

1/2/00

BENJAMIN ELIOTT – A MEMORIAL

Frequently a Friends memorial meeting for worship is referred to as a "celebration" of the life of the deceased Friend. It is a time when we share with each other that life we shared with the person who has died. The effect of such sharing is that everyone comes away with a more complete picture of their friend than they had during life and we are enveloped by a sense of peace. But what have we to share about the life of Benjamin? We never heard his tiny voice in meeting. We never saw him take a role in the Christmas program. We never heard him read from the Bible that would be given to him on Easter Sunday when he reached the Fourth Grade. We would never see him grow in the nurturing love of his parents and this Meeting, and become involved in God's work. Do we share only grief at disappointed expectations? I think not.

I have been thinking back to the time when my wife and I were having children. Every time that I learned that I was to become a father (four times – all girls) I had a strange feeling of joy and pride that I couldn't define. I never talked about it because until now I didn't understand it. I believe it was a joyous sense of reverential awe at the knowledge that I had played a key role in God's creative process by starting a new life through an act of love. I had similar feelings of joy upon learning that I would be a grandfather (9 times), and again when told I was to be a great grandfather. This also explains why I have always smiled inwardly whenever I see an expectant mother. There is joy in my heart at the knowledge that there is another life coming to carry out God's work – a life created out of the love of two people for each other.

We have nothing to say about the when, where or by whose act of love we come into being. And we have little to say about the when and how of our dying. We are persuaded, however, that every life is precious and has meaning and purpose in God's creation. Although we were never to know Benjamin as a life in being, he was nevertheless a part of our lives and of the life of this Meeting. While our sense of loss at his death cannot compare to that of his parents we did for a time share with Jennifer, Mark and Katie, the joyous expectation of Benjamin's life. For this we are grateful.

