



February 2015
Number 85 (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*

Paradigm Shifts (Supplemental)

Barclay's Church

Tom Fairbank

A few weeks ago a woman started a message in Meeting by saying, "One of the hard parts about being a Quaker is that there are so few of us, so you have to drive far if you want to do anything!"

This has certainly been my experience. Since I live off student loans, I am keenly aware of how my decision to drive to Meeting every First Day is a burden on my already limited finances.

Three blocks from my house, there is a young adult bible study that meets once a week. A year ago I was a semi-regular attender, but now my only connection with this group is that I receive, and delete, their emails.

I read in *Barclay's Apology*, Robert Barclay's definition of the word "church." I was expecting this to be a very dry section of the book, but to my surprise this was one of the many times in which Barclay spoke with a timbre similar to Rage Against the Machine, a rap metal band known for their abrasive and leftist lyrics.

Barclay's new paradigm of Christianity was seen as blasphemous by the Church of England and in 1662 Parliament passed the Act of Uniformity, also known as the Quaker Act, to dictate the form of worship. Two years later the Conventicle Act further restricted Quaker gatherings. Despite those laws, in England and Wales during the 1680s, there were about 60,000 (approximately 1.5% of the population) who identified as Quakers.

Barclay defined the church in two ways. First, as the church invisible, as "the society, gathering, or company of those whom God has called out of the world and the worldly spirit, to walk in his light and life." In other words, as all those who are, "called and truly gathered by God. It includes both those who are still in this inferior world and those who... have passed into their heavenly mansions." Barclay adds, "There may be members...not only among all the several sorts of Christians, but also among pagans, Turks and Jews."

Secondly, Barclay defined the church visible: "a certain number of persons who have been gathered by God's Spirit and by the testimony of some of his servants.... Through this fellowship they become in many respects like one family and household. They watch over, instruct, and care for one another according to their several abilities and attainments." This provided an opening for women ministers, which was as profane as Quaker worship in the eyes of the authorities.

Barclay's church stands in sharp contrast to what I say when I tell someone, "I am going to church tomorrow." Reading Barclay's description of the church, I see why we

From the Editors:

In the pursuit of truth, whether scientific or religious, one must keep an open mind for new information that can lead to a paradigm shift. Quakers' mystical practice provides opportunities for paradigm shifts because it appeals to one's experience instead of a human authority.

Our authors describe their experiences that have led to paradigm shifts in their lives. Tom Fairbank is changed by Robert Barclay's definition of "church;" William Mueller had a "Day of Visitation" that changed him; Mariellen Gilpin writes of her experiments with prayer; Judy Lumb experienced a paradigm shift through music and Howard Brinton's explanation of the similarities between mysticism and science; and Steve Bradley is charged in a Buddhist ceremony to "serve" and that made all the difference.

—Judy Lumb and Earl Smith

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

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 best communicate to our readers focus on specific events and are written in the first person. 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 **WCTS, 818 W. Columbia, Champaign, IL 61820.**

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WCTS Offers Two Retreats in 2015

What Canst Thou Say will offer two retreats this year at the Conference Center at Quaker Hill in Richmond, Indiana. The first will offer spiritually experienced Friends an opportunity to share questions and concerns amid deep worship. The second retreat is intended for those who are beginning or desire to begin deepening their spiritual life.

1) **Touching God Together: The Third Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics** is scheduled for June 12-16, 2015, at the Conference Center at Quaker Hill, Richmond, Indiana. The first two days will be a retreat led by Elaine Emily. The following two days will include time for extended worship while we wait for God to draw us together into a body capable of birthing newness into the world. 2) The following weekend (June 19-21, 2015) the WCTS organizers will offer "**Spiritual Sustenance: Supporting Early Steps on the Spiritual Path**," a retreat designed for those who are awakening to a spiritual path and desire a deeper experience of the Divine.

- Do you long for a deeper relationship with God?
- Have spiritual things happened to you that raised questions or concerns?
- Would you like to share what you've encountered on your spiritual path?
- Are you open to hearing other's joys and struggles to deepen their spiritual life?

Deadline for registration is May 1, 2015. For more information, see the **WCTS** website <whatcanstthousay.org> or contact Michael Resman (815 9th St SW, Rochester MN 55902).

Quakers attend "Meeting for Worship," instead of "church." It is because the church is all of us, of every sect, including atheism and agnosticism, who are gathered by God. The church includes Gandhi, Abraham, and Muhammad, as well as the countless millions who have lived before us and were called by God.

The church is not my Meeting with its struggle to get children to attend, with its dwindling pool of volunteers to serve on committees, and our painful wounds from conflicts between members. The church is not those who unite under a common creed, attend services regularly, and have paid clergy. Instead, it is the gathering of all souls that have been assembled by our Heavenly Father.

I do not worship *at church*. Instead, I worship *with the church*, and *I am a member* of the church. As are you, that is if you too are, "endeavoring to be delivered from iniquity, and loving to follow righteousness."

These are the words of Robert Barclay, but perhaps the credit for these words belongs to their original source, the source of all wisdom, knowledge and joy. These words belong to our heavenly Father who has, "called and truly gathered," each of us.

Tom Fairbank is a member of Downers Grove Friends Meeting in Illinois and a recent graduate of Northwestern's physical therapy program.

Have You Had a “Day or Time of Visitation”?

William H. Mueller

Seventeenth-century Friends spoke of God granting everyone “a certain day or time of visitation.”¹ Evidently Friends realized that in addition to the “Inward Light,” which guided, pushed and strove with us daily, that we might become more perfect (*Matthew 5:48*), there could also be less frequent but powerful life-changing confrontations with the Holy Spirit, such as George Fox experienced when he discovered the Lord would teach his people himself.² In this, as in so many aspects of Quaker theology, early Friends were remarkably modern in their religious vision, a point emphasized by Patricia A. Williams in her excellent book *Quakerism: A Theology for our Time*.³

An example of paradigm shift, psychology has the concept of “quantum change,” in which we are suddenly confronted so profoundly that our lives are literally turned around and upside down; a person experiencing this is forever changed in an instant. This contrasts with most psychological change, which tends to be slow, in small stages.⁴ The researchers say that quantum change events are more frequent than most imagine. They almost always result in positive changes in the person’s life who has experienced them, and the changes are permanent.

Have you had a day or time of visitation? Once I was meditating, walking back and forth in five feet of water.

The pool was crowded, with people swimming laps. I walked in order to work on a crippling impatience I had at the time. When an impatient person turns, upon completing such a lap and views the goal he must reach at the other side of the pool, a terrible sense of dread comes over him, for the water at five feet of depth forces him to go slowly. Thus I went, silently repeating a mantra.

After about half an hour, suddenly I heard a voice that said, “*judge not, lest ye be judged.*”

I couldn’t believe my ears! It was not auditory that others present could have heard it. It was from inside somewhere. It was not a thought; it was a clear and distinct voice, and it made me mad. At the time I was not on good terms with the Bible, particularly disliking the King James Version. This arrogant voice, I thought, was not only quoting the New Testament, but the anachronistic King James!

The other thing I disliked about it was that I did not consider myself a judgmental person. I always thought other people were that way. I was, after all, over 50 with 11 years of college education under my belt. Was there no respect for elders and doctors of philosophy by disembodied voices?

I was astonished and prone to dismiss the event as some kind of aberration. I resolved to forget the whole thing as soon as possible. However, I found this was not possible. That is another aspect of “a time of visitation,” for so I took this to be. It was unforgettable.

After some time passed, I began to think about the message. Was I judgmental? Did I have a particular problem here? Why the King James?

Then it hit me. Someone has a sense of humor. They know all about me. I can see them now: “*He dislikes the Bible in general, and especially the KJV. Let’s hit him with a good, brief quote that treats the problem. That should get his attention. This man is impatient with everyone because he is judgmental. He has put himself above others and is getting lonelier and more blind about it by the day.*”

Sometimes we have a warm and fuzzy perception of what a spiritual experience or “time of visitation” should be like. A light will shine, and we will suddenly feel peace. This can happen, too. It happened to me once in a vivid dream. A dear friend, Elias Gomez, dead several years, visited me. His face shone upon me like a great celestial light. His wide and familiar smile gave me encouragement at a time when I had none.

My visitation by the KJV was no such warm and fuzzy event. It informed me of a fault, a stumbling stone that it was time I got into my awareness. Am I a changed man? Am I no longer judgmental? No indeed, I am not changed; but now I know it, and I can chastise myself in most cases when I find myself going down the judgmental path. I am humbler for having had this experience, and am aware that God loves me deeply and has, and values, a sense of humor. Why should I not endeavor to love myself more by trusting God and others who can help, and to have, and value, a sense of humor too?

William H. Mueller is a member of St. Lawrence Valley Friends Meeting (Potsdam, New York), an allowed meeting under the care of Ottawa Monthly Meeting where he is involved in a local prison ministry. He edits a monthly prison newsletter “The Inlook-Outlook Letter”.

1 Robert Barclay, 1967. *Barclay’s Apology in Modern English*. Dean Freiday, ed. Newberg OR: Barclay Press, p. 82.

2 George Fox, 1952 *Journal*, J. L. Nickalls, ed. Religious Society of Friends, p. 8-11.

3 Patricia A. Williams, 2008. *Quakerism: A Theology for our Time*. Concord MA: Infinity Publishing.

4 William R. Miller and C’deBaca, J., 1994, Quantum change: Toward a psychology of transformation. In T. Heatherton & J. Weinberger, Eds., *Can Personality Change?* pp. 253-280, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Prayer As Experimental Self-Healing

Mariellen Gilpin

I grew up in a small Indiana town that had three churches: Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and Evangelical United Brethren. I learned as a young person that it was okay to talk to God about your own concerns, but there was a serious lack of guidance how to do so. A Quaker meetinghouse was a mile or so outside town, down a long lane marked by an inconspicuous sign on the road. As a good reader, I read about Quakers doing things differently and wanted to know more. I hoped for a different prayer paradigm. I certainly knew Quakers who lived in my town, but I was much too shy to simply walk into the meetinghouse and sit down.

I chose Earlham College because I wanted to explore Quakerism. I found there were two worships at Stout meetinghouse: early worship, which was silent with the Clear Creek Friends, and All-College worship, which was semi-programmed.

I attended both, but especially appreciated silent worship with Clear Creek Friends. It was in one of my very earliest experiences of silent worship that my prayer paradigm changed. On that Sunday a man I never saw again stood and said quietly, "I have learned that prayer and scientific experimentation are the same in method if not intention." He sat down, and in the ensuing silence I pondered his words: *Hmmm. That is a parallel that I never heard before. What does it mean? Is it really okay with God if I try things in prayer, observe the results, form and test hypotheses, refine them over time, and learn what seems to work for me?*

I learned recently that there were an amazing number of physicists in the 20th century who were Quakers. I am not surprised. Basing one's spiritual practice on listening to God for oneself can be a very good model for scientific practice as well. I recently said as much

to a friend who said, "But what's your control group? How can it be really scientific unless you have a control group?"

"I'm the control group," I told her. "There's the me before I began experimenting in prayer, and the me I am now."

I could speak with some assurance because I once helped with a study of the efficacy of a computer-based drill on the US and Illinois Constitutions. At that time every high school and GED student had to pass a state-administered test to graduate. Our drill was so successful that the State Board of Education investigated, for fear massive cheating must have happened. No, it was just a very good drill. But there was no money for conducting a proper Ed Psych study with a control group... except that many previous generations of students consistently had high failure rates, and our students consistently passed. History can provide the control group, I had learned.

Many of our readers know that the me-who-used-to-be hallucinated—regularly: all night, every night, for years on end. Pills helped but didn't fix it, and that was all the doctors had to offer. It's been years since the last time I hallucinated, and that's because I experimented in prayer, very persistently, for many years. I used a scientific approach; I tried things, observed the results, and refined my methods of prayer.

There is always a great deal of inner chaos when one comes to the attention of a psychiatrist—lots of issues at a rolling boil. Maybe pills alone fix some people, but for me, the inner chaos still bubbled and seethed and boiled over. God's approach was to choose a single aspect of my faulty thinking and keep bringing that one

issue to my attention until I understood it enough to deal with it better...or ask for Help to deal with it better. My reward was that I no longer needed to hallucinate about that issue. I still hallucinated, but not about that. Then there would be a few weeks or months of rest as one source of hallucinations simply didn't occur any more. Then God chose another issue and helped me focus on coming to understand that one well enough that I no longer needed to hallucinate about that.

Imagine how comforting and reassuring it was for me to be able to depend on my Teacher to help me focus on one issue enough to set it to rest—forever. There was Someone I could trust and learn from. Once I'd figured out God's pattern, each time a new issue was brought to my attention, I was eager to wrestle with it. I could hope for myself, because I could see I was getting better, thanks to my Teacher. Healing was happening. It was a very complex and tangled illness, but one snarl at a time was slowly resolved under God's guidance. All I had to do was cooperate as best I could and learn as much and as quickly as I could.

I haven't hallucinated in years.

The man I never saw again started me on the Quaker prayer practice that carried me to a logical conclusion. It was a real paradigm shift in my understanding: I have learned there is a way to pray for myself that helps me get my life under better management—a way of expanding my understanding how to become stronger, wiser and more loving.

Mariellen Gilpin is an editor of WCTS and a member of Urbana-Champaign Meeting, Illinois. She celebrates the many ways God has helped her recover from mental illness.

My Paradigm Shift

Judy Lumb

I had always felt a great divide between my scientific side and my spiritual side. It was a split right down the middle with neither side ever over-powering the other. The divide was further split by my relationship with my doctoral advisor, Ruth, who was an evangelical atheist. It was the only difference between us, the only thing that kept me from wanting to be a “little Ruth.” She often called me derisively “a believer,” but I didn’t mind the insult because it allowed me to maintain my own identity.

I began working on the split when I was on sabbatical in New York City and attending the Jazz Mobile, a workshop to teach jazz on Saturday mornings. Analogous to my scientific side was my classical music training. Put any written music in front of me and I will play it precisely. But I really wanted to play jazz, to improvise. I mentioned this dilemma to my jazz flute teacher and he opened the next session with an interesting lecture on right versus left brain function. That night I had a dream where I was generating chemical and mathematical symbols that floated up in the air and became musical notes. Toward the end of the dream I put my flute up to play, but the head joint went limp.

When I reported that dream, my jazz flute teacher enjoyed both images. Improvising in jazz really requires an integration of both sides because one must follow the chord progression and know when to begin and end your solo. I managed to play some jazz, which helped to heal my split.

But my real paradigm change came when I read the Preface to *Friends for Three Hundred Years: The History and Beliefs of the Society of Friends Since George Fox Started the Quaker Movement*, by Howard Brinton (1952). Brinton explains that the distinction between mystics and other religious persons is that mystics believe in their own experience while other established religions require beliefs as determined by some human authority. He goes on to say that is the same as scientists who believe in the results of their experiments, rather than some established authority defining scientific truth. Bringing these two together is the quotation where George Fox wrote, “I know this experimentally.” Some people say that he really meant “experientially,” but the original wording was a validation for me.

From that time I have felt whole, as one. My spirituality was an integral part of my scientific career and

I took an experimental approach to my spiritual practice. I often had a meditation session during our lunch break at work with a colleague who is also a Friend from my Meeting. As a part of the orientation of new graduate students, I conducted a series of sessions on creativity, logic, and intuition to show how scientific advances are made. I explained that a big part of the creative scientific process is intuitive (a secular translation of meditative), where the scientist deeply immersed in a particular project gets a sudden image that explains a mystery. I did a guided meditation with the new students, putting them 30 years in the future as a scientist. That served two purposes: giving the students an image of themselves as a functioning scientist and bringing the intuitive and meditative process into the graduate scientific research training.

Conversely, I take an experimental approach to my spiritual life. I have used prayer, dreams, past life regressions, journaling, and any other methods that come my way to get guidance from God.

Judy Lumb is still a member of Atlanta Friends Meeting (Georgia) even though she has lived in Belize since 1987.

Proceedings of First Gathering

As the 2013 “First Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics” was drawing to a close, Janice Stensrude volunteered to solicit contributions, edit, and publish the Proceedings of this historic gathering. She assembled a beautiful document, complete with photos of the participants.

It is available for download at whatcanstthousay.org/first-gathering or print copies can be ordered from Lulu.com. The full-color hardcover edition is \$29.98 and the paperback edition in black and white is \$5.50. Go to lulu.com/shop and search for “What Canst Thou Say.”

To Save Or To Serve

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only”
—James 1:22

Over the course of a few years, visiting many Zen centers with my Buddhist wife, Lynn, I sat on many zafus and gazed meditatively at many walls. I also partook of much chanting while sitting zazen, and even memorized several pieces of Zen liturgy, some long and some short, some in English and some in Japanese.

One of the most common chants – The Four Great Bodhisattva Vows – is also one of the easiest to learn: four lines and a mere 29 syllables, in the Japanese. The first line is universally “shu jo mu hen sei gan do (shoo joe moo hen say gahn dough), and like the other three lines in the Japanese, it never varies. However, learning any of the Four Vows in English, in an absolute sense, is impossible, simply because virtually every Zen center translates them differently. So, while one who has memorized the Japanese can chant in concert with any Zen center’s residents attenders, that same benefit does not extend when the chanting is in English.

In its essence, “shu jo mu hen sei gan do” translates to “sentient beings are numberless, I vow to save them.” That said, word shifts and subtle word-changes morph it seemingly endlessly, with common variations at the end of the first line being, “to liberate them,” or, “to free them,” and in many cases to finish any of the variations with “all:” “free them *all*, liberate them *all*, save them *all*.” So, while I felt significant frustration at being unable to take my chanting of these vows, in English, from one Zen center to another and chant along seamlessly, my larger and more abiding frustration came as I stumbled over what in the world I could possibly do to save all sentient beings, or countless beings without

number, or however else the last part of the first Vow captured the vast infinitude of organic creation.

Sitting on a cushion....gazing at a wall....chanting from the heart.... did nothing to provide answers or solutions to this “saving” business, this vow. Even though it had been explained to me that the concept was more along the lines of seeing with an eye of compassion the suffering we all create, this did nothing to dampen my confusion and frustration.

My paradigm shift happened towards the end of our first period of sitting zazen, when the The Four Great Bodhisattva Vows were chanted in English and my ears heard the first line end with “...I vow to serve them.” Serve? Serve? I was thunderstruck.

It only helped slightly to know that I was not alone: as late Zen master Robert Aitken wrote, “Kanzeon, the incarnation of mercy and compassion, weeps because she cannot save all beings.” Still and all, perched on my cushion trying to mollify my aching hips and contain my squirrely thoughts, facing walls of tastefully placid neutral colors, I stewed: too many sentient beings, too little sense of how to “save” even one of them.

In December 2012, Lynn and I spent several days at Zen Center of Los Angeles. My paradigm shift happened towards the end of our first period of sitting zazen, when the The Four Great Bodhisattva Vows were chanted in English and my ears heard the first line end with “...I vow to serve them.” Serve? Serve? I was thunderstruck, and at the end of the service I made a beeline to the closest resident to ask

Steve Bradley

if I had heard correctly; yes, that was it—*serve*.

At this point it was I who felt liberated, felt freed somehow (although not exactly saved....), and as we exited the zendo I said to Lynn, “I cannot start saving all sentient beings until I start serving at least some of them.” At that time it was almost a throwaway line, or maybe a form of displacement activity in lieu of having any immediately obvious way to begin serving. For a couple of months I kept internally voicing this mantra-like line. All the while I was becoming aware that it was taking on a life of its own. In fact it was growing with each passing day, gaining breadth and depth and becoming a force I couldn’t shake. My perspective, my worldview, was altered by about 178 degrees, whiplashed from an attitude of “can’t save anything” to a nudge-turned-shove determination to serve what I could, when I could, how I could, and to whom I could.

By mid-March I had made the commitment to actually serve some of those sentient beings by volunteering a few shifts each week at Ottawa Mission, a large homeless shelter that provides about 1300 full meals every day. And as often as possible (which is neither that often nor often enough), I volunteer at prisons in Massachusetts and Ontario to deliver the Alternatives to Violence Project workshops to incarcerated men. Elie Wiesel once wrote that “Words can sometimes, in moments of grace, attain the quality of deeds,” and I feel blessed to have been enlightened about “serve,” and to be able to live, in small measure, that word through my deeds. I am able to see it similarly to how it seems to be expressed in Psalms 119:105, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

As I traveled this path, there was

a tender challenge evident that was deeply encouraging. Zen teacher Josho Pat Phelan expressed this with “When we take these vows, an intention is created, the seed of an effort to follow through.....we continually define and redefine them as we renew our intention to fulfill them.” Close to daily, my intention is renewed; I’m just not sure where the path will next take me. But I take considerable comfort in another part of Psalm 119, the gorgeous verse 54 as translated by Pamela Greenberg: “The mysteries of your law were melodies for me in the house of my fears.” I no longer question the mystery, and I feel no fear; I just follow where I am led.

I still harbor no delusions about “saving” sentient beings, although it is not lost on me when prisoners and the homeless look me in the eye and say “God bless you.” I wonder if Julian of Norwich was giving voice to a similar chord of salvation when she wrote, “First there is the fall, then we recover from the fall. Both are the mercy of God.” I live with these words close to my heart, and can only hope that all marginalized and disenfranchised people, those who make up what Michelle Alexander refers to as the “undercaste,” can experience some of this mercy of God. In lieu of that, however, I can only do what I do, and undertake that with honor, gratitude, and as much love as I can summon forth.

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Like many significant seismic events, my paradigm shift was followed by aftershocks—those smaller rumblings and repercussions that reflect a recalibration of a landscape, usually far below the surface. For me, the aftershocks were also word-related (as was “save”/“serve”), and I mean that very literally. They involved new perspectives on the word “word.” Words are core to my existence: I bask in them, wallow amongst them, caress

them and, in turn, allow myself to be caressed by them. Now, however, I found myself exposed to different slants on the word “word,” and in ways that enhanced the basking and caressing.

In writing about *lectio divina*, the practice of contemplative spiritual reading, Henri Nouwen emphasized the deep value of focusing on a particular word and letting it “descend from our minds and into our hearts,” “... chewing on the word and incorporating it into our lives,” and receiving the word “into our silence where we can ruminate on it, mull on it, digest it, and let it become flesh in us.” Finally, said Nouwen, “Then and only then can the word bear fruit as seed sown in rich soil.” This is very close to the process I underwent in traveling from the unfathomable and impenetrable “save,” to the comprehensible and attainable “serve.”

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***Like many significant seismic events, my paradigm shift was followed by aftershocks—those smaller rumblings and repercussions that reflect a recalibration of a landscape, usually far below the surface.***

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Moreover, the Bible spoke to me in ways I did not (and could not) previously understand. With the help of a good concordance or two, I delved into *The Word* in order to develop a keener and more reverent appreciation of “word.” 2 Timothy 1:13 instructs “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus,” while in 1 Corinthians 2:13 I found strength in reflecting upon “And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” I

can be brought to the edge of tears by Proverbs 16:24, “Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body,” and my own interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2:17 bridges my need to serve with “... comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.”

While I saw none of this coming a scant three years ago, the late Celtic spiritualist John O’Donohue might have. O’Donohue wrote feelingly about thresholds, which perhaps are part of the territory in which paradigm shifts operate, manifesting further growth—or at least radically different growth. While a good part of O’Donohue’s reflections on thresholds are of hushed, awe-some events in one’s life, he states, “A threshold ... is an intense frontier that divides a world of feeling from another.”

As if O’Donohue knew me far better than I think I have ever known myself, he expressed my own experience in the following series of questions: “At which threshold am I now standing? At this time in my life, what am I leaving? What am I about to enter? What gift would enable me to do it?” Some well-honed discernment might have been useful to me as I encountered those questions not all that long ago, but that was not part of this particular process: the shift was too abrupt, and O’Donohue captures this simply with “We are often surprised by change that seems to arrive out of nowhere.” Change came to me in the form of turning “save” into “serve,” and this was the gift that blessedly allowed me to cross a threshold at which I found myself, without even realizing that I was approaching it.

Save and serve; vows and commitments; paradigm shifts and thresholds. As Hamlet replied to Polonius, “Words, words, words.” But the good prince’s weary response does not reflect the effect words have always had on me. Johann Wolfgang von

Goethe once quipped, “When ideas fail, words come in very handy,” and almost in rebuttal across the mists of time and space, Chuang-tzu said, “Words exist for meaning, but once you understand the meaning you can throw away the words.” But as my own paradigm shift was guided by and is carried forth by a deeply developing spirituality, I take no small amount of solace and guidance from the timeless line of St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary use words.” The Gospel helps me recognize the deepest roots and wellsprings of “serve” and “service,” and the truest preaching I can do is to live my life in accordance with those words; it is a true blessing to be able to do so.

*Steve Bradley is a member of Ottawa Monthly Meeting, where he serves with pride and dignity in the all-important ministries of snowshoveling and dishwashing.*

## Book Review: Held in Love

In the process of preparing the print edition of this issue, Carolyn Treadway made me aware of her 2009 book, edited with Molly Young Brown, *Held in Love: Life Stories to Inspire Us Through Times of Change* (Psychosynthesis Press, Mt. Shasta CA). It seems an appropriate way to end this issue because we all need inspiration to get through our current Paradigm Shifts.

Over seventy authors contributed to this uplifting book, including several WCTS authors. Under three sections, “Awakening Within,” “Awakening in Relationship,” and “Awakening in Community,” we are presented with miraculous stories of thriving in the midst of upheaval, healing of body, mind, and spirit, true inspiration for the way ahead. I highly recommend this marvelous guide for our future.

*Reviewed by Judy Lumb*

## WCTS Gathering Organizers Meet

The first weekend in October 2014, Mariellen Gilpin, Diann Herzog, Marcelle Martin, Rhonda Pfaltzgraff-Carlson, Mike Resman, and Earl Smith met to plan the 2015 Third Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics. Out of the silence arose a rich sharing of metaphors around the question, “What are our gatherings of Friendly Mystics for?” We were reminded of the days and weeks of extended worship throughout Quaker history when Meetings acted as crucibles for Spirit. Even now, through these gatherings, we come together as individuals and leave transformed, drawn into new and deeper paths of purpose.

Our Gatherings are a riverbed that holds the Holy Spirit; the river goes where it will, creating new avenues of ministry. Perhaps even more aptly, the Gatherings act as a nest. Participants come together and form a tree upon which a nest may be built and baby

birds nurtured. We bring new ministries into being but do not keep them—we release them. Ministry comes through our Gatherings but doesn’t belong to us.

Our Gatherings draw together deep Friends whose capacity for holding Spirit and allowing transformation engender a Meeting whose power comes from and reaches beyond us. Our Gatherings are a fireplace. We come together carrying cries of pain from the ocean of darkness. As we gather, we kindle a fire. As we separate, embers are dispersed—Light goes out into the world spreading God’s love where it is needed. In all of these metaphors, we come to hold Spirit then allow love and ministry to go where it will.

The third annual gathering is scheduled for June 2015. See page 2 for details.

### SUBSCRIPTION FORM

**Please send this form to:** WCTS c/o Michael Resman, 815 9th Street SW, Rochester MN 55902

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



May 2015

### **Liberation from Captivity** Editor: **Rhonda Pfaltzgraff-Carlson**

*Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people."* Ephesians 4:8. How have you been held captive? What led to your captivity? How did you come to find liberation? Do you feel you are partially or totally free? What leads you to that conclusion? What gifts have you been given as you've been freed from captivity? How has liberation led to your current lifestyle and/or work?

Deadline: February 15, 2015

August 2015

### **Divine Intervention** Editors: **Bill Mueller with Mariellen Gilpin**

Early Friends believed every life has "a day or time of visitation" (*Barclay's Apology*), a critical moment(s) when opportunity (God, if you will) knocks. It is somewhat different from the divine light that strives daily, but just as essential for answering the question: "What can I say? How can I let my life speak?" Have you had a divine visitation or otherwise inexplicable encounter in your life? What did you come to know experimentally as a result? ("...and this I knew experimentally." *Journal of George Fox*)

Deadline: May 15, 2015

November 2015

### **Evil** Editor: **Michael Resman**

*Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* Romans 12:21 (NRSV). Are people inherently good? Bad? Both? From where has the evil you have known in your life come? Why did God allow evil to come into your life? What part do you play in perpetuating or reducing evil in this world? Share with us your struggles, triumphs and blessings when dealing with evil. What did that teach you about life, yourself and God?

Deadline: August 15, 2015

## **What Canst Thou Say?**

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815 9th Street SW  
Rochester MN 55902

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