuclear war. Whatever comes, "we've a story to tell to the nations". Patiently, by word and deed, we proclaim the "kingdom *of love and light*, trusting that at *God's timing* the Lamb will complete the victory.

Let us now engage in silent prayer on three topics:

1. -Christians under persecution.
- 2 -Our President and Congress, that they will rise to honorable cooperation.
- 3 -Our children and grandchildren, that they will not only relish the fruits of Christian witness but will also nourish the roots.

Receiving an Inheritance

Friendsview mid-week meeting, February 13, 2013

(adapted from a sermon published in *The Sacred Ordinary*)

Scripture Reading

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. Colossians 1:11-12 (NRSV)

Three times I have inherited money. The first bequest-- a couple thousand dollars from my aunt Mae-- occurred early in my teaching career at George Fox College when we were struggling financially. My aunt had invested much of her inherited and earned funds philanthropically while still living. She bought me books and Bible commentaries. When I went to Boston for my doctorate, she deposited to my account three thousand dollars in the Seaman's bank. It covered all tuition and fees. (I wonder how much the cost would be now?) I used the last dollars to purchase academic regalia. Aunt Mae died on Easter Sunday, 1955, shortly after we had visited her in California. I was one of eleven legatees who, in words of our text, "shared in the inheritance of the saints in the Light." Christ's light. Aunt Mae's gravestone verse reads: "She lived for others."

A few years later I received a surprise bequest from an aunt and uncle I barely knew. Childless, Harry and Henrietta Ulfers had struggled through harsh North Dakota winters, seasons of drought, and the great Depression. Their property, however, after World War II had increased in value. Upon their deaths it was sold and the estate divided among sixty-four nieces and nephews. By the time all heirs were located and probate ended the estate was considerably diminished! Each received eight hundred dollars. This was appreciated, but I thought it might have been better had their legacy gone to missions, a church, or some compassionate ministry, where it would have made a more significant impact.

The third inheritance was from family. Because my parents had prudently handled their own inheritance funds, had been debt free during the Depression, and were good farmers, this legacy provided financial assistance to their four children's families both before and after mother's death in 1964.

These stories, and ones you could tell, illustrate how one generation's faithful stewardship blesses subsequent ones. In reading the Old Testament one is struck by the importance of inheritance to the Israelites. Some had to do with homeland, but more involved a *spiritual* legacy, with being a people chosen of God for witness to the world. Legacies are more than money. Many generations of faithful Christians contributed importantly to my family's spiritual legacy—and probably to yours, also. The "cloud of witnesses", from Pentecost until now, has conveyed this bountiful inheritance.

When Paul wrote from prison to the Christian community at Colossi about an incredible inheritance he wasn't describing property but the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What a valuable Gospel inheritance we share! Let's consider what it means.

First, this inheritance involves redemption. Christ redeems us from sin. We gratefully accept the gift. We call this conversion. By conversion we're included in what God wills for the world. By God's grace we qualify for that inheritance. Conversion occurs when a penitent person says 'yes' to a gracious God. For some of us, conversion occurred long ago, for others more recently. Some persons are just now opening the door for Jesus. We praise God for enabling us to be legatees of that Kingdom so lovingly bequeathed to us from a cross at Calvary.

Secondly, this inheritance is witnessed by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit documents inclusion in God's family. When we listen attentively the Spirit witnesses to our spirits that we are children of God and heirs with Jesus Christ. When people enter into a contract, a land purchase, for example, a deposit constitutes a performance bond. The Holy Spirit is God's performance bond. In Ephesians 1:14, Paul calls the Spirit "a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession --to the praise of his glory". How blessed we are!

Is it the case with you, as with me, that sometimes the heart must jog the mind that this is so? We must heed the Holy Spirit! Good listening involves disciplines: regular worship, daily prayer, meditation, Bible and devotional reading, setting priorities for use of time and possessions. And It means grateful praise! At sixteen I began tithing to church and kingdom causes. It was difficult during early years of marriage, but Fern and I persisted and found the discipline rewarding. Like many of you, we now give much more--- just like dear Aunt Mae! Spiritual disciplines strengthen stewardship. They guard against self-centeredness.

Thirdly, this inheritance is threatened by sin. We have been delivered from darkness, let's not fall back into it! Paul warns, "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person. . . has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ." (Eph. 5:5). The writer of the book of Hebrews warns us not to "sell our birthright" (Hebr. 12:16) "See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights. . . ."

Warnings against immorality and godlessness are forthright, aren't they? Did you catch the warning against greed? I'll share a sad story about greed. Some years ago a well-recommended person met with several of us, promoting a plan to enhance missionary support. "I could give my money directly to missions," Mr. Jones explained, "but think how much more mission outreach can be supported if I help *you* all make money!" Jones' business venture was 3-D cards. Remember them? He discussed plans for expanding production and distribution. The first cards carried Disney and Holy Land motifs, and sold for a dollar each. I didn't particularly think I would buy one, but people have different tastes, don't they? The venture sounded okay. Who could knock the cause: prosper financially and support missions at the same time? So I invested several thousand dollars. The first monthly checks reflected high interest, but soon it took prodding to get them. Then checks quit coming; finally phone calls were unanswered.

You've guessed why. The pyramid collapsed leaving the latest investors financially devastated and others badly battered. Not quite to the scale of Madoff who made off with billions. But several persons lost retirement savings, others, like myself, inheritance funds. W.C. Jones lost his life, a suicide. When legalities were settled and inventory liquidated we

received 10 cents on the dollar. My *outward* alleged motivation, albeit naïve, was honorable, but my *unacknowledged* inward motivation was greed. (Can one be *honorable* in business ventures but also greedy? Sure, sometimes). How subtly Satan, posing as an angel of light, twists ambition into greed! That's why prayer is so important in raising the shield of faith.

Ours is An Enduring Heritage

Wrote an early believer, "Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance . . . " (Hebrews. 9:15). Christ forgives sins *and* delivers us from them. The Holy Spirit guides us. Praise God! Friends, rejoice with me in the divine bequest of salvation from sin, the witness of the Spirit and the promise of heaven. Our most important legacy is a *spiritual* heritage, conveyed, generation after generation, by words of truth and deeds of love. May we remain faithful stewards of that inheritance!

A Touch Would Help

Lord, many years ago you came to me
in a conversion experience so vivid
it's recalled now with tears of joy.
"I have decided to follow Jesus," I sang,
"no turning back, no turning back!"
It's still the song of my soul.
But I don't feel very spiritual now.
Concerns about property and health
nag at me. Is there some vision
of heaven, some touch of your Spirit
to bless these twilight years?
A heavenly touch would help, Lord.
(from *Prayers at Twilight*)

Our Animal Companions

FVRC Care Center worship, March 24, 2013

(From a book of poems, *Heavenly Fire*)

Charlie and Missy

Charlie and Missy were companionable. On a sunny day,

Missy, the cat, used to rub up against her dog friend
in loving ways mutually appreciated. Cross-cultural friendship

extended to their human friends, too. Of an evening,

Missy would curl up in our laps and purr happily,
kneading us gently with her paws. When old Missy died
we grieved along with Charlie dog.

Charlie would wait patiently for us at the Post Office door.
wagging his tail happily at neighbors who patted his head.

He liked it that we let him engage in rapturous sniffing
on an ambling ocean-side walk to and from home,
and was wont to lick our faces in appreciation.

Like the lilies of the field our animal friends
didn't worry about tomorrow, they didn't fret.

They sopped up affection easily, reciprocated it readily.

No strings attached, no keeping score, no pettiness.
Charlie and Missy shared the joy of living with each other
and with their human friends. They demonstrated what
Jesus taught and Paul wrote: "love is patient, love is kind."

Like Charlie and Missy we can reach across boundaries
to enjoy one another in the sunshine of God's love.

Joyful Eagle

I give tribute to Eagle, a dappled gray Morgan horse.

How he hated it when, needing extra horsepower
for farm work, we threw the harness on him:
his body sagged, his ears slumped, his head drooped.

"Don't put me through this!" he seemed to say.
But with the saddle, now that was a different story!
Head held high, tail a-twitch, he could hardly wait
for me to cinch up the girth, grab the bridle reins,
and mount. Wow! How he loved to gallop
across the desert above our Idaho farm!

Eagle epitomizes sheer joy, like Raphael Nadal
playing tennis. Have you watched this Mallorcan lad
in a match? No racket slamming, no pouting,
no yelling at the referee. Just sheer exuberance
in stroking backhand winners or racing to the net
to return an opponent's backspins. Simple joy!

Like my horse Eagle racing across the desert
in the morning with young Arthur in the saddle.

Like manifold pleasures along life's path
when we open ourselves to God:
the rivers clap their hands,
the mountains sing,
and the sea roars its applause.

Oh, God, in your presence is fullness of joy!

Gertrude and Joe

Gertrude and Joe build a nest on a neighbor's roof
and each year raise a nestling there. How patiently
this seagull couple together feed, protect,
and nurture each year's fuzzy bundle of feathers,
and in a few months teach it to fly off the roof
out onto the rocky shore. Sometimes older siblings
fly back home to visit, to pester mama for food,
and to check out the latest family addition.

We like to check out this family also.

"One generation commends your works to another;
they tell of your mighty acts," wrote the Psalmist.

Human nestlings need patient nurture, too.

Each year little ones enter our families,
our communities, our churches, our world.

Gertrude and Joe remind us how important it is
to nurture the "next generation" in love and truth,
so as young adults they can "fly off the roof"
and cope wisely on our world's rocky shores.

Green Pastures

Just outside historic Lafayette, Oregon, is a dairy farm.
One can see scores of cows walking from barn to pasture,
grazing, or resting. From the road one must look for them,
because sometimes they're in one pasture, sometimes

in another of several fenced acreages. The farmer rotates
these pastures and irrigates them in timely fashion.
Never overgrazed, the grass stays green and luscious.
Thanks, farmer friend, for providing good pastures!
If I were a cow I'd like this farmer. As a human being
I'm glad our heavenly Father keeps us well nourished
and cared for in places (and times) where He leads us.
Sometimes, unlike Lafayette cows, we resist changing
from one venue to another. Accepting divine guidance,
however, brings contentment: peace with ourselves,
our neighbors, and the world. As the Psalmist said,
God makes us "to lie down in green pastures." Psalm 23

From Psalm 145

"I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name forever and ever.
Every day I will praise you and extol your name forever and ever.
Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.
The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is
good to all, he has compassion on all he has made.
All your works praise you, Lord; your faithful people extol you. "

Today is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week, when Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on a humble donkey, to the acclaim of joyous believers who strewed palm branches on the path and sang "Hosanna!". We join other Christians around the world to rejoice in Jesus, our Savior, God's greatest gift! Our Savior, Lord, and friend.

Touch

Friendsview mid-week meeting May 8, 2013

An ancient Christian thinker, Augustine called the five senses "messengers of God." (I wrote a book about them with that title and draw upon it for this message). Spirituality rightly involves hearing, seeing, tasting (potlucks maybe?), and smell (flowers?). Today I focus on the fifth sense, touch. Hear my stories.

A love-deprived girl

A woman seeks counsel from a pastor. Her home situation is dysfunctional. The current husband is an alcoholic. Distraught, the woman pours out her troubles, fidgeting as she speaks. Her small daughter, meanwhile, hugs the legs of the pastor, trying to move herself from periphery to center of attention. Her needs are as urgent as the mother's, but she lacks words to express them. She is, however, no less sensitive to pain, no less hungry for loving touch.

A love-deprived boy

On his walk a retired gentleman pauses to talk to boys playing near a park. New playground equipment has been mutilated. The man is concerned about it. He's also troubled that one lad, barely into teens, smokes a cigarette. So he talks with them about how much children like to play on new equipment. When it seems appropriate he warns about health risks of smoking. The smoker, having begun at age ten, admits he's hooked and would like to stop, but can't. His mother accepts his habit and buys him smokes, he says. In leaving the man puts a hand on the shoulder of the smallest boy, as a gesture of friendship, much as he would a grandson. "Don't touch me!" snarls the lad, flinging off the elder's hand. Taken aback the man asks why. The answer? A shrug and a mumbled, "I dunno, I just don't like to be touched." Rebuffed and bewildered, the man trudges home. And along multiple neuron networks on bodies young and old sorrowful angels retrace their steps to the Source and ponder Calvary.

A thoughtful schoolboy

Evening farm chores done, a boy sits with his father in the living room before heading upstairs to bed. "Papa", he said, "at recess today the big guys teased Ed, because he talks funny and stumbles. At first I wanted to join them, but then I remembered this picture on our wall (he points to it) and the song we sing in Sunday School, 'Jesus loves the little children, red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in his sight'; so I took Ed's hand and we walked back to class. I hope the big kids don't beat me up tomorrow!" "Son you did the right thing, overcoming evil with good. Let's plan a picnic with Ed's family Sunday afternoon, so you boys can play together. Okay?" "Sure, papa, I'd like that!"

Hospital bed.

The patient lies on a hospital bed. It has been several days since surgery, and she is sicker than anticipated. Exhaustion, pain, and drained emotions mark her condition. But each day a Hispanic nurse's aide serves as God's angel, holding the sick woman's hand, and saying in broken English, "You I pray for each day. I burn candle in church. You get well!" Together the two women experience that life is precious; and is often preserved by caring hands, loving presence, and comforting words.

Angiogram

The patient has had an angiogram procedure. To prevent arterial bleeding, a nurse positions a compress tightly against the insertion point holding the pad steadily for two hours, until danger of rupture is over. The men experience together that life is precious, and is often preserved for one by the caring hands of another.

Touch in a time of terror

In a Boston hospital a nurse, putting aside her own fears, holds the hands of a patient who screams in terror and pain from shrapnel wounds caused by the Marathon Day bombing.

The Hobbit Trail

The Hobbit Trail is hard to spot from Highway 101, just a small sign. But a couple know where to find it. They exit the car and walk eagerly into the thick forest, treading on

spongy ground, breathing fecund air. The trail leads through rhododendrons towering twenty feet high, down to a sandy beach. He grasps a walking stick fashioned to fit his hand. She takes his other hand when the path gets steep near the shore. They emerge onto the beach, enjoying its warmth, still walking hand in hand, for love's sake, listening to the surf, searching for tidal treasures. After a while they climb back up the trail, pausing to puff a bit before easing bodies into the car for a return home and a good sleep together.

Hands across time

The old mother has lost touch with everyday affairs. Her life is ebbing away. She remembers events from childhood, many years ago, but doesn't know where she is now. Her adult son, recalling hands that long ago soothed his fevered brow, now brushes his mother's hair and gently strokes her gnarled hands. Few words pass, but many emotions do. They are bonded by touch that binds their love together in this difficult time of passing.

An Arctic touch

Eskimo Quakers are celebrating the coming of the Gospel to their villages a century ago. In a ceremony once modeled by our Lord, Jesus, they wash the feet of visitors from Oregon and California, from which regions came to them the first messengers of Christ.

Commissioning

Following worship the elders gather at the altar to lay hands upon, pray, and thus commission a youth from their congregation called by Christ to be a minister of the Gospel.

Touching is Believing

After Jesus' crucifixion people were confused. Amid grief, hope loomed; the faithful said the Master had risen from the dead. Was this so, or only wishful thinking? A disciple, Thomas, wanted tangible proof. Then one day Jesus appeared to the group and said, "Thomas, put your finger in my hand, and your hands in my side, and be not faithless but believing." (John 20:27) Thomas did so, and immediately resurrection reality surged like electricity from Lord to disciple. Touch became a messenger of God. Many persons subsequently believed on the basis of John's testimony, and that of others present. But they also believed on the basis of an inner touch by the risen Christ.

A few thoughts about disciplines for sensuous touch

1. Religious instruction for children should include teaching them how to touch.

Gary Fawver, experienced camp director (former president of Christian Camping, International), has conducted the "Five Sense Tour." Exercises help children intensify tactile sensations in ways that affirm creation and the Creator. They reflect on water, sunshine, bark of a tree. He has them feel another's face and hair, and to sense energy flow from finger receptors by touching natural objects. There is wisdom in what Gary recommends.

2. An inventory of one's tactile habits may be a useful prelude to spiritual renewal. Because many persons have depended so much upon languages of the eye and the ear it may be helpful for them to discern the messages from God that hands and feet have been sending and receiving.

3. One's spiritual journey can be enhanced by disciplines of touch, involving the right interrogation of tactile experiences, by dedicating ones body-- hands, feet, tools, instruments-- to the good of others. People brought children to Jesus for him to touch. Sensitive disciples of Jesus carry about them the same charisma that makes people want touch and expect it to be kind, loving, and healing.

4. Touch helps us interact more thoughtfully with creation. Isaiah wrote: "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands." (Isa. 55:12 NIV). The metaphors are meaningful not because trees literally have hands, but because we have. We have eyes to see, nose to smell, palate to taste, ears to hear-- and hands and feet to feel. The Hess creek trail is for many a place of worship.

5. Let touch be a vital part of friendship with others. Discover the ecstasy that arises from touch that seeks to affirm and not control. Sin has given touch a bad rap. Let's help contemporary culture recover an affirming use of touch. How powerful and meaningful is touch when serving as a messenger of God.

Touch

Times there are to wrap up in silence,
sun above, earth below, or even to draw
darkness down around, and be alone.

And there are times
when friend and friend touch friend
without much noting
the mechanics of it all,
as life drums out a rhythm
fast and slow.

There are such times. . .

But there are other times:
times when to live one day even
untouched by someone who cares
can scarcely be endured,
times when watching
the cat rub against the dog
renews that ache to feel
an arm about the shoulders
or the hand grasped,
establishing again
the borders of the soul

.....

Hymn: "Love Lifted Me"

Scripture: Mark 10: 12-14