



May 2022
Number 114 (2)

What Canst Thou Say?

Friends • Mystical Experience • Contemplative Practice

*You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this: but what canst thou say?
Art thou a child of Light and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest,
is it inwardly from God? —George Fox*

Empowerment (Supplemental)

A Sunrise on Easter

Jennifer Elam

Walking to the creek, a man yells out his truck “Happy Easter” – I raise my arms to the Heaven’s and yell back “Happy Easter; we both smile a big smile, a moment of shared Radical Love.

A man walking his dog, we share the beauty of the moment with a “Happy Easter.”

I walk past Dave’s flowers and revel in the beauty of so many colors of tulips, daffodils, so many flowers

*I get to the creek; this creek is flowing and my life’s still going and the sun is about to come up
The dew sparkles on the grass, the water flows quickly over and around many rocks,
The hard places of life have no chance of continued disruption when the flow just glides over them
I stand still and see, I see the sparkle coming on each little cup of the water*

*THEN the sun peeks through the trees and the light grows, until there is the sun in full force
I look it straight in the glow and say “Welcome to my world, may I be in yours?”
It glows brightly, fiercely and keeps getting bigger and shining more.*

*The new grass is shining with dew; the little violets are so purple, the selendine so yellow,
The trees standing so tall, yet seem to be holding me. I stand in awe; the air shimmers;
I feel the Love as much as ever in my life, I feel the Beauty as much as ever in my life,
I feel the gift coming from the trauma as much as ever in my life.*

*I have asked, “God, why me?” Why do I have to live such hard stuff?
We experience the hell, we do the work, and there comes the Love, more deeply than ever.*

There comes the empathy, the compassion, the joy, more deeply than ever.

*I asked God for a sunrise service on Easter. My prayer was fully answered.
I got a pure glimpse of resurrection this morning.*



From the Editor:

Rosa Parks once said, “You must never be fearful about what you are doing when it is right.” Jennifer Elam provides some colorful art along with a poetic statement in the “Circle of Life”. In our Afterwords section Jan Mullen shares some thoughts on how the Pandemic has changed our view of worship.

Earl Smith

What Canst Thou Say? (WCTS) is an independent publication co-operatively produced by Friends with an interest in mystical experience and contemplative practice. It is published in February, May, August, and November. The editorial and production team is Muriel Dimock, Lissa Field, Mariellen Gilpin, George Hebben, Lieselotte Heil, Judy Lumb, Grayce Mesner, Mike Resman, Earl Smith, Eleanor Warnock, and Rhonda Ashurst.

Tell us your stories! **WCTS** is a worship-sharing group in print. We hope to help Friends be tender and open to the Spirit. Articles that communicate best to our readers focus on specific events and are written in the first person.

Although there are themes announced for most issues, we accept any expressions of mystical experiences or contemplative practice at any time.

We welcome submissions of articles less than 1500 words and artwork suitable for black and white reproduction. Please send your text submissions in Word or generic text format and artwork in high resolution jpeg files. Photocopied art and typed submissions are also accepted.

Send via email to <wctseditors@gmail.com> or hard copy to **Rhonda Ashurst, PO Box 9032, Reno NV 89507.**

All authors and artists retain copyright to their articles and artwork published in **WCTS**. **WCTS** retains the right to publish initially and to reprint in **WCTS** anthologies.

If you want to reprint an article from **WCTS**, please contact us for permission. We will make every effort to contact the author. If that is not possible, we may grant permission.

For subscription rates, see the subscription form on page 9. Send subscription correspondence to George Hebben <wctssubscriptions@gmail.com> or **George Hebben, 2811 West B. Avenue, Plainwell MI 49080.**

Circle of Life

Jennifer Elam

*In the Circle of Life, opposites meet and mean the same...
in that place where opposites meet, tension is,
tension brings Destruction, Creation or both,
destructing old places and in the Light or Darkness
bringing the new.*

*As Opposites meet, Light flows, Spirit comes
which Spirit do we embrace here?*

*the Far Left meets the Far Right...
Black meets White...
Red meets Blue...
too Good meets Evil;
too Correct meets Wrong.*





Us “hillbillies” meet the rest of the world.
In knowing theirs is the ONLY Correct way,
the story forgets how to dance;
Souls shatter, Countries destruct or become new.

How does the story get unstuck?
How does the story remember how to dance,
Destruction or Creation to go forward?

Destruction calls for Only Correctness
to meet the “Othered” Only Correctness and both are harmed,
Players selling their souls.





The Angels of Our Braver Selves enter and
Creation calls for core values of each side to Meet and Dance,
Meet and Dance in Love, knowing both are Correct,
both have a place in God's Choir.



Opposites Dance

As Opposites dance, Light, Sweat, Messy
and Spirit may enter and the colors change.
They see each other more clearly,
changing the Invisability of each, to Transparency,
seeing the Soul, as Gof intended each soul to be seen,
appreciated and valued in the Wholeness,
Life meets Death and Resurrection comes,
includes a place for Left and Right, Black and White,
Red and Blue, Right and “Othered” Right ...
And even hillbillies...



We remember our common humanity, our connected souls,
And that memory, saves us in our togetherness, our oneness,
Our Love, our equality, our freedom to be who we are,
Connected, beyond the many identities that are tearing us apart.







Jennifer Elam has been a Quaker since she fell in love with Berea Friends Meeting, Kentucky, in 1991. She moved back to Kentucky because when COVID hit, it became clear she could no longer lead her double life of going back and forth from elsewhere to Kentucky.

In June of 2022 Pendle Hill will be publishing her pamphlet entitled *Hillbilly Quaker*, the story of how she turned her back on her "hillbilly" heritage, but later came to honor her heritage beyond the stereotypes.

Jennifer is offering a workshop on "Mediating Trauma Through Creative Expression" with Gloria Stearns-Bruner. Trauma and grief can be stories that have forgotten how to dance. We will help them learn to move again toward healing. For more information or to join/schedule a workshop, contact gloriabruner@gmail.com.

Afterwords

Greetings Rhonda and WCTS Friends,

I appreciate the topic of the pandemic, and enjoyed reading the WCTS issue on it. There are so many facets to these strange times, and it is so helpful to reflect on them together. I have been blessed with many new Friends and activities that would never have been available to me before. And the obvious dark sides, the untimely deaths of hundreds of thousands and our isolation. My own meeting has been suffering in a particular way, and I am hoping that wise Friends in this e-group might shed some Light on this issue.

In the November 2021 issue of *What Canst Thou Say?*, Friend Robert Lowe writes:

‘Mystical group experiences can only happen during Meeting for Worship in our Meeting Houses. It is fraudulent and inconceivable to think that it can be done virtually or through some dumb Zoom meeting! In that respect, I am spiritually adrift, and forever isolated. I will never lower my standards in this respect. It won’t be until humans have come to their senses and get back to some sort of state of normalcy that I may continue my mystical pursuit within the Religious Society of Friends.’

I am pondering this message, thankful that it gives me an opportunity to reach out for more understanding. This is an issue which is causing me deep pain as it is affecting my own Meeting. Queries have risen:

What is a mystical experience?

Is it God speaking directly to me, an experience of the divine meant for me?

Is it God sending an inspired message through me, meant for the group?

Is it both, and can one exist without the other?

If it is solitary, why do we meet in community? What purpose does that serve if we are each of us isolated in our inner world, listening for what God may speak to us?

What then is the beloved community? Is there only one true way to meet in worship?

Friends, our Quaker meeting is in crisis, and I too am in turmoil. When the pandemic hit, some Friends who are skilled in technology worked together to enable our Meeting to continue to meet on a zoom channel,

which is now being called the ‘virtual Meeting House.’ We were given a gift, so that we never missed a week without an opportunity to meet for worship. Many attended, some did not. A newer Friend who is unable to attend in person due to illness, was able to join us. Her attendance was a joy and raised awareness that offering an online presence was a new element of accessibility. Others are able to join worship who could not always come in person, such as a chaplain who comes following being up all night.

As the lockdown eased and the Meeting House opened with caution, we have shifted to a hybrid meeting, again with the service of those skilled in technology we have a computer presence in the Meeting House and those who cannot come in person are able to attend. However, some Friends have stated that they will never attend a Meeting for Worship that includes technology. Therefore, we have a temporary situation to accommodate both, in which the meeting including those attending via technology, or ‘hybrid meeting’ and the ‘non-technical, in-person only’ group each Sunday meet at the same time, but switching between the Meeting room and the classroom. The technology is mobile, on a cart. As I live close to the Meeting House, I volunteer to move the cart back and forth each week. This is getting harder to do, as it is a concrete symbol of our divided meeting.

This situation in which there are two groups is weighing heavily on our community. Several Friends have found it too distressing and have left to attend other Quaker meetings in the area which are in unity and offer hybrid attendance. We struggle. We have an Ad-Hoc committee which is holding small groups in worship sharing format, so that Friends might understand one another in hopes we might arrive at unity once more. New attenders come, but do not return.

I have shared messages in our hybrid meeting, but the non-hybrid group has not heard them. One was a story about our garage. When we were young homeowners, we contracted with a builder to build a garage for us, and it looked good. Years later however, another contractor called us to look at the garage, pointing out that the original construction had a flaw: instead of one strong beam at the peak, the contractor

had used two boards, but they were not connected. In time, that would lead the garage to literally come apart at the seam. He was able to bolt the two together, so that we have a sound building now. My message was a plea: our house is divided, and I sense that it could also come apart at the seam. I feel alarm, and see it happening. I pray that a way will open to join us together again.

Another message I have shared is my personal anguish as I miss those who are in the 'other' meeting. I do not hear their messages, nor do they hear the ones spoken in the 'hybrid' meeting. But the essence of community is more than messages; to me, it is the shared life and love for one another.

A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another." ~ John 13:34.

Yet, when my daughter was going to have surgery for her cancer and I asked for Friends to hold her and the surgeons in the Light, the message did not travel to the 'other' group, nor have those Friends asked about her even though we'd been praying for her for two years. This was disheartening to me.

Our Meeting is still in pandemic caution, we do not stay to share a meal, yet there is still the opportunity to check in with one another at rise of meetings should Friends be led. I was led to ask one Friend who attends the 'in-person only' group, would they at least consider joining the hybrid group for sharing blessings and concerns but this Friend rejected the idea. The question of how to proceed has not yet been brought to Meeting for Worship with respect to Business for resolution. I am afraid that when we do discuss this, it will harden this temporary condition into two separate worship groups, permanently splitting our meeting.

I have been attending daily morning online Quaker worship with Pendle Hill since the end of 2020. There are around 100 attenders, and they have formed a deeply caring and worshipful community. I have never met these Friends in person; they live in places around the world, from all over the United States, to Britain, South Africa, Honduras, India. And yet, they have reached out with loving prayer for my daughter and to each other. They are a loving community. I can only imagine that the Divine Spirit would be pleased, and see this as a

fulfillment of 'love one another.'

In our classroom, we have a poster illustrating all the splits and divisions in Quakers throughout history. It is formidable to see that. I wonder if those Friends had sought reconciliation with one another, and how that was done. If anyone knows that history, I would enjoy knowing the reference. I have looked for wisdom in this but so far have not found any precedents.

Every time I have reached a place where I think I know, now, what Spirit is, and how I am to live my life, I am propelled out of that complacency, either gently or even shockingly. I realize that God is mystery not unknown and yet full of surprises. To stay with God, I need to remain humbly flexible, seeking not a place of familiar comfort but staying with the path of love. I believe this is also Quaker wisdom, willing to look to each person as a unique expression of the living mosaic that is God.

There is a saying that 'that which you are seeking is also seeking you.' I wish that were true; I hope as I am seeking unity that those in the 'no-technology' group are also seeking unity. I pray that a way forward will open.

Beyond by Rumi

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field.
I'll meet you there.*

*When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.*

*Ideas,
language,
even the phrase "each other"
doesn't make any sense.*

**Blessings of peace to all,
jan mullen**

Jan Mullen is in the middle of retiring from her therapy practice and finds herself in the middle of many things, the story of her life. She hopes to write about the inter-connection between Quaker faith and practice and the model of therapy that she has embraced for 30 years called Internal Family Systems. She's a member of Downers Grove Friends Meeting in Illinois.

Please write for ***What Canst Thou Say?***



August 2022
Truth
Editor: Judy Lumb

Each of us has a particular experience of God and each must find the way to be true to it. We can find truth in other people's opinions and experiences if we listen patiently. Was there a time when you discovered you had been mistaken about some truth you had long nurtured? How did you confront your error? Was it public or private? Do you respect that of God in everyone though their truth may be different from your own? How do you reach across those differences?

Deadline: May 15, 2022

November 2022
Spirit-Led Action
Editor: Rhonda Ashurst

Looking back over the past month, year, or decade, what are the times that you knew Spirit was answering your need or guiding your actions? How do you experience these leadings? How do you test/season your leadings? Have you believed you were misled only to find that, in hindsight, you were led to exactly where you needed to be?

Deadline: August 15, 2022

February 2023
Unitive and Numinous Experiences
Editor: Michael Resman

Academics divide mystical experiences into two categories, unitive (being one with everything) and numinous (the presence of the divine). There's debate about whether one is more advanced than the other. Have you known both? How did they differ? How do they fit within your spiritual life?

Deadline: November 15, 2022

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Please send this form to: WCTS c/o George Hebben,
2811 West B. Ave, Plainwell MI 49080-8601

Enclosed is my check to *What Canst Thou Say?*

_____ \$ 10 for a one-year subscription _____ \$18 for two years

_____ \$ 5 for a one-year electronic subscription

_____ \$ 100 for a complete set of back issues to the most current

_____ \$ 20 for any set of 20 issues (1-20, 21-40, etc.)

_____ \$ 1.50 for individual past issues

Enclosed is a contribution of \$ _____

I cannot afford \$10, enclosed is \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____