

First Spiritual Temple

142nd Anniversary Message

Rev. Simeon, Pastor

“One-Hundred, Forty-Two Years Ago”

Nearer, my God, to Thee, Nearer to Thee. As I consider the words of this great hymn - one which has followed the history of our Church: from its founding date; to the laying of the cornerstone, around which a grand Temple would be built; to the dedication and consecration of said Temple; to the day a great and honorable man's earthly remains were laid to rest - when I consider *Nearer, my God, to Thee, Nearer to Thee*, my heart and soul swell with emotion, pride, deep appreciation, and profound respect for that which our beloved founder, Marcellus Seth Ayer, accomplished.

Truly, his was a calling and a mission to help bring us Nearer, Our God, to Thee, by helping people know, appreciate, love, and honor the Universal and Divine Spirit of God which resides within every soul, throughout the whole of Creation.

If he were here with us today, I am sure he would be greatly dismayed and saddened over the events plaguing our world, especially our great Nation. He would be distressed over the divisiveness within religious circles and churches. He would be appalled at the shrinking of the middle class, the backbone of American culture and progress. As a successful wholesale grocer, his heart would most assuredly break, as he witnessed men, women, and children of the world starving for food. And I cannot even imagine what his thoughts are, as he witnesses from Spirit the plight at our southern border.

Yet, as much as physical hunger would have affected him deeply, spiritual hunger and thirst would have cut right through the core of his soul, as it did on June 28, 1883, when he founded our Church, under the auspicious name of *Working Union of Progressive Spiritualists*, as a vehicle for a New Dispensation, a universal Spiritualism which provides more than sufficient to ease the hunger and the thirst of the people.

142 years ago, a door was opened and an opportunity availed itself for men, women, and angels to come together and sing the praises of life and resurrection.

142 years ago, on June 28, 1883, a group of men and women gathered at the Statehouse of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, in Boston, to formally and legally establish our Church, the First Spiritual Temple, on the principles of sound ethics, honest integrity, and a love for God, Spirit, and Christ.

142 years ago, our Church was consecrated to holy living; to universal brotherhood and sisterhood; to the cultivation and manifestation of the Christ Spirit, stripped of antiquated dogma and cemented ritual; to the unity of the spiritual life with that of the earth; that the doors to God's Holy and Righteous Kingdom might be swung open, that all may pass through.

What happened to the dream of our founder, Marcellus Ayer? What happened to the promise which he made to God and to Spirit? What happened to the hopes, the prayers, the tears, the joys, the anticipation? What happened to the countless voices of Spirit that once echoed and bid us tidings of good joy? What happened to the door that swung open 142 years ago?

That dream; that promise; those hopes, prayers, tears, joys, and anticipations; those countless voices; that door - and the covenant with God and Spirit which made every one of these things so real - are all with us today. Not one ounce of that energy is lost; not one tear has been shed in vain; not one fiber of that doorway is misplaced; and not one iota of that covenant has ever been cast aside for the sake of convenience. The door continues to remain wide open, and the pathway to that door continues to remain, quite frankly, straight and narrow.

We have inherited the promise and the hope of our Church ancestors. Within our hands resides the hope that we can accomplish what pride, ego, and self-fulfillment so often smother to death. Within our hearts resides the love for God and Spirit which fueled the fires of our Church, in another time, at another place. Within our very soul rushes the same wind of God's Holy Spirit which helped fan those early flames and which, now, seem so very faint.

Is it too late to recapture that dream? Absolutely not! Can it be realized in our time? I believe it can! On this, our 142nd Anniversary, let us once again commit ourselves to the mission and ministry of our Church; not just in words, but in mind, in heart, and especially in action.

Let us stand firmly upon what we believe; not teeter and totter all around it because we are afraid of what others may say or think about us.

We must, without any question or reservation, accept that God is the Head of our Church; that Christ, Buddha, and the Prophets are all examples of leadership for our Church; and that Spirit walks, side-by-side, with us along this wondrous journey.

We must be of one voice; not two, not three, not four. Our teaching is eclectic and touches the human soul on many different levels; that is the beauty of the pearl placed in our care. We may be diverse in that which we promulgate; but, let us always be united and of one voice in our mission and ministry. **Unity amongst diversity.** It's the Cosmic Mantra echoed throughout Creation. It's the foundation stone, perhaps not always expressed as it should, etched within the founding documents of our Nation. Sadly, it's also what we see crumbling all around us.

In founding our Church, Marcellus Ayer believed that one's religious pathway, regardless of what that pathway may be, must be tempered with the love and faith of the heart-life, along with the discernment of the intellect. In this, I am sure he would rally around what Albert Einstein once said: *"Science without Religion is lame; and Religion without Science is blind."*

Marcellus Ayer would marvel at the advances of modern technology and scientific research. He would welcome, with a firm embrace, that which recent revelations in String Theory suggest: at the core of everything physical is not a particle of matter, infinitesimally small though it may be; rather, at the core of everything physical is a common thread, a tone, a vibration, a string of energy which, depending upon how it is played, plucked, struck, or simply energized, determines whether it forms the physical foundation for an ant, a crystal, a rose, a dinosaur, a galaxy, or a human being.

Imagine, the whole of Creation is a cosmic symphony, and we are the musicians who have been given specific instruments to play within this grand masterpiece!

Indeed, Marcellus Ayer would welcome such scientific revelation while, at the same time, wonder: what took so long to figure this out? For he understood - and understood in a most profound manner - the underlying harmonics of the Soul and Spirit, as they played out in life and in the various forms of Spirit communication and manifestation. He was a progressive thinker who endeavored to shed light upon both an ancient and a universal Spiritualism; for he saw that Spiritualism was, indeed, the golden thread that intertwined all religions and spiritual persuasions into a wondrous tapestry of the Soul's journey through Creation.

His definition of Spiritualism was very basic, yet profoundly revealing. In my opinion, it is the best and most succinct definition of this ancient revelation known as Spiritualism: ***"The soul's recognition of its immortality, and the progressive development of its Divine attributes, powers, and potentials."***

Let us always remember those who came before us, in our Church, and who continue to walk with us through this New Dispensation: **Marcellus S. Ayer; Hattie M. Ayer; J. Commodore Street; Alice Spalding; Frederick W. Leatherbee; E. R. Dyar; H. S. Lake; N. J. Willis; Mrs. Copley; Daisy; Mrs. Humboldt; John Berlin; Dan Curley; A. Viola Berlin; Florence Berlin; Rev. Doris Brown; Spirit Christal; Spirit Star; Spirit The Evangelist; Spirit Pharos; Spirit Syrsha; Spirit John and Rev. Stephen Fulton.**

These are not people whom we simply remember and honor one day of the year. These are not people whom we relegate to the recesses of the past, dust them off now and then, and proclaim: we remember. They are a part of the Soul of the First Spiritual Temple; as am I; as are you.

Each of these wonderful people are living Spirit who walk with us and share in our trials, in our tribulations, and in our joys. They are as much a living and vital part of our Church, today, as they were

when they were donned in earthly garb. They talk to us; they embrace us; some have even shown us their faces from Spirit, as they once were on Earth. Thus, the wonder and beauty of our faith.

Let us be proud of our Church and its remarkable heritage. If that legacy continues to be nothing more than adornments on a wall, then surely we - the inheritors of that legacy - shall be nothing more than adornments upon the Christmas tree of spirituality.

If the voice of Spirit becomes nothing more than something upon which to ponder for a few moments, or to make us feel good about ourselves and our gifts, then it has all gone for naught, for it has fallen on deaf ears and shallow hearts.

During the past 142 years, this Church has gone through so much. Much of it has been a joy, a mystery, and a wonder. Much of it has been painful and ever-so-frustrating. Indeed, we have shed equally in tears and in laughter.

You all know the reality of the day: we work and struggle for every penny which goes into our coffers. We stand amidst a world which would have our small voice silenced, in favor of psychic spotlighting, dubious mediumship, hateful Christian Fundamentalism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, white supremacy, and misguided nationalism. We stand amidst quick fixes and equally quick gifts of the Spirit.

We could have given up long ago. The dream which Spirit placed within the heart and soul of our beloved founder could have been shattered long before our time. But, we are here; standing and, I hope and pray to God, proud of our accomplishments.

So, as we enter our 143rd year of service, let us do so with renewed faith and renewed commitment. Why? Because people need places like the First Spiritual Temple. The more I once traveled around the world, the more I appreciated just how much we have, and the more I realized just how deeply our small voice can and, indeed, does soothe the Soul and the Spirit of others.

We are Interfaith Spiritualists who embrace the Spirit and legacy of the Great Christ. We are Interfaith Spiritualists who have the wherewithal and the desire to reach out to people of all faiths and beckon them to perceive what Spirit can do. Christ's Resurrection was not only the foundation stone of living faith; it was the opening of a doorway. His appearance on the Road to Emmaus, following the Resurrection, was not just a demonstration of Spirit communication; it was the rekindling of an ancient Spiritualism which had, for centuries, become lost in the world of flesh. Our Spiritualism is pure and simple. We embrace a Spiritualism, not born in 1848; but born and deeply etched within the very Spirit of Creation the moment God breathed life into us all, as Living Spirit.

The dream of our founder, Marcellus Seth Ayer, made manifested 142 years ago, is as alive today as it was then; as it was during ages prior; and as it will be for eternity. Spiritualism is the *ism* of the Spirit. Spirit is eternal and universal. Therefore, Spiritualism is an eternal and a universal truth.

It has been said: there is not enough darkness in the world to put out the light of one candle.

Well, this is the candle which God gave to Marcellus Ayer, 142 years ago. This is the candle which God and Marcellus Ayer entrusts to us, today. Over the decades, an immense amount of darkness has tried to snuff out the light of the First Spiritual Temple. But, the light glows as a beacon to the wandering and weary Soul.

Spirit's tent is still illuminated with that light. So many in Spirit have invited us all - each one of us - to sit quietly amidst its glow and bask in God's Healing Grace and Love.

Be grateful for that light. But, more than that: hold it high, not in prideful arrogance, but in deep respect. Christ instructed us not to hide our light under a bushel. This Church, more than anything else, is devoted to helping people bring forth and be thankful for the Light of the Spirit, so often hidden deeply within the recesses of a body or a prideful ego. As bearers of the torch of the First Spiritual Temple, we must understand the profound difference between not hiding our light under a bushel and flashing our light to all whom we meet.

Ours is to help resurrect the Spirit within. Ours is to help people appreciate the grandeur and wonder of God's Spirit within us all. Ours is to help show how, once we engage that wondrous Spirit within, miracles can happen! There is no death; there is only life!

And that grand truth should move and inspire us, today, no less than it did those who stood at the threshold of an opened tomb and proclaimed to the whole of Creation: *"He is risen!"*

142 years ago, a vision, conceived in Spirit, was made manifest upon this great Earth plane. Our Church was, and I quote from our Charter: ***"FOUNDED FOR THE PURPOSE OF establishing a religious society for the promulgation of the truths and principles of Spiritualism in the practical work of self-culture, mentally, morally, physically and spiritually, through the instrumentalities of spirit communion, lectures, libraries, lyceums, homes and healing institutes."***

What a Commission! What a Church! What a Dream! What a Vision! What a man!

At Greek wakes and funerals, we greet each other with the expression "ζωή σε μας," (Zo-ee se maas) which means "Life to us."

So, I close by saying, *"ζωή σε μας and Happy 142nd Anniversary."*