

From Despair to Strength and Joy

by Diane Randall

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Good morning Friends. Thank you, Tom [Ewell], for that very warm introduction and welcome to North Pacific Yearly Meeting. And I want to thank the Yearly Meeting for welcoming me here this week as a Friend in Residence. Thanks to Jonathon and Dan and Dorsey, holding me in support this morning. Both Tom and Dorsey were on that first executive committee when I was hired. And to carry out the analogy that Tom started: You know when you fall in love, you remember those first moments that you meet one another and hold and cherish those relationships in a special way. And so Dorsey and Tom, amongst others, are those people for me. I remember Tom's story slightly differently. When we talked, it was actually a couple of weeks before I officially started. I had come for the executive committee meeting, and Tom did spend a lot of time lobbying. He would come and stay at the office and go visit his members of congress. And he said to me, "Not only are you not alone, in this work, because there's a network of people in the country." But he said, "This is not all about you". And I have to tell you, that actually was a big relief – that it wasn't going to be all about me! And that has been true.

From despair to strength and joy. . . "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

– John 14:27

What is your condition today? Is it despairing? Is it hopeful? Peaceful? Joyful? Perhaps you, like many of us, move from one feeling to another, depending on your social media feed. What's on Facebook? Or what's on Twitter? Or perhaps it's based on what newspaper article or a television show you may have watched recently. I know there are at least a couple of people in this room who have just come from the FGC Gathering with a thousand other Friends. And you may be feeling blissful, full of emotion, and spiritual deepening from being with Friends.

Violence, cruelty injustice, unrest, inaction to address climate disruption – these are issues that can make us despair. Let's face it, we live in a world of frustration, and sometimes fear, and disappointment often with our political and elected officials. It can make us feel kind of down. So this morning, I want to tell you a little bit about how about my work at FCNL brings me hope. And I want to tell you that the trajectory from despair to strength and joy is not a straight line or even a beautiful arc. But it is possible to see how, from despair, we can move to strength and joy. And these emotions can live together within us. I want to challenge you to see that through our lives in the Spirit, we can find grace in the world, and we can see how our work in community brings strength and joy.

Despair. . . Well, last week alone was probably enough to sink many of us. The video images of Alton Sterling being killed by police in Baton Rouge. Philadro Castille killed by police in a

suburb of Minneapolis. Five Dallas police officers killed while protecting peaceful protestors. And that's only naming some of the violence in the streets in the United States.

You might have overlooked that President Obama made the announcement that he would keep 8500 troops in Afghanistan indefinitely, perpetuating what is and has become the endless war. That endless war is also fueled by the so-called security assistance that our country provides through both financial aid and military aid to countries around the world. As well as the low-intensity drone warfare that we perpetuate.

A couple of weeks ago, when the White House issued a statement on drones, and they indicated that there had been sixty-eight civilians killed by lethal drones in the last eight years or so. That number is far below the civilian count of deaths that many close observers of lethal drone warfare, and even journalists, have counted. Still, we count this action by the administration as a step, at least, of trying to begin to address transparency and accountability. The drone program has often been off-limits to public debate because it is operated by the CIA. This report is an example of an opening where FCNL can step forward and request a meeting with security officials at the White House to talk about the drone program and to make it known that we oppose the use of lethal drones. So today – because I'm here I can't be in that meeting – Yasmine, who leads our civil rights and civil liberties and human rights program, is there with other faith leaders, with people from the Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren and the US conference of Bishops, to talk to people who work with President Obama about the drone program and to discuss the our difficulty with how they even term "civilians." and how they term "non-combatants." And to think about how to restrict this drone program.

Many of us turn off the news because we cannot bear to hear the repetitive speeches or sometimes the downright lies of candidates running for public office. At the same time, we may find it hard to look away from the historical shifts that we know our country and our world are going through. We are in a rapidly changing global society. And just keeping up can consume us. If we look at the issues of injustice from strictly a political perspective, we do have reasons to be discouraged. Congress, I don't have to tell you this, is more partisan than ever. I was at a conference about three weeks ago, put on by a security think tank where Vice-president Joe Biden spoke. He said specifically that in the last four years, he has seen Congress become more partisan than ever. Seeking policy changes to promote peaceful solutions to deadly conflict and to address human security threats, seeking policy solutions that would address systemic injustices or would meaningfully reduce carbon emissions, seeking policy to reform our broken immigration system – you can name any of the many concerns you might feel that our elected officials should take up. And yet they are not.

I will tell you that from my view of lobbying the front lines of Congress – and I literally have a view of the Hart Office Building, where many senators have their offices, because that's where our office is located – I can assure you that Friends are having an impact. And we are having an impact significantly because of our network of Friends who have engaged.

Right now, there's a bill moving through congress called, "The Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act." It's a piece of legislation that creates an architecture for peace-building within the U.S. government. And this piece of legislation actually didn't have its genesis

recently. It's really the legacy of work that FCNCL has done for well over a decade. A former Friend in residence here, Brigit Noyce, a former employee at FCNL, helped start the Peaceful Prevention of Deadly Conflict program at FCNL. We now have a secretary for a peace-building policy, and we convene a coalition of about twenty-six organizations -- human rights, humanitarian, religious, development -- that are often have people on the front lines of deadly conflict and who are working to try to implement peace-building solutions. So our work is trying to help create structures to support that work within the U.S. government. We are trying to create structures so that, when deadly conflict is brewing, the first response is not to send in the U.S. military, that the first response is to prevent the conflict from increasing -- to prevent war, in essence. If it weren't for FCNL, this legislation wouldn't exist. Our staff worked with the staff of Senator Cardon, who introduced the legislation. Moreover, it was the FCNL advocacy network -- through work done last year when we convened in our annual sessions and Friends came to lobby -- that resulted in us now having twelve Democrats and three Republican senators co-sponsoring this legislation. And the three Republicans who signed off on to this legislation, after they signed, they called the Quakers and others who had lobbied them to say, "I signed on as a co-sponsor to this legislation."

So, they're paying attention. Later this month, for those of us who cannot look away from politics, we'll be watching the Republican and Democratic conventions on TV. And these are national events designed to be partisan, and they are also obviously designed to nominate the various parties' candidates. So of course, this is a historic year in many regards. We now have the first woman to be nominated in a major party, and even if you don't like her, that is a "whoop whoop," OK? That's a good thing. We now have our first non-politician reality TV personality to be nominated by a major party. So again, from the political perspective, and if you are a political junkie, this is pretty fascinating.

But when we move out of that political framework, when we consider what is happening in the world today from our spiritual condition, from a humanitarian, communitarian viewpoint, the view changes. We can see that we are not alone. There are millions of people around this country and around the world who long for an end to violence, not just Quakers and Mennonites or Brethren. There are millions of people who are motivated to live non-violently and peacefully, and who would like our elected officials to work on that. There are thousands of organizations working to address climate change and lessen environmental degradation. There are 190 governments that have actually signed on to address and reduce carbon emissions, and they declared that at the Paris climate conference. I know that that is not enough. But we are part of a broader community working to make the world a better place. There are academics in our colleges and universities who are teaching students about conflict prevention and transitional justice, about how to end and how to prevent wars, so new wars don't start. And there are thousands of activists on the ground, many of them are Quaker colleagues in Kenya and Burundi and Rwanda, who are working to prevent violent conflict. These are peace-building practitioners.

I often think of our peace-building work as having this academic, in-the-ivory-tower possibility and also having people on the ground, who are making it happen. And in between are these policy makers who just don't get it yet. They have to learn how to implement what's actually happening.

We are not alone. When we take into our hearts the troubles of this world, we may still feel discouragement. But we may also begin to hear the still, small voice. And hearing that still, small voice can give us clarity and can drive to use our own voices in the public sphere. Not to add to the cacophony, but to speak from the truth we know.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.” That’s the first verse of the 14th chapter of John – the chapter in which Thomas and Philip, disciples of Jesus, are fretting. They’re worried. This is the time of Passover. When Jesus is about to be crucified. And they don’t know what’s going on. They say, “We don’t know where you are going. How can we know the way? Just show us the Father. That will be enough for us.” This is at the point in the story when Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to be with the disciples. So when I was preparing for what I would say today and looking at different translations (which is just amazing, right? You can do that now – there are 50 translations.), I came across the New International Version translation, which I love. And this is the verse:

“But the advocate,” (The advocate, that’s sometimes what we call lobbyists.), “the advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things. And will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. I do not give you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.”

Let’s talk about fear for just a little bit. Fear is absolutely a true emotion that we all feel at one time or another, and sometimes that fear can tie us up into despair. So I know that we have probably all felt the pounding of our hearts before we have to do something that’s scary. I know when I was a small child, I was absolutely terrified to go into my basement alone because I had two older brothers who figured out that they could go downstairs and jump out and scare me. And I would scream. And that delighted them. When I was in my twenties, I was actually physically accosted in my driveway in the daylight. I was not harmed, but I was emotionally scarred, and I was fearful to leave my house for months, especially at night. It was right when I was pregnant, it was before my first child was born, and it was a fearful time for me. We all have fears about adequacy. Will I be hired for that job? If I get the job will I be successful? Will I have enough money to live through my retirement? Will I be loved? Are we really Quakerly enough? If Diane expects me to talk to elected officials, will I know what to say? Will I have the confidence to ask a good question or make a good statement? We have fears about harm, the physical harm that can happen to us.

These fears cause us to do all kinds of things to protect ourselves and our property. This includes buying expensive security systems and fortifying ourselves with weapons. And this response of fear is played out on both the personal level, and the national level. As a country, we have built our national security’s confidence on militarization. The American public buys this militarization argument because those selling it play on our fears. That argument, about the fear of others, has spread militarization to our communities. Local police don riot gear to counter peaceful protesters or use armored personnel carriers to show force.

This show of force at the personal, the local, and the national levels may make people feel protected, but when we examine this show of force through the crucible of our inner lives, through our lives in the Spirit, we realize that this outward show of strength has its limits.

Because it is strength based on fear, not on love. Our lives in the Spirit teach us to love. When we put on the Spirit of love, we see our work through a different lens. Sometimes I like to think in images, and when I think about looking through a different lens, I actually think of going to the eye doctor. And most of you have probably had this experience when you go to the eye doctor, and they put that machine up to you, and they start testing what looks better or not, and they'll say, "Better like this?" or "Better like this?" "Like this, or like this?" And you get about three seconds, and you have to decide which is the best view. And sometimes you get a little uncertain, because first you thought one maybe was better, and then you think, "No, this is a little bit better." Sometimes our view of our public lives and our political activity is like this, sort of like rapid-changing lenses. We aren't really sure of the clarity, of how the grounding of our spiritual lives creates the crispest view. But I maintain there is a direct link between our spiritual lives and our political lives. Perhaps more so for Quakers, because of the practice of our faith, than for many others.

I have three advices or points that I want to impress on you today. I don't know what to call them, but I'm going to call them advices. I have three advices for you about our spiritual lives and our political lives. And I hope these help provide clarity about what I'm speaking about.

First, as the Religious Society of Friends, we have a powerful voice for peace and justice. We can and we should speak boldly when we have something to say that has not been said or has not been heard. Second, we as individuals, as citizens, and as people who care about the public welfare and life in this country and around the globe, we must be engaged in the political system. Good citizenship is more than voting. Third, it is possible through our actions to have an impact on bending the arc of history toward justice.

So, the role of the Religious Society of Friends – I'm going to cast my net wide here, and like anyone who's participated in a Quaker organization, I've been part of conversations about how we define membership. Those are yeasty and ripe conversations among Friends, and thank you Junior Friends for being with us, because this will be part your decision-making. But I want to talk about participants in our meetings. I want to talk about members, attenders, admirers and companions along the way. Let's cast the net wide. Let's welcome, include, and teach all of those who aspire to be connected to Quakers.

Those of you – and I think it's probably many people in this room, regardless of your age – those of you who have been in this faith and practice of Friends for a long time, you have a special role. You are elders in a sense. You hold your meetings in the light. You serve on the committees. You contribute your time and your money. You pray for the work of Quaker organizations around the globe, and you always go the extra mile. You serve on the committees at the monthly meeting, and yearly meeting, and the organizational level. And I ask you, as Tom said: Hold us; pray for us; pray for our work in Washington, DC. Pray for the network of people around the country who are engaging with their elected officials. I grew up in a Lutheran church, and it was a church that had a flag, a United States flag and a Lutheran flag. And the pastor would, at the end of every worship service, would pray for the leaders of our country. And I never got it until I got to Washington, DC, and I started praying more than I had ever prayed. I really gained a new understanding of Paul's encouragement to "Pray without ceasing". And if you don't pray, cause that's not what you

do, I will ask you to do what Pope Francis encouraged people to do when he visited Washington, DC. He said, "If you don't pray, send us your good intentions".

We are not alone. We carry the legacy of generations before us. I'm not a historian, but you know the history of Friends, you know the sort of "brand" that Quakers have. But it isn't just a brand. It is actually a legacy, and so our roots go down, but they go across as well. We are deep and wide. Those Friends among us who are working on addressing injustice of all kinds, those who have worked for years on voting rights, civil rights, are going to have to keep working. Cause those rights are deteriorating in some places. Those who worked on LGBTQ rights are going to have to keep working on it, because we have a lot of people who still oppose that. We have work to do on immigration reform, on ending mass incarceration, on even understanding, comprehending our own role in power and privileged dynamics. We have work to do preventing war and promoting peace.

But this is what Friends do. We let our lives speak. We don't do a lot of preaching. We don't do a lot of proselytizing. (That's another thing I started feeling when I got to FCNL – we need more Quakers!) It wasn't until I began working at FCNL that I really began to appreciate that process that FCNL uses of going to Quaker Meetings and churches every two years and asking for input on our priorities. And I know that there are many people here who participate in that. I did it in Hartford Meeting before I came to FCNL, and I thought, "Well, what do they do with that? What difference does it make what I say?" Let me tell you, it makes a huge difference to us, to know and understand what Friends tell us.

So the process is this: You guys work with our queries to you in January, February, March. In April this year, we got the results back from 233 meetings and churches. Our policy committee met in June, and before that, they had already started going through the results, cataloguing. And Stephen Aldrich, whom you all know, is on that policy committee. And there are different ways the committee members look at the results. Every member approaches it slightly differently. Some people actually start tallying, you know. And other people are just like, "No, I'm just going with the sense of what I'm hearing here." At any rate, the policy committee comes up with a list, gives it back to the staff, and asks the staff to say, "So if we were to approve these in the general meeting in November, would these be good priorities to work on"? And staff will give input, but the staff doesn't decide. The policy committee decides. Our Friends decide what FCNL will work on.

That grounding is incredibly powerful to me, in my role. Because if somebody comes to me and says, "Wow, you've just got to work on food policy. You've got to work on this GMO issue, cause it's a huge issue." And I know it's an issue for many Friends, but if we didn't approve it as one of our priorities, we're not going to work on that issue, even though there are Friends who care about it. We'll see if we can find out something about it for you maybe, but we work on those issues for which priorities are named. And we are a multi-issue organization. And the beauty of being a multi-issue organization, and the work that we try to do as staff is to draw the connections between various issues – like to help people understand how climate change can drive conflict, or how conflict drives migration, or how migration drives Islamophobia. Once our priorities are named at our annual meeting, then staff develops what we call "change strategies," to figure out what we can do. And there's no question that our legislative priorities are very aspirational.

So I was sitting with Yasmine, who is meeting today with staff at the White House, discussing drones. And she said, "We're going to be asking for accountability and transparency." And I said, "Well, Yasmine, you know we have a position to end the use of drones." Yasmine is from Iran originally, and is herself a refugee. And she said, "Well, I don't know if that is going to be very strategic." And I said, "Yeah, I know. That's probably not going to be very strategic, but that's our position." So we try to be strategic and be thoughtful and speak in the parlance that people can understand, but most importantly, we try to represent what Friends ask us to do. And we usually find a great way to do both.

FCNL was the first faith-based lobby established in Washington, DC in 1943. So we are soon going to celebrate our 75th anniversary. We are not as old as Fellowship of Reconciliation, but we're getting up there. We're probably the second-largest faith-based lobby in DC, which many people find hard to believe. We have 43 staff people right now. That includes lobbyists who are on the Hill, and it includes our young fellows, who are people who come spend a year with us after they graduate from college. Our fellowship program is a competitive program; not everyone who applies gets to do it. Our staff includes people who travel around the country; it includes our fundraisers; it includes business office staff. We own two buildings now, so our staff includes someone who actually manages those buildings. But FCNL also includes tens of thousands of people around the country, Quakers and others who care about these issues and who want to work with us on these issues. A couple of years ago, Parker Palmer spoke at our annual meeting, and he gave us a great testimonial. His line was this, "FCNL: giving lobbying a good name for over 70 years".

So in the spirit of inter-visitation, I want to extend an invitation to all of you to come to our annual meeting. Now, Maurice and Tom and Dorsey, people who are reps come because they are reps. But other people, you, can come if you want to. You know, we are open, and you don't have to come just at annual meeting. If you travel to Washington, DC, we want you to come visit us. And we hope that when you come, you'll be willing to lobby. And I want to extend a very special invitation to people from Idaho and Wyoming and Montana, because we don't have that many of you, and we need you. Because we need to be talking to those members. Members of congress listen to their constituents. It's incredibly important.

And this gets to my second point: An engaged citizenry can bring integrity to politics. Strength comes from this network, and it is essential for lawmakers to hear the voices of their constituents. Let me say that again. It is essential for lawmakers to hear the voices of their constituents. Even when you think you know what they believe or that they already agree with you, they need to hear from you. Especially if they disagree with you, they need to hear from you. Even if you keep getting the same form letter back from them, they need to hear from you. It takes more than voting.

And I want to be clear about political activism – it is more than talking to the people who agree with you. That is not political activism. Political activism is finding people with whom you are in conflict and figuring it out – how to have a respectful conversation that finds some common ground, but also tries to take another step. And that's part of what we do when we lobby. That's why lobbying is a spiritual exercise. I once said to a friend of mine in Hartford, we were at Meeting, and she said to me she didn't really want to deal with someone in the Meeting because she didn't really like that person, they always had conflicts.

And I said, "Well that's the work, that's the work. We have to figure out how to deal with people we're in conflict with."

I know that it can be much more enjoyable to sit around and maybe watch your favorite TV show, or hike on Mt. Rainier, or do any number of things. But figuring out how to put in a little bit of time to engage with your member of congress is really important. And I dare say it might bring you a sense of strength and joy to do it. We can help you. So, part of FCNL's work is lobbying on the Hill, but we also train people. So we've established these advocacy teams. We now have one in Great Falls, Montana. Yeah! We have one in Olympia, Washington, that needs some more support, the one that Stephen's working on. We have a great team that's been in Bellingham, Washington, for a while now. We have twenty-seven advocacy teams around the country. We need one in every state. And these are people who've agreed to put a little more time into their advocacy work by building a community around the priority areas that FCNL is going to work on. They have a meeting once a month and they do letter writing. It's a way to build skills and build support. But you don't have to be an advocacy team member to take action. You can take action through our website. We make it pretty easy. And you can also just pick up the phone and call your member of Congress.

On Monday before I came, I sent a note around to our lobbyists and I said, "Hey, I'm going to North Pacific Yearly Meeting. I'm going to see people there from Washington and Oregon and Montana and Idaho." I didn't know Georgia was going to be here from Wyoming, or I would have said that. And I said, "What do you want me to talk about?" And Jose Woss, who is our lobbyist leading criminal justice sentence reform, said, "Ask anyone from Montana to call Senator Danes to say, "Thank you." So I'm going to model for you how you would call, what you would say. So you pick up the phone, you can call the district office or you can call the Washington office. And you can say, "Hi, I am Diane, calling to say thank you for supporting the sentencing reform infractions act. I'm really concerned with fairness and with federal sentencing and with Congress taking the lead in reducing the incarceration rate in our country. I also want to tell you how pleased I am that senator Danes is working on a bi-partisan basis. As a voter and a Quaker, I really value bipartisanship work and I hope that the senator will provide leadership for bipartisan solutions to climate change." So you said thank you, and you said what's the next thing you want to talk about.

Here's what Emilia, our director for Domestic Policy, said: "If the Democrats gain control of the senate in November, which is widely expected, Senator Widen of Oregon is going to be the chair of the budget committee, which is the powerful tax-writing committee. So here's what we'd like to talk to senator Widen about." Now, these are not the only things. There are other things, but these are the ones Emilia gave me. So Emilia says, "Talk to Senator Widen about the earned income tax credit for single adults." So when I call, I would say, "Senator Widen, I'm calling to ask for your support of making the earned income tax credit for single adults more effective. As a leader on the finance committee, your support of this would mean that millions of single adults who are working in low-wage jobs and not raising children could be lifted out of poverty. Just like the Earned Income Credit for Families helps families get out of poverty. Thanks you so much."

That's it. Takes about a minute, right? So here's the secret. There are many, many issues where members of Congress do not know what their constituents think. They do not know

what you believe. There are some things that they get dozens of calls on, and there are many things they get very few calls on. You can have an influence. The other thing I want to tell you is that persistence makes a difference. It is great for you to send an email, make a phone call, but following up a month later or two months later is even better. We talk about building engagement, building a relationship with Congress. Do you want to know how to do that? Talk to Tom and Jonathon. They're both people who have, over years, talked to their members of Congress about militarization or about key issues, so that the member of Congress kind of starts remembering them. "Oh yeah, you're here to talk to me about that weapons system, right? Let's talk about it." And they pay attention. Jim Corbert, who was a leader in the Sanctuary movement in the '80s had this famous saying, "Individuals can resist injustice, but only in community can we do justice."

So the mutual support of our meetings, the mutual support of those who go with us is very important. So when we do justice in community, we come to my third and final advice. And that is this, a phrase that you know well, of course, from Martin Luther King Jr; "The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice." And our collective action is what helps to bend the arc of the moral universe.

Here's the other part of that news, of course. And the older you are, the more you appreciate this. We won't always see the fruits of our labor. We won't always see a lovely arc. It may bend toward justice through the issues that we've talked about already – through voting rights or through gay rights, and then it may get a little crooked again and kind of bounce back up. Once example I'd say about that is the work that we've done on the Iran deal. A year ago today is when President Obama announced that the U.N. Security Council had come to an agreement with Iran about its nuclear program, forbidding Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. This is an issue that FCNL has worked on for a long time, to try to create diplomacy with Iran. We put a full scale lobbying effort onto this when that announcement came out. We worked with religious communities around Washington. We held a national call with the National Council of Churches and Pax Christi International. We mobilized people, particularly in Maryland and Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New York, and North Dakota to try to get the 41 senators who would support this. And we were successful. That was a remarkable achievement. If you run a Google search today on Kate Gould or The Hill newspaper, you'll see an op-ed that Kate Gould published today, which she co-wrote with Representative Keith Ellison from Minneapolis, about the work of the Iran deal and what's working with it. This is not an arc that's going to stay there. This week the House introduced a bill that would impose new sanctions. Iran is not an easy partner to work with. They continue to violate human rights. But they have dismantled their nuclear program so that they cannot now acquire a nuclear weapon, and it will continue, and that is an important step in nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

We know that to move from despair to strength and joy, we do have to walk into conflict. We have to walk into conflict to do the work of justice. We have to talk and listen to people who disagree with us to find strength. We have to relish the act of faithfulness in the Spirit of love to experience joy.

I want to share a quote that many of you will know, or you may know parts of it, but I want to read a little bit longer version of this quote from Reinhold Neibuhr, who wrote a book

called *The Irony of American History* and who is a well-known Christian realist theologian in the '40s and '50s. This is it:

Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime. Therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in the immediate context of history. Therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone. Therefore we must be saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our own standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness.

We are not alone. We know the spirit is in us and is with us. We know that the undivided life, when we let our inward experience inform our outward action to live in the world, can help us let go of despair. We can move with strength and hope and with joy. Our participation in community brings us hope; our life in the Spirit brings us joy and brings us peace. Not as the world gives. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

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