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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*

Jesus: Love in Action

On the Path with Jesus

Jennifer Elam

I always say that my mama was the most faithful follower that Jesus ever had. As a youngen, I just took on the religion of my mother and gave my heart to Jesus, my life to God. Then at about age 12, I started asking questions that my mother could not answer and to rely on faith became not good enough after awhile. Soon, I went to college. I had philosophy and religion professors, many of whom were atheists. I became confused and depressed about it all and did not go to church again till I became a Quaker. But the part about giving my life to God remained steadfast throughout. Now, about Jesus and me...as I start to write this, I have no idea what will come out my fingers. There is a lot I don't KNOW in the theological, intellectual sense but I will write about what I have experienced.

I have always experienced a Presence in my life that I call God's Presence. At one point in my life, probably about age 40, I had an experience for about three weeks of not feeling that Presence. During that time, I have never felt such horror. It was black and lifeless and I don't even know the words. Suddenly, I understood addiction, murder, crime of all sorts, and a lot of things I never understood. I got it why people would do anything imaginable, if it were to try and get rid of this feeling. After it was over, I was very grateful for the experience. How better to learn to appreciate the water in which the fish lives than not to have it? Believe me, I learned quickly to appreciate the Presence in my life. What exactly is that Presence? I choose not to name it other than God's Presence. But, it could be named Jesus as it was for my mother. It could be named any number of names as people of other religions name it. I have a deep belief that God is big enough to go by whatever name we need to call God. (And when I get mad at God, I have a few choice names then too; God is big enough to handle that, too).

Jesus. OK, I'll tell you of an experience or two.

When I was a baby, my parents had to work hard on the farm and I spent a lot of time in a playpen with my dog Lady nearby. I have a lot of memories of not so nice things that happened while I was in that playpen - sent me to a lot of therapy. When I was about 40, I had an experience of Jesus as I was driving to work. It was clear I was to pull off the highway. I did. Suddenly, I was transported to being in that playpen. I saw a giant Jesus standing by the playpen with his arms outstretched toward me. I reached up and he took me out of the playpen. I knew the significance. I was being freed from the horrors that had plagued me of memories from the playpen. Well, when I finally got to work, I had to go in my office, lock the door and just lay my head on my desk for a little while and soak in that healing moment. I felt a need to be in fetal position and soak in

From the Editor:

This is a time to bring Light into the world—to manifest Jesus' love in action. This issue of WCTS includes a mystical experience with Jesus, one woman's decision to stay in her marriage and transform abuse and illness into peace and love, reflections on how Jesus' message of love and democracy relates to Black Lives Matter and the upcoming election, a song for Jesus the Janitor, a poem, an answered prayer, and an imagined conversation with the historical Jesus with study questions. This topic generated more submissions than we could print, so make sure to see the web version which has art in color and another song <whatcanstthousay.org>. I hope this issue will inspire you to shine your love and Light on all who cross your path. —Rhonda Ashurst, Editor

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, Judy Lumb, Grayce Mesner, Mike Resman, Earl Smith, Eleanor Warnock, Rhonda Ashurst, Janice Stensrude and George Hebben.

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.

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what had just happened before I could go to any meetings. Then I went to the meetings, smiling.

Also, sometime when I was around 40 (a rich and challenging period of my spiritual life), I had to get to know Jesus in a different way. Some people have to buy new sports cars. I was in a time of fairly extreme challenge. I had an experience in which I felt transported out into the middle of an ocean in a tiny boat with no paddles. The boat started sinking. I could see the shore. As the boat sank, I jumped out and swam (I can't swim) as hard as I could and made it to the shore. I lay on the bank a very long time getting my breath and feeling amazed and grateful that I had made it, when I was sure I was going to drown. I noticed a little dirt road and started walking down the road. Suddenly, someone was walking next to me. I recognized the person as Jesus, just walking next to me. After we walked silently for a long time, there was a bench on the side of the road. We sat down and rested on the bench. I asked if I could put my head in his lap and he said "yes." We sat there a very long time and I felt the deep rest of my head in Jesus' lap.

Many times after those two experiences, when feeling challenged, I got an image of being on a long deserted beach at the ocean. A large bench was there with Jesus sitting on the bench. I would go sit beside him and put my head in his lap and be comforted.

I think Comforting Presence is one name I would give for my relationships with Jesus. Jesus also can be present to me in a way that challenges me to look at what I am doing and re-think my actions. I deeply believe that support and accountability are necessary for all humans leading a deep, spiritual life. Not only have I experienced

that from Jesus but when I have had clearness and support committees (and I have probably had more than almost any other Quaker), that is the magic combination for help from God working through humans as well.

Jennifer Elam has been a Quaker since she fell in love with Berea Friends Meeting, Kentucky, in 1991. After Parker Palmer came to Berea and told her about Pendle Hill, she became a resident student at Pendle Hill where she developed art and writing as spiritual practices that have continued. She ended up staying in Pennsylvania where she studied, researched, taught, and practiced psychology, the last 13 years as a school psychologist at the preschool level, her favorite age. She has been quite involved in wider Quaker endeavors for many years. But she lived a double life, traveling back and forth frequently between Pennsylvania and Kentucky. When the Corona hit, Jennifer realized she could no longer live the double life and has now moved back to Berea, Kentucky, where she lives in an apartment in the Friends meeting house. See her painting in the web edition <whatcanstthousay.org>.

In the Moment

George Eastburn

a motion of heaven
on earth
wrapped in silence
rapt in silence
inspiration rises then
revelation
and Light
flows
like a mountain
stream.

George Eastburn is a member of Abington (PA) Monthly Meeting and a member of William Penn Charter School's board in Philadelphia, PA.

Me and Jesus

Eric E. Sabelman

Once, when asked what kind of Quaker I am, I answered something like “Maybe four days a week I am a Universalist Friend, two days I am Christocentric, one day I am a pantheist, and the rest of the time I am in awe and bewilderment.” I have made some effort to become “convergent”, fusing these time-shared attitudes into one, but it has been hard going.

I remember a time when I was in high school around Easter when I became intensely aware of the suffering of Jesus the man. My family had recently come back to California from Germany, where my parents had hoped to go to the Passion Play in Oberammergau, but could not as it is held only every ten years. Their interest in this 400-year-old dramatization primed me to re-read the Biblical account and internalize the story of the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

Not much later, I became exposed to the doctrine of Atonement Theology, and the apparent distortion, omission and mistranslation of essential parts of the life of Jesus that support this doctrine. The very idea of a God who demands that one person – any person, Son of God or not – suffer in order to buy my way into Heaven is repugnant to me. If there is a gate into Paradise, let me pass through it on my own merits, please, God.

I had little attention or affection to spare for Jesus for years afterward, only coming to realize when I found Quakerism that the Light Within – which I did feel – could be equated to the Christ within – which I did not. I have become comfortable with this equation for two days a week, if not continuously.

I have also come to realize that omissions in the Gospels may happen not only to serve theological doctrines, but because the writers of the story of Jesus had only human language in which to write. I imagine Luke or the author of “Q” interviewing someone who had met Jesus during his lifetime, both of them struggling to put into words an experience of utter transcendence. To this day, we have trouble describing the experience of being loved.

The two days a week when I feel Jesus is real sometimes coincide with Meeting for Worship. On those days my ministry – if any ministry is given to me – often has a Biblical connection, most likely extrapolation from one of the stories so briefly told by or about Jesus. I am still fascinated by what has been left out of the Bible, from the name of the innkeeper in “the good Samaritan” to the words Jesus wrote in the sand before saying “... cast the first stone” to unwritten meetings with Jesus by unknown witnesses after he rose from the dead.

Other Friends share my fascination, at least to the point of holding a study series on the “historical Jesus.” Wanting to put myself into that history – even if just as an observer – I wrote the accompanying story. And then – to make sure the story is not taken literally, as the Bible so often is – I wrote a set of study questions.

Talking to the Historic Jesus

I wanted to ask Jesus a few questions, so I went to where I thought he would be, and he was there.

I walked along the gravel shore of Galilee toward a boat drawn up on the shingle. Just up the bank from the boat was a pole-framed tent or awning, to shade a lone workman from the summer sun.

The workman was smoothing the shaft of an oar, using a spokeshave to plane away the rough edges. He looked up and smiled as I approached. “Are you ...?” I asked.

“I am,” he said. *“If you can use a whetstone, you could sharpen this blade while we talk.”*

I picked up the stone and the oilcan and took the spokeshave from his hand. He had a round scar in the center of his palm. That answered one question without my having to ask it.

Using another tool like a broad gouge, he began to carve the blade of the oar. *“The strongest oar will have the end of its blade near the knot where a branch left the trunk,”* he explained, like a teacher. *“You don’t want the knot itself, but the wood that supported the weight of the branch and withstood the wind.”*

“I thought you ‘ascended’ after ...” I began, but didn’t know how to finish the question.

“But this isn’t ‘after.’ This is ‘now.’ Here, I am just beginning to preach. We will sail in this boat up to Capernaum later today.”

“ ‘We’? ” I asked, “Do you mean the fishermen you chose for disciples?”

“If fishermen listen to their hearts, then fishermen will do the choosing. If shepherds listen, then shepherds.” He sighted down the oar, and seemed pleased at its straightness. *“Do you think I should take some more off the handle? It should be easy to hold, so your strength goes into the stroke and not into just holding on.”*

“I always wondered why you picked the disciples you did. What is written about them does not show a great deal of understanding about your mission.”

“What mission do I have that was not always the mission of everyone? However they dispute and misunderstand, these disciples of mine know they have in them the love that is their human birthright—along with healthy doses of denial, jealousy, embarrassment, fear and courage. Are they not marvelous? How could I not love them?”

“But they seem so ... so inattentive! If they had just listened to your words more closely and written them down, we would not have such uncertainty and doubt.”

“They were not the ones to write, but rather the ones to experience, to live the moment that would be written. Of course they were inattentive. They didn’t even notice that when the net was suddenly full of fish, among them were salmon from the Baltic and sturgeon from the Black Sea. The fish had to come from somewhere ... you didn’t think there were that many fish in this lake, did you?”

“I hadn’t thought about the kinds of fish,” I said, thinking I had missed something important.

“Nor did they, nor should you. It is not about the miracle of fish being where they shouldn’t be. So why write it that way?” He began to put his tools away.

“Your disciples will found a Church. What do you think about the Church?” I asked.

“It is what men habitually do: establish institutions. You can’t stop them. As long as the Church does not get between its followers and God, it is not such a bad thing.” He handed me the finished oar. *“Lay this oar in the boat next to its mate, so it will be ready when we cast off.”*

I climbed into the boat. While I was clambering over the thwarts to the rowers’ bench, a small crowd of people came over the bank toward us. Some of the men and women embraced the

workman, while others began pushing the boat sternwards into the water.

“Wait!” I cried. “Let me out! I’m not supposed to be here. I’m just an observer!” They didn’t hear me; they just kept pushing.

As the boat floated free, a dozen of the men and the workman himself climbed over the gunwales. Some began to raise the sail, although there was no wind to fill it.

The workman sat next to me on the rowers’ bench and set his oar into the oarlock. *“Lower your oar and row, and we will be in Capernaum before dinnertime.”*

Study Questions

- 1) Why is the workman alone?
- 2) How can he have a scar from his Crucifixion and yet be only beginning to preach?
- 3) How much oil did you put on the whetstone? If you don’t know anything about sharpening spokeshaves, why didn’t you say so?
- 4) Is he really talking about how to choose wood for an oar?
- 5) Why don’t you answer his question, “Do you think I should take some more off the handle?”
- 6) What is his mission, that is always the mission of everyone?
- 7) Are you being attentive, like a disciple?
- 8) Where would you get the fish? Would you write it down?
- 9) Does he care much about the Church?
- 10) Why raise the sail?
- 11) Why is it you he sits next to? Have you strength to pull an oar the equal of his?
- 12) Since you weren’t planning to go to Capernaum, what will you do there?

Eric E. Sabelman recently retired as a neurosurgery bioengineer, but continues as a lecturer at Santa Clara University. He first attended Orange Grove Meeting in Pasadena in 1969; he is a member of Palo Alto Friends Meeting. Some of his stories are recorded by Tom and Sandy Farley <spont.com/w2wcd.htm>.

Marriage as a Proving Ground

Anonymous

A proving ground is an environment that serves to demonstrate whether something really works. I was raised in a Midwestern fundamentalist Christian family. Our entire social lives revolved around church. I went to Christian school from kindergarten through eighth grade. I memorized roughly 5000 Bible verses, mostly extended passages, in a Bible Memory Association program which rewarded its participants with a Christian book or game every fortnight, and a week-long trip to Bible camp each summer. So the words of Jesus – and King David, and the apostle Paul -- have become the foundation of my thought processes.

Five years ago, I discovered a local Quaker meeting (open, affirming) with many non-theists involved. I at first felt like a fish out of water, but they were so welcoming that I soon learned I had left the judgmental sharks behind, and finally found my own school of dolphins. Today our little lunchtime Quaker Bible Study arrived at Matthew 19, beginning with Jesus’ teaching on marriage and divorce in verses 1-12. Specifically, “What God has joined together, let no man separate.” My Bible-based parents had inculcated in me early on that “Divorce is never an option.” Their own marriage lasted 53 years, though it appeared to me that their last fifteen or twenty years together were not completely blissful.

I married fresh out of Bible College (my father’s insistence) to someone I found dashing, intelligent, shy, and a tiny bit frightening. A jazz pianist and scholar, he was by far the most fascinating person I had ever met. When we were courting, I did see him yell at his mother once, and remembered that a favorite grade school teacher had told us girls, “Watch how your boyfriend treats his mother, because that’s exactly

how he will treat you as his wife.” But I ignored the warning and we were married in a matter of months.

At first, life was joyous! We had great long discussions, listened to hours of classical and jazz music, and ended each evening watching the late movie together, camped out with pillows on the floor. Because I had never been allowed to attend movies, this wholly new cultural experience was great fun.

The trouble started when I was late returning from a required work event one night. He greeted me in our apartment parking lot, waving his arms and shouting. Those were the days before cell phones, and the event was held in a large public auditorium, so there was no way to call him; in fact, I had no idea he would be so worried. But from that night forward, every time I was even a few minutes late, he would explode in anger. Always, he would explain that it was FEAR that made him so angry—fear that something had happened to me, fear that I wouldn’t be able to come home. But the effect on me was distressing.

There always seemed to be a high level of tension in our home; once I was reading (quietly) to our little daughter while he was studying. Suddenly a plastic glass flew through the air, hit the cabinets, and ricocheted toward me, hitting me in the chin. I drove myself to the hospital and got it stitched up. He would misplace something—glasses, a pen, a book—and then yell frantically while everything else stopped, and I hunted until the object was found. In later years, if I had a big deadline at work the next day, the night before my deadline he would always need an inordinate amount of help and attention. Julia Cameron calls this kind of activity “Crazy-Making.”

We had very limited social life. This is because we lost one set of friends after another, due to his either deciding we had to leave just after we arrived, or his cancelling plans just before we

were set to meet someone. He was only comfortable with one or two people, never a larger group, and the people had to be listening to him expound on a topic. He was truly bright, and knew something about everything. Folks used to joke that “If you ask him a question, you’ll get a half-hour answer.” Years into our life together, someone gave me an article on Agoraphobia (fear of crowds or open marketplaces) and I was relieved to know that there might be a name for this.

Through the ‘70s, ‘80s, and ‘90s, the tension in our home was palpable. While no alcohol or drugs were in use, things would fly through the air, I’d get a stomach punch (where it wouldn’t show), doors would slam, fists would punch through the walls. It was terrifying! Yet I didn’t tell anyone, because he had a job teaching in a Christian college, and it would ruin his career if our marriage didn’t appear “perfect.” I never told my parents because they were constantly reminding me that, as their only child, their reputation in the church depended on my “successful” marriage (although all the other deacons’ and elders’ grown children had gotten divorces). Remember, “Divorce is NOT an option.”

As my marriage vows replayed in my head, “in sickness and in health, till death do us part,” I felt that surely there must be some sort of mental illness involved. But without a diagnosis, I felt trapped “till death.” I figured that since he was physically strong, I should end the sham marriage in death – my own. I was suicidal! Briefly, I had toyed with the idea of running away, but my religious roots were so deep that I couldn’t imagine who I would become without following all the rules, obeying my husband and giving him the respect that he demanded. Also, I was afraid that if I took our daughter and ran away, he might find us and kill me. Then who would take care of her? And who would take care of him, for that matter? I did


all the shopping, housework, yardwork, errands, banking, bookkeeping, cooking, car repairs, etc., so that he could concentrate on studying and writing his lectures and sermons. “Wives, obey your husbands!”

The dam finally broke when he had a complete nervous breakdown late in the 1990s. By then, doctors knew a lot about mental illness and prescribed calming medications for him. He retired from teaching, which eased a lot of his stress. Lately, my daughter and I have read up on Asperger’s Syndrome, and believe absolutely that he is high on the autism spectrum. Because of his social impairment, just going out to work every day was an act of love on his part. It was HARD for him to do! At the same time, staying with someone with severe personality problems was also an act of love on my part. When my parents had both passed away, I once again toyed with the thought of leaving him, but our daughter talked me out of it.


For the past eleven years, he has endured severe dementia, and doesn’t remember his teaching years at all. His personality has done a complete 180; he proclaims about fifty times a day, “I love my wife.” He is agreeable and says “Thank you” whenever someone hands him anything to eat or drink. We watch TV movies and news together; we lie around; and I scratch his back. I tell him stories (the happy ones) about our courtship and early marriage. When he is troubled, I quote for him passages on the Resurrection. We listen to jazz.

Our daughter and her partner have left the West Coast and joined us on our little farm in Kansas, where she helps with his care, does the heavy yard work, and keeps us safe from Coronavirus. I start each day in the Pendle Hill Meeting for Worship, where God speaks to me with the thoughtful messages of other Friends. My husband and I are blessed, living “as heirs together of the grace of life” (I Peter 3:7). Tomorrow will be our fifty-third wedding anniversary.

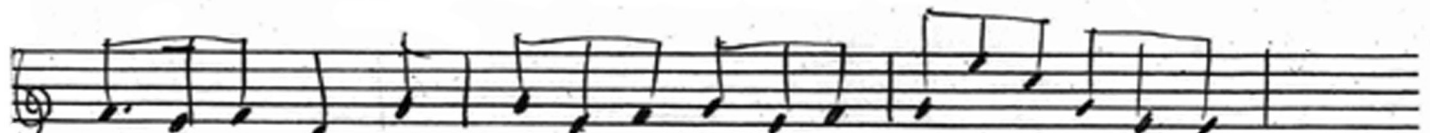
Jesus the Janitor



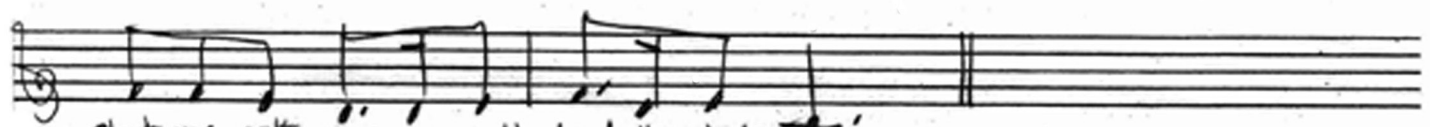
Je-sus the Jan-i-tor lives in my heart and This is the song He sings.




I love you, I love you, I think the world of you and through you I'd love to




love the whole world, I love you, I love you, I think the world of you and



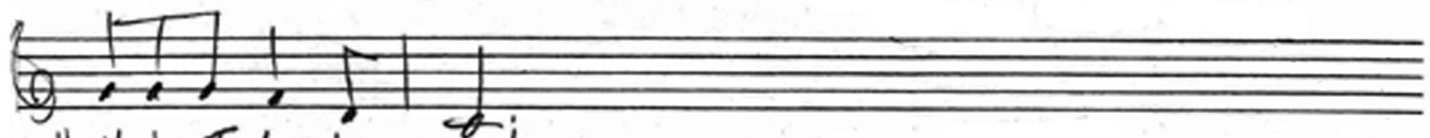
Start-ing with you we could heal the whole world



One day in meet-ing as I was a-pray-ing trying to find out what the



Spi-rit was say-ing But all I could feel was my bad beat-ing heart so



That's where I had to start

Jesus the Janitor

Sally Campbell

*Jesus the Janitor lives in my heart,
And this is the song he sings:*

*"I love you, I love you, I think the world of you,
And through you I'd love to love the whole world.
I love you, I love you, I think the world of you.
And starting with you we can heal the whole world."*

*One day in meeting as I was a-praying
Trying to find out what the Spirit was saying,
But all I could feel was my hard, hurting heart
So that's where I had to start.*

*"Oh, help me, please help me!" I cried in my mind
To the One in the silence who'd always been kind.
"Help me let go of this pain in my heart.
Help me to let it depart."*

*Now one thing I've learned if you ask you'll be given
And if you forgive then you'll find you're forgiven,
So I wasn't surprised by an answer to prayer,
But the one I was given was rare.*

*The next thing I knew a wee Jesus came flying
To answer the call that I'd been a-crying
And in his right hand he'd a tiny string mop
To come and clean out all the glop*

*That was all that I knew on that Sunday in May.
I left it at that and I went on my way,
But silently Someone was busy at work
In my heart there deep in the murk.*

*Several weeks later again I was praying,
Listening to hear what the Dear One was saying.
"I'm here now!" I heard loud and clear from inside.
I knew Who had come to abide.*

*You'd think that was all but it wasn't, my friend.
There's just a bit more 'fore we get to the end.
My resident Friend timed his move with great skill
For soon I found out I was ill*

*Though I'd never had kids and was past forty-five
I was basically glad just for being alive,
But then when I felt a sharp pain in my side
From the truth I no longer could hide.*

*There was no more time, I had to let go.
To the chance to have babies I had to say "no",
But Jesus was there, he was sharing my loss,
So now I call him my "boss".*

*Now in a meeting when I am a-praying
I listen to hear what Friend Jesus is saying.
For Jesus the Janitor lives in my heart
And this is the song he sings:*

*"I love you, I love you, I think the world of you,
And through you I'd love to love the whole world.
I love you, I love you, I think the world of you,
And starting with you we can heal the whole world."*

Sally Campbell is a singer/songwriter, a member of Morningside Meeting (New York City), retired librarian and a Friendly personal organizer. She loves to give away her CD "Gift Songs and Blessings." If you'd like one, just send your mailing address to her at scampfriend@earthlink.net. Some of her songs are on YouTube. Look for Sally Quaker Campbell.

Following Jesus

David Blair

Jesus was a man with brown or black skin. He certainly felt that all lives matter, yet I have no doubt that he would have stated “Black Lives Matter” as his concern was so clearly with the oppressed, the poor, those who in Howard Thurman’s word are “disinherited.” After all, he chose to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan rather than the Good Neighbor. He was making a point about what it means to truly love our sisters and brothers by lifting up the despised Samaritan as the model neighbor.

Jesus’ entire message of radical love for God, for neighbor, even for enemy, is a challenge to me in my daily life. For all of us! Some of his words have taken on special meaning in recent months.

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. (Matthew 5:17; all quotations from the NRSV).

Black Lives Matter seeks not to overturn the founding promises of our country but instead to find and fulfill their deepest meaning.

I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother. (Matthew 10:35)

Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead. (Matthew 8:22)

Primary loyalty is not to family but to Jesus and to doing God’s will. Lineage, blood, hierarchy are all subordinated to this. God’s family is defined by doing love, not by who or where I am born. Jesus does not set out to shatter families, yet if by speaking the truth and acting in love we do break the confines of family, class and ethnic/racial identity, that is a necessary cost of following Jesus.

Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. [Matthew 6:5]

It is thrilling to see how “Black Lives Matter” has resonated across the country, in every state, in cities and small towns. May it continue to resonate! Yet if all I do is put the sign on my front lawn, and that’s where it stops, Jesus tells me I am a hypocrite praying in public so others may see me.

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God. (Matthew 19:24)

The riches Jesus refers to include the inherited privileges of being white. I must become conscious of these and tell the truth to myself and to others. Without the truth, we cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. (Mark 8:35)

I’ve always understood this as a metaphor for letting go of the narrow, small self in order to find a home with God, to be joined with the infinite Self. This is my understanding of resurrection. Being “born again” in this way was for me a scary and difficult journey, painful, costly, and ultimately liberating.

Yet there can be further costs of discipleship. I am now following the query: Are you learning from his life the reality and cost of obedience to God? What am I called to do, who am I called to be, at this time?

I pray with Meister Eckhart: “Open my eyes to what is happening in my life. Help me to see your particular path for me. Give me the insight to see what holds me back and the grace to let it go.”

David Blair has lived and worked in China, the Philippines and Vietnam. His inner journey has taken him even more amazing places. David co-founded the Mariposa Museum and World Culture Center in Peterborough, New Hampshire, a museum dedicated to peace and justice through understanding across boundaries <mariposamuseum.org>. He is now a student at the Boston University School of Theology.

Practicing Democracy with Jesus

Judith Favor

“Who do you say I am?” asked Jesus.

“The Inner Guide,” I said. “I want to follow. Show me the way.”

Jesus introduced me to Quakers during a period of homelessness when Friend Susan Murphy gave me shelter and kitchen privileges. On the refrigerator, with magnets, she posted Advices and Queries from *Faith and Practice of the Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends*. The Advices were a bit too doctrinal, but the queries fascinated me. The first ones focused on Harmony With Creation:

- *In what ways do I express gratitude for the wondrous expressions of life on Earth?*
- *Do I consider the damage I might do to the Earth’s vulnerable systems in choices I make of what I do, what I buy and how I spend my time?*

I reflected on these queries while waiting for the kettle to boil, and pondered them during breakfast. Employed only part-time, I had spacious hours to copy queries into my journal, sit in the garden with Jesus and prayerfully reflect in writing.

On a bedside shelf, I was attracted to *The Journal of George Fox*, where I found flashes of fresh insight. Fox’s descriptions of direct experiences with the Living Christ brought me into a whole new relationship with self, others, God and Creation. Friends worshipped together in silence, giving voice to “concerns” that led them to leave farms and shops, travel in pairs and share vivid discoveries of inward transformation. The Religious Society of Friends arose from the depths

of fellowship with the Living Christ. In their journals, Quakers recorded moments of mystical union, concerns and questions, just as I did. "What canst thou say?" I wanted to belong to this vibrant community of Friends.

I was impressed how the Religious Society of Friends practiced democracy from as early as 1682, challenging one another to live up to the ways of Jesus. Britain Yearly Meeting asked local Meetings to report: (1) What Friends imprisoned for their testimony have died in prison since the last yearly meeting? (2) How has the Truth prospered amongst you? (3) How are Friends proceeding in peace and unity?

From 1787 onward, Quakers also commended queries for personal self-examination, wrote responses in journals, and shared them with Meeting members. Personal queries focused "on the right management of one's own affairs both inward and outward," such as, "What unpalatable truths might you be evading?"

In *Quaker Spirituality: Selected Writings*, (Paulist Press, NY, 1984, p. 14), Douglas V. Steere summed it up: "Here was a religious democracy in which there was a realization in the group that the Spirit might use anyone as its vehicle to speak words of truth to his or her fellows....Out of this expectation grew the most democratic vehicle of Christian worship that has ever been fashioned."

I have been a convinced Friend for twenty years. During election year 2020, I practice Quaker-Jesus-style-democracy by penning prayers for favored candidates in my journal, and venting judgments about opponents. I call my journal "The Mercy," for it patiently accepts whatever I blurt onto the page, including strong words about politicians who commit crimes and misdemeanors, or misuse power. On my best days—when blessed with time and patience—I re-read my scrawls with a high-lighter pen in hand, and mark the places where I actually follow Jesus in expressions

of kindness, love, mercy and respect toward others.

A few election-season Jesus-queries to consider in your own Quaker journal:

- 1) Which persons help to shape your democratic values? How?
- 2) Which Jesus-values are most difficult to practice in today's political climate?
- 3) How do you build, use and share power?
- 4) What social changes do you see occurring as a result of current conflicts?
- 5) What kinds of democratic change do you seek from elected leaders?
- 6) Which candidates are most likely to reduce violence and increase equity?
- 7) What else canst thou say?

Judith Favor, author and soul companion, belongs to Claremont Monthly Meeting, Southern California Quarterly Meeting and Pacific Yearly Meeting.



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February 2021
The Journey to Overcome
Editor: Judy Lumb

"The dark night of the soul is a journey into light, a journey from your darkness into the strength and hidden resources of your soul."
Carolyn Myss. How are you managing the chaos and darkness of 2020? What strengthens your resilience? What has helped you find your way back to the Light from a dark night of the soul?

Deadline: November 15, 2020

May 2021
Grief
Editor: Earl Smith

There are so many reasons for grief. Grief is a sibling of loss. So also is love. We have loss of life, loss of position, loss of family through a divorce, loss of attachments, and loss through sudden changes in schedule. How has grief changed your life? What stage of grief (Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance) was the hardest? Is it true that time heals? What helped the most in dealing with grief?

Deadline: February 15, 2021

August 2021
Approaching the End of Life
Editor: Rhonda Ashurst

As the vessels that hold our Life Light dissolve, we are poured into the Ocean of Light from which we came. For most of us, this is a slow process that happens over decades. As you approach death, what is falling away? What are you learning about who you really are? How are you preparing for death? What advice would you give younger people about living life fully?

Deadline: May 15, 2021

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