

First Friends Church, a Quaker meeting
Rev. Dr. Loletta M. Barrett
Children of Light
March 21, 2021
John 12:20-36, Acts 10:34-43

Reading

John 12:20-36 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, "We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

Acts 10:34-43 Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.

Message

I want to center us first with a prayer using lyrics from a beautiful song that brought me to tears. "Spirit, lead me where my trust is without borders, let me walk upon the waters wherever you would call me. Take me deeper than my feet would ever wander and my faith will be made stronger in the presence of my Savior. You call me out upon the waters, the great unknown where my feet may fail and there I find you in the mystery. Then oceans deep my faith stands, and I

will call upon your name and keep my eyes above the waves. When oceans rise my soul will rest in your embrace, for I am yours and you are mine.”¹ Amen.

On my vacation I did four things that were deeply meaningful. One was being in silence and prayer during our monthly meeting. Holding each of you and our meeting in the Light was very powerful and deeply satisfying. I felt incredibly connected to God, the Light and all of you as children of Light.

I also read a lot. I read Quaker pamphlets on how our faith tradition encourages us to be children of Light. I also read books by Howard Thurman, an African American, Baptist theologian, preacher and teacher. Thurman lived radical nonviolence, shaped a generation of civil rights activists including MLK, Jr., and co-founded the first major interracial, interdenominational church in the USA. He was a student and friend of Quaker theologian Rufus Jones. They were children of Light.

I also listened to a podcast on the 1900 year old Apostles Creed reinterpreted by open and relational or process theologians. For those who are not familiar with the ancient creeds, many churches recite them every Sunday. Listening to the podcast reminded me that one of the things I learned and affirmed in the United Church of Christ is: “it is the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and

¹ Oceans, Solomon Lighthouse, Joel Timothy Houston, Matthew Philip Crocker

in purity of heart before God.” There are many more recent creeds and statements of faith that use less traditional and gendered, and more open and relational, language. But by examining and reinterpreting these statements of belief I found I can both honor the witness of other children of Light and think about what I believe as I live into my identity as one of the children of Light.

Finally, I did my best to prepare for the Interfaith Dialogue today at 3:00. A Jew, a Muslim and a Christian are tasked with answering a five part question: What does your religion teach about: God, Scripture, Jesus, the afterlife, and other faiths? When I combine reinterpreting the creeds with the challenge to represent all Christians, it is almost as though I am re-writing my ordination papers to face an ecclesiastical council who will test my readiness to accept a call to ministry all over again. Whew! It is a major challenge to summarize 2000 years of Christian tradition and the broad spectrum of what Christians believe. It would be a challenge to describe even the 379 years of Quaker tradition and the spectrum of what Friends believe. And my interfaith colleagues have the same challenge! But there is a big difference between believing and being children of Light.

We have abundant faith traditions to help us with answers to the questions about religion and faith. We have abundant stories, images, scriptures, teachings, creeds, rituals, books and communities to give us clues about God, life and walking in the Light. Our faith traditions describe what the Ultimate is, what God

offers, and what the Divine expects from us using different words. Some of them are: submission, health, union, righteousness, forgiveness, center, enlightenment, peace, mercy, salvation, repentance, atonement, justification, example, relationship, predestination, sanctification, justice, nirvana.

In the Christian tradition, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches differ in apostolic succession, worship rites and iconography. The Protestant Reformation rejected centuries of tradition and hierarchy and put scripture central- it was through scripture alone that God could be revealed and accessed, not priests or rituals. I went to a Methodist seminary and learned how they expanded this with “the Quadrilateral.” Scripture is primary but interpretation of scripture is through tradition. Tradition is to be compared with experience of God. Finally experience of God is subjected to reason lest it become unruly. Then reason is subordinated to scripture, tradition and experience. Quakers may believe all these things can be helpful, but most of all we believe in listening deeply to the Spirit, and opening all things to the experience of God in our midst and the Light within.

But what I have learned over time in my education, prayer and interfaith dialogue, gleaned in my preparation for this afternoon, and walking with you as being and becoming one of the children of Light is a journey. In addition, knowing what it is that Christians believe or stating what I believe is not as important as the difference between believing and trusting.

In John 12:36 Jesus says "...believe in the Light." In John 14:1 Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. The key is the translation of the word "believe." A better translation here is trust. There is a big difference between making a statement of faith or reciting a creed and saying, "I believe there is God who is..."- and trusting God. Trusting means knowing in my mind, heart, soul and body God is present in and with me, that all things happen in God, and that all things work for the good for those who love God. Even if the worst happens God will be there with me; it will be what is meant to be.

And then there is the real clincher: I don't need to control everything that happens. I show up and do my best, but then let go and let God. I co-create not by controlling and taking charge but by discussing everything with God, asking for God's leading, trusting that God is present and that all that will be well.

What I understand about being children of Light is that God is always reaching out to us and luring us into relationship- God is in every detail. Some might say God wants a personal relationship with us but for me that is too much like a person and God is what God is- everything. Still, the Divine Light provides abundant opportunities for our growth- all for the purpose of our wholeness. But even without our wholeness or perfection or whatever, it is for relationship, now; union, connection with the Ultimate, with God in whom we live and move and

have our being. And all so that we know we already are and can become even more deeply children of Light.

Now, we cannot do this without each other because God is in each of us as well as all around us in nature and Spirit and breath. Where there is separation from creation or segregation of people by race, religion, age, ethnicity, ability, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, or economic status God is cut off. God is around us, within us and in experience shared with others and nature.

Walking in the woods, playing on the beach, petting our companion animals, prayer and Open worship, reading, study of tradition, discussion of transformation of tradition, delving into preparation to present, being present in loving companionship with friends from other traditions and listening to them is all part of learning about believing and even about what it can mean to trust. If we do it well, with love, compassion and patience, learning to trust God and be in relationship with God and others, we can become more fully, deeply and completely children of Light.

When it comes to belief we all have different things to say and we can translate things differently- belief, fear, awe, trust because words can only be mere symbols and metaphors of Truth. But by the Light we can see God shows no partiality, and in every nation and religion anyone who trusts God and does what is right is acceptable to God and is one of the children of Light.