

Sermon: Spokane Friends Church – August 11, 2024

‘Enduring Love’

Ruthie Tippin, Morning Minister

Psalm 136: 1-9 Responsive Reading, Psalm 118, Matthew 21

Celebrations of Tippin’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and George Fox’s Birthday

Friends Journal, June/July 2024; *Fox at 400, Reflections from Friends around the World*, Sharlee DiMenichi, 2024.

We have a microwave oven at home that’s as old as our house. They were both built 25 years ago. Sharp Model #R-930AK, manufactured January 1999. It started acting up last year. Fortunately, when we bought the house in 2016, we signed up with American Home Shield for a Home Warranty contract. I think we’re on our third appliance repair/replacement! A service technician came to the house and took a look at that microwave... a long, careful look and said: “You don’t want to replace this unit. They don’t make ‘em like they used to. It’s perfectly safe to use, and *it’s still got a lot of life left in it.*”

Endurance... the life that’s left when we think all the love, all the energy, all the caring, all the capacity we have is spent. The athletes that swim, run, vault, throw, and cross the finish line coming from behind have shown us their capacity to endure, when it seemed it was impossible to do so. We read today the psalmist’s song that God’s love endures... forever. Not only for a time, a season, but *forever*. 50 years for a marriage is a long time. To remember someone’s birthday 400 years later, let alone 2024, is a very long time. Forever is a really, really, long time. But some things just don’t wear out. They’re perfectly safe to use, and ‘they still got a lot of life left in them.’ God’s love is a lot like that.

Jon and I were married fifty years ago yesterday. We’d met almost exactly three years earlier when Jon came to George Fox College from Southern California. I had been there for one year, from Portland. Our families were very similar – Quaker, middle class, very musical, professionals, educators, family oriented. But very different too – mine was *very* conservative and Jon’s was less so – they actually played card games! I was very naïve. Jon understood the world far better than I. We met in a Music Theater class, and had known each other and a bunch of mutual friends for two years or more before we ever started dating. I think we fell in *like* with each other before we fell in love. I’m not sure, but I think so.

We've been together for a long time. We've enjoyed - and endured - a great many things. We've done it, together. We've had to trust each other to figure things out. Many things have been incredibly delightful. Some things... really difficult. But we've always wanted to make things work... to find a life that was joyful, meaningful, interesting... to see our life endure. Because of... our love for each other, and for who God is in our lives.

George Fox would never have thought that people would celebrate his 400<sup>th</sup> birthday, let alone his 40<sup>th</sup>. "The average life expectancy in England in the 1650s was around 37–40 years, but life expectancy for noble adults was higher, at 54 years for those born between 1400–1650." [google.com] George Fox was no nobleman, but he lived to be 67 years old, despite years of ministry, travel, illness, and imprisonments. This thoughtful young man searching to know God became one of the most formative persons of a movement of faith grounded in Christ's presence, God's Light, God's Love, in each person.

So many people have been influenced because of George Fox and his teachings, here at home and around the world. This year, children in Bolivia, learning about his life and celebrating his birthday "called him by the affectionate Spanish diminutive "Georgito". People *affirm* in legal proceedings rather than swear that they speak truthfully, because of Fox's testimony of integrity. Charles David Tauber, from Multnomah Monthly Meeting in Portland, now lives and works in Croatia with those traumatized by the war in the former Yugoslavia some 30 years ago. "People feel stopped up; people feel imprisoned," Tauber said. He credits George Fox's writings with motivating him to treat people who have been traumatized by war. Just think how *your* life has been affected by Fox and the tenets of Quaker faith, practice and thought!

Enduring love... One child born – one life begun 400 years ago – and Fox's life has left an enduring impact on the world. His search for God, his *reach* for God, and the life and love of God in Fox for others, has given so many a fresh way of seeing God, of living lives that value simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, stewardship – these Testimonies and so much more.

Simplicity: Focusing on what's important and not getting distracted by material things

Peace: Being kind and gentle, and using non-violent methods to resolve conflict

Integrity: Being honest and true to yourself

Community: Welcoming and including others, and taking care of each other

Equality: Being fair and valuing everyone's gifts

Stewardship: Taking care of what you have and serving others

These have endured through those of us who seek to find things that are *real*. We want to see our lives as Friends endure. Because of... love, for one another as much as for ourselves, and for *who God is* in each of us and in the world.

Not every microwave is built the same as my Sharp Model #R-930AK. Not every marriage lasts 50 years. Not every man who starts a religious movement is remembered 40 years later, let alone for 400 years. Some things just don't last. Whether it's a ministry, a marriage, or perhaps even a microwave, the miracle is the good that was found in the time they *did* last, the work done, the lessons learned, the gifts that were given.

Psalm 136, the scripture you read today with Linda, goes on for 26 verses, each one proclaiming "God's steadfast love *endures* forever." We hear this again at the beginning and the end of Psalm 118. But, it's interrupted! Why? Because *life* gets interrupted! The Psalmist suddenly says, "Out of my distress I called on the Lord." He does what you and I would do! He calls for help. He calls out to God. This one finds God to be steadfast, constant, trustworthy, durable. Who *else* would he go to?

He is fearful, surrounded like a swarm of bees, helpless, falling. And then we hear this singer's voice soaring: "The Lord is on my side", "the Lord helped me", and "the Lord is my strength". And then, *this*: "I *thank* you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing, it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Do you remember who told the story of the stone the builders rejected? It was *Jesus*, and he was quoting Psalm 118! The story is powerfully told in Mark, Chapter 21. Some things may seem like failures, worthless, things that 'ain't got no life left in 'em" – until they're filled with the steadfast, loving *intention* of God. Something that was once *rejected* has a new life, serving an even greater purpose.

We all struggle. Sometimes we fail. Sometimes things just don't work out. We don't win the race. Our hearts are broken. But we can and do succeed too, because we survive – and we can *thrive*! Once we've recovered from the distress of it all, sought help, and found our center, we discover God's *got* us!

*God's got us!* God answers. It may take time. George Fox spent years in prison cells. Some live with illness, or in difficult family situations, for a long time. We can endure because God *with us* endures. Regardless of our circumstances, we *live* empowered by God's spirit, we *endure* because of God's strength, and we are *filled* with God's great love.

Guess how Psalm 118 ends?

"The Lord is God, and he has given us light...  
You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;  
You are my God, and I will extol you.  
O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,  
*and the people said...*  
For God's steadfast love endures forever."

Thank you, God for George Fox's life. Thank you, God for my husband and family. Thank you, God that your love in each one of us endures forever. Amen.