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Good morning. Let's start with a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, thank You for getting us all here safely today. Thank You for Your Holy Spirit, which opens up the Scriptures to us and teaches us and helps us to understand Your truths. We pray now, O God, that You will enlighten our understanding about who we are and who You want us to be. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen. Well, today I'm going to talk a bit about our denomination. Our church, our denomination is the Religious Society of Friends. That comes from in the Bible when Jesus said, "I've called you friends." And so we call each other friends, as in friends of Jesus. And somewhere along the way, someone tried to slander us with the word "quaker," and we just sort of held onto that kind of as a little badge of honor. So you also hear us called "quaker" sometimes, but friends is the universal, generally accepted term. If you look at what we send to the government, it says "Religious Society of Friends." Friends began with a man named George Fox in the 1600s. And George was kind of disheartened with the state of Christianity. He looked around at people who went to church on Sunday but just led very carnal, worldly lives throughout the week. And he didn't see any of the power of God or any of the biblical promises being fulfilled. And so he was kind of disheartened with what he saw. And he spoke with people. He went around and talked to people and said, "What's the solution to the way I'm feeling?" And his parents said, "Well, of course," his parents said, "You need to get married." And then he had friends who said, "Just come drinking with us." And he had pastors say, "You need some tobacco." And he just got all kinds of crazy, useless advice. And so finally, one day, he was just walking out by himself, and he felt God speak to his heart. And God said, "There is one, even Jesus Christ, who can speak to thy condition." And when he heard that in his spirit, it was everything he'd been missing. He did a complete 180 in his attitude. He had finally found what was missing, and that was the direct communion with God through the Holy Spirit inside of us. And you'll often hear him refer to the light inside each one of us, and that's a very friendly term to use as the inner light. But he was excited. He was like, "Yes, this is..." Because it wasn't just the words that were spoken. It was the fact that God was speaking to his heart. And so as he began to listen to God and listen to God, the Holy Spirit inside, speak to him, God began to open up his understanding of Scriptures, and suddenly everything that he was reading started making sense. Things that he had just skimmed over time and time again, suddenly jumped off. The meaning jumped into his heart. And so as he learned these new things, he did what any other excited person would do, and he started telling other people about what God was revealing to him. And that was the beginning of the Religious Society of Friends. So what do friends believe? Well, that is a much more difficult question to answer, because over the years, the Religious Society of Friends has split and split and split again. And there are Quakers who believe that all roads lead to God. There are Quakers who believe that there is no God. So you can't simply say what do friends believe, unfortunately, because there's a lot of weirdos calling themselves Quakers. Our church, I can tell you what we believe. We are what would be labeled, by anyone who studies Quaker history, we would be labeled as a "Gurneyite Friends Church." And that name comes from a man named Gurney, I think it's Joseph Gurney, who at a time, at one of the splits, he was preaching that the Scripture is authority, that yes, you can listen and hear God in your spirit, but what God says in here will never contradict Scripture. And there were other people who said, no, whatever God says in here is that goes, and even if it completely is contrary to Scripture, and that kind of thinking will get you in trouble. So Gurneyites are just a result of one of the splits. We believe, our church and our yearly meeting, we believe that God exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We believe that because of sin, all men must repent and find their salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. We believe that there is a little bit of the light of Christ in every man, and that it draws all men to God. But we also believe that when you become a believer, you are baptized with the Holy Spirit, and that fills you with the power of God and gives you direct communion with Him. And again, like I said, we also believe that Scripture is canon, but it is through the Holy Spirit revealing and teaching to us that it goes from just being ink on page to being real life applicable truth, things that we understand. So in addition to this core foundation of what we believe, we also have certain practices, friends have certain practices. For one thing, they believe that the outward trappings get in the way of the inward spiritual relationship with God. And that's why friends have done away with ceremony and ritual and intermediaries between man and God. We also believe that the people are the church, not the building. And the building is often referred to as just the meeting house. And when we talk about the church, we are talking about these people here. And as such, we can have church anywhere. It doesn't have to be in this certain place or in any certain place. We can be sitting by a lake and have church because we are the church. And wherever we meet, we are having church. Friends also believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the direct communion we have with God are sufficient for the biblical mandate of baptism and communion. The outward water baptism and the outward physical communion. Again, these are outward things that take away from the inward spiritual experience. And so outward things are shunned in the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the communion we have with Him and with each other. Friends believe that is sufficient. Friends believe that the Holy Spirit can work through anyone, whether they are a trained seminary minister who has been preaching their whole life or whether they are just a little kid, God can work through and use anyone. And that it is God who makes a person fit to be a preacher. And finally, there are these things called the Quaker Testimonies. And I found a really handy, I guess it's an anagram. For the first letter, it means the first letter of each word. Is that an anagram? Mnemonic. Yeah. So the word is SPICES. And that stands for Stewardship, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Simplicity. And these are these things that Quakers call Testimonies, which is a thing that they take a very deliberate, public, hard stance on representing because they believe that in doing so, this loudly proclaims God to the world. All right. And I'm going to talk about each one of them in case you missed them. I'll be going through them. First off, Stewardship. Quakers friends believe that we are to take good care of our planet, our bodies, our homes, and our money. We should be good stewards of this planet and be careful about recycling and making good use of what resources we have. We should be good stewards of our body. And as such, Quakers have a stance of no alcohol, no tobacco, no drugs, except for prescription drugs. We are to be good stewards of our homes, take care of our families and our possessions, because we see everything we have is from God and we are to use it for Him in His glory. And we are to be good stewards of our money, which is why Quakers have a hard, no gambling stance. That's the Stewardship testimony. Next is the Peace testimony. Friends believe that since there's a bit of God inside each one of us, that it is wrong to ever kill or take violence on another person. And so we have this Peace testimony where friends are against all forms of violence and death and war, whether it's military action or whether it's killing someone for a crime, capital punishment, thank you. They're against anything that would harm another person because friends believe that there is that bit of God in every man. That is the Peace testimony. Then there's the Integrity testimony. Quakers friends don't lie. They believe that you should always speak the truth at all times. And that is why when a friend goes into court, they don't put their hand on the Bible and swear to tell the truth. Because by swearing, I'm going to tell the truth right now is like saying, and then later on I can go back to telling lies whenever I feel like it. So by never swearing, I will tell the truth right now, they are declaring I tell the truth always. That rather than putting my hand on this holy book and saying I'm going to tell the truth, I'm going to believe that the truth itself is what is holy. And I'm going to always respect the words and the things I say as holy and complete truth. Also, part of the Integrity testimony is to make sure that our actions reflect our words, the things we do reflect what we say we believe. And then the Community testimony. And there's debate about which of these are official testimonies. And some people just, you know, they don't have the stewardship or the community testimonies per se. But a lot of what is included in those is they've just lumped it into some of the other ones. But the Community testimony is to care for our community, to care for the least of these. Those who are poor, those who are prisoners, looking out for people who are having a hard time taking care of themselves. Also, friends have always had a very strong influence on education. And back when this country was young, back before the government had put any sort of educational system together, it was friends who were out there establishing schools, making sure that every child could grow up reading the Bible and learning God's truth. The Equality testimony. Friends have always been anti-slavery, anti-racist and anti-sexist. Again, knowing that there's that bit of God in every man, no matter their gender or their race. And I was told this, and I didn't have a reference for it, but I was told that of all the denominations in early America, that friends were the only ones that kept every promise they made to the Native Americans. And finally, the Simplicity testimony, the one that I think gets overlooked a lot these days. Materialism impedes spiritualism. This is one of the things we've talked about. And so to do away with the unnecessary outward things in life, the stuff that this world chases after, possessions and belongings, by foregoing that, by shunning materialism and stuff, by making our lives as simple as possible, we can dedicate more of our life to the service of God and we can dedicate more of our resources to the service of God, because we're not spending money on unnecessary stuff. Living a life of simplicity, the friends believe that that allows us to focus on what really matters, which is the inward spiritual walk with God. So that's what friends believe. I'm going to give you a very brief history of this particular church. Carmel Friends came into being way back when Indiana, the state of Indiana, was just a big piece of wilderness. It was only 14 years old. Indiana was only 14 years old when the first friends started meeting in this area. And three years later, they had been meeting regularly enough that they applied to a nearby yearly meeting and said, "Will you please recognize us as an official Quaker meeting?" And they said, "Yes." And so in 1833, when Indiana was 17 years old, what we are just Carmel Friends was established. It wasn't called Carmel Friends. It was called Richland Friends, because one of the guys who helped establish it said, "I used to belong to a church called Richland Friends." And they said, "Oh, that works." And that's where we got our name. So yeah, so 1833, Richland Friends was established. And it was really just wilderness and swamp out here. There was very little going on. We were founded in a tiny little wooden shack, which there's a picture of out there. If you look at our little history glass case over across from the mailboxes, you can see some... There's a little picture of that wooden shack that was erected that year. Now, we are a lot different today than we were back then. Back then, when they started meeting, they were a completely unprogrammed service, meaning they all came together and they had what we call open worship for the entire time. They sat down and they silently waited on the Holy Spirit to speak to them. And if they felt led to share, they would share. But there was no minister up here speaking. There was no up here, actually. The benches just all faced each other. And it was just a room full of benches. And they sat in silence, and there was no music or preacher or anything like that. In fact, Carmel Friends didn't have a full time paid minister until 1892, when the church was almost 60 years old. They existed for 60 years without having someone up here doing what I do. As I hinted at by the nature of the shack that they met in, there was no decoration. I know you can't... We have a cross behind our screen up here, but they wouldn't have had anything like that because that would have been symbolism. And symbolism detracts from the inward spiritual. So there would have been no cross, no sound system, no air conditioning, none of that stuff. Probably no carpeting. It was very minimalistic. Everything outward was minimized so as not to detract from the inward. Well, the reason that we're having this little history lesson today is because lately MNC has been meeting and praying about our mission and our vision. And that kind of got me thinking about our identity, who we are as a church. When I came back here, it was about two and a half years ago. Something happened and it just kind of put a little question in my brain. We had a picture in our bulletin of our veterans. We had a picture of all of our veterans. And that was like a... That's in honor of Independence Day or Veterans Day or something. And that just kind of... In the back of my brain, I remembered some class I had about Quakers. And I was like, "Oh, that's interesting because Quakers are anti-war." And I just sort of just put it off. I didn't really think much about it because so many other churches do that. We honor our military. That's a very American thing to do, an American church thing to do. On Independence Day, you had your veterans stand up and you clap for them. And that's cool. I've been a part of a lot of churches that do that. But in my head, I was like, "Oh, I kind of didn't expect that we'd do that here." But whatever. And then over time, a little more of those things have just been kind of popping up every now and then. Like I hear someone say, "Oh, yeah, well, we occasionally drink or smoke or gamble or..." Sometimes the death penalty is necessary or I was baptized or I took communion or I swore an oath. And it was kind of building up in my mind. I was like, "You know, I'm starting to not be able to find people here who completely adhere to the faith and practice, the list of all of the Quaker stuff." And I'm not attacking or accusing or anything. I'm just making an observation. Because I wonder sometimes if people maybe come to this church and they hear us say, "Yeah, we're Quakers or we're friends or whatever." And then we explain what that is and then we start giving them all these caveats, except, "Well, I don't." But I do this and then we start telling them which bits of the faith and practice we pick and choose. And maybe the reason we're picking and choosing this stuff is because we're trying to be relevant and reach a world that is lost, a world that is, you know, maybe by saying it's okay to have a drink now and then maybe we are eating with sinners as Jesus did. And if that's the argument you're making, then, okay, I get that. But I'm worried about if we are calling ourselves one thing and acting like a different thing, if people might say, "Oh, that's hypocrisy. Hang on just a second now." And so the point, the reason that I'm going through all this today, the reason I'm making a squirm is just I think we ought to, as we're figuring out our vision, as we're figuring out where this church is headed, I think it is important for us to also figure out identity, who we are, who we want to be. And I realize, God save us, this is the kind of thing that creates church splits because some of you have probably heard this and said, "Yeah, you're right, Matthew. We need to go back to the way things were." And some of you said, "Yeah, you're right, Matthew. We have adapted and changed to the needs of the community." And those are opposing viewpoints. These are kind of two different camps and I'm not trying to cause a rift or anything, but... And some of you were thinking, "Shut up, Matthew." It's like, "Everything's fine. Stop rocking the boat." But we do need to kind of be honest with each other and we do need to be able to talk openly about this stuff. And I know some people just, some people say, you know, there are people who come here and meet here and they say, "I'm a Christian. I'm not a Quaker." And they're just upfront about the fact that they like these people, they like what we do here, but they don't adhere to faith and practice. And they say, "That's me. That's cool. I like that. That's honest." But I'm worried about people who say, who claim that name of Quaker but then don't live up to it. So my hope is that in the coming months or let's say weeks, because in the coming weeks that we will begin to decide, to pray about who we are and who we want to be. And if we want to take up that mantle of Quaker and proudly carry it into the future, then let's do that and let's shore up our lines and firmly establish this is who we are. We are friends and this is what friends believe. Or if we feel like we need to change and adapt and become something a little bit different, then that's okay too. But I feel like we ought to think about it and talk about it. And it's not going to be easy and there will probably be some heated discussions and that's okay. You can blame me. But yeah, let's start making that change. Because the outcome of those conversations is that we're going to be united. That we will be of one mind and one purpose and one vision. And there won't be any question about who we are or what we're doing. There won't be factions and camps working against each other. There won't be people saying we need to go this way and people saying we go that way. We need to be united and marching arm in arm straight forward to whatever God is calling us to be. And so we're going to have our time of open worship now in the manner of friends. And I ask that during this time you just pray and say, God, open up my eyes and my heart to your vision for this church and my role to play in this church. Who do you want us to be, God? And am I a part of that? We pray before we get started. Heavenly Father, thank you for this incredible, proud heritage that this church has. I thank you for all of the good and all of the wonderful things that you have done in this world through the hands and feet of Carmel friends and Richland friends. God, as we spend this time out here before you, please help us to figure out your will, your identity for this church. Help us to see who you want us to be. Help us to lay aside our preconceptions and show us, God, your dream, your desire for this body of believers. And show us the part we are to play in that dream of yours, in Jesus' name. [Silence] I appreciate the focus on friends' background. Many of us here, of course, have known the friends' background for a long time and as myself, have grown up here. But then, over the years, we went from three churches, and you could say, like the show on television, everybody knew our name. Everybody knew who we were. We were a farm community. The friends, the Methodists, the Westlands. It was easy, if you will, to be a Quaker. You really weren't questioned that much. We just knew that we were who we were and they were who they were and we all got along and everything was fine. And then the Catholics moved in. I always joke about that. My dad thought I was going to marry some Catholic and go to hell, you know. And I did. No, I didn't go to hell. But anyway, we now have so many denominations and every color and design you can think of. And now people that come in here, they don't know who we are. And how do we explain who we are if we don't know who we are these days and how are we relevant? It's a question I've been asking a lot of myself and in conversation with others. How can we be relevant in this community? Most many, I'll say, friends, meetings are still in rural areas. Many of them are small. Many of them are 12 people. And it's kind of crazy. But they want to hang on. And we want to hang on. But we're not in a rural community anymore. And I look around and, you know, of course, many of our people are either out of town or ill or whatever. But also many people who are here are gone, literally or figuratively. We have to address the future. And how can we be relevant, be friends, be Quakers, and still be relevant? I realize that that wasn't really a spiritual message today. I didn't have any scripture references for you. But I do think it was something that was important for us and for our future. And I encourage you to keep thinking about it and talking about it. And if you get any insights, please share them during quiet time, share a monthly meeting. Just come and talk to MNC. Because getting this straightened out is important for our health. Let me close in prayer real fast. I thank you, God, that you do love us. You have an amazing, passionate love for this body of believers. And you have a plan and a desire for our future. Please continue to speak that plan into our hearts. Please help us to find the path you want us taking into our future. And equip us and prepare us to be ready to follow you wherever you lead. In Jesus name, Amen.