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Number 108 (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*

Jesus: Love in Action (Supplemental)

Jesus Brought My Soul Back

It was spring in the early 2000's, I can't recall which year now. My dance troupe went to a class in Santa Fe, which was a three-hour drive from where we lived in southern Colorado. The day was warm and the skies clear when we headed out that morning. It was going to be warm in Santa Fe, so we dressed lightly. The class was long and afterwards we were hungry, so we went to dinner before heading home.

I was driving with Catherine in her sedan. We were engrossed in conversation and that's how we missed the turnoff. It took us a while to realize we were headed into the mountains towards Chama. It was dark so we didn't see the storm shrouding the peaks. We decided it would take us a little longer to go that way, but we were enjoying our talk and giddy from the day, so we kept going.

Part of the way up the mountainside snow began to fall lightly. Neither of us recalled a storm being in the forecast, but freak snowstorms can come out of anywhere in the southern Rockies, especially in spring. As we traveled higher, the flakes thickened and began to stick on the pavement. By the time we reached the top of the pass, the road was coated with a layer of snow and it was coming down fast, reducing visibility.

As the car headed down the pass, it picked up speed. Suddenly, there was an unexpected curve in front of us. Catherine applied the brakes and the car began to slide, heading towards the edge of the road. She turned the wheel, trying to steer us back onto the road. But we were going too fast and a layer of ice had built up under the snow, making it impossible to gain traction. We were going over the edge.

I remember her hand leaving the steering wheel and reaching for mine at the same time I was reaching for hers. We grasped each other and screamed; our eyes glued to the windshield. I had the horrifying vision of us careening off a 1,000-foot precipice and smashing into pieces at the bottom. It was impossible to see anything but snow and the darkness beyond as our tires left the pavement. We were going over backwards.

Rhonda Ashurst, Editor

Time slowed down as the car tilted back and we seemed to float in the air. We braced for the impact. But it never came. I was aware that we were skidding down the mountain on snow, like a toboggan on wheels. I could hear it creaking under the weight of the car and the sound of the metal sliding over it. Very gently and slowly, the car came to a stop and rolled lightly onto the passenger side. Later I imagined angels throwing snow under the back of the car, cushioning our fall, and making sure we didn't roll over.

I could see the headlights pointing up the mountain towards the road and I recall thinking, "Good, that will be a beacon if anyone comes this way." This was a very remote, deserted mountain pass and I knew it was a slim chance at this time of night. I prayed help would come anyway.

I turned to Catherine and realized she was frozen with shock. Her wide eyes stared ahead, and her hand was locked on mine, the other on the steering wheel. I placed my other hand over hers and said, "Catherine, we're ok, we're going to be ok. We're stuck in a snowbank." She looked at me and I asked if she could get out of the car. She shook her head. I told her I'd have to scramble over her to get out because my side was blocked by snow. She nodded, still unable to speak.

From the Editor:

This is a time to bring Light into the world—to manifest Jesus' love in action. This supplemental issue of WCTS includes a mystical experience with Jesus, an imagined conversation between Jesus and Judas with a beautiful illustration, a quote of Carl Magruder's FGC Bible Half Hour on Trickster Jesus and a love poem. 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 cooperatively 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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I reached over her and opened the door. Pushing hard against gravity, I climbed over her and out. I sank about 3 feet into the snow. I had fortunately put boots on over my tights, but I had no jacket and it was freezing cold. I looked up and realized we were only about 40-50 yards down from the top. Apparently, the pass had a gradual slope on this side of the road, and I said a prayer of thanks. We were so lucky. The fresh snow had cushioned our fall perfectly. And then there was another stroke of luck, a snowplow appeared out of the night, stopping when it saw the headlights of our car. A man climbed out and looked over the embankment. I called up to him, "We're down here!"

"Do you think you can make it up here?" he asked.

"We'll try. Let me get my friend out of the car!" I yelled back.

It took some coaxing to get Catherine out. I realized she was wearing sandals and she was already shivering in her skirt and tee shirt. I decided the best thing to do was for me to pack the snow and her to follow behind me. I knew we would have to crawl up on all fours to distribute our weight better and be able to stay on top of the snow. It was a long, freezing cold climb, but we did it.

Near the top, the man reached down and helped pull me up onto the road. Then we both helped Catherine. Inside the plow, the heater was on full blast and there were blankets. We thanked the driver for rescuing us. I don't know what we would have done without him. He lived with his family a short way down the mountain at the maintenance station. They were in bed when he brought us in and sat us next to the roaring wood stove. Soon his wife and daughters were up and making us hot drinks, covering us in blankets. I was relieved when Catherine started speaking again, the shock and the cold wearing off.

She called her husband who had a big truck with a winch. It took him about an hour to get there. He and the snowplow driver hooked up the car and winched it up onto the roadway. Incredibly, it was undamaged and drivable! Catherine was still too shaken to drive, so I drove, following behind her husband. In an hour, we were home.

But I didn't come back. I was lost somewhere out on the pass. An empty shell that looked and talked and walked like me returned, but I felt hollow inside. I couldn't seem to get out of bed and go to work. I wasn't interested in life and I thought a lot about dying. I wasn't injured or in pain, I simply had no will to live. This went on for several days. My husband worried about me; he didn't know what to do. I didn't either.

One afternoon, I was in bed drifting in and out of sleep. In my mind's eye, Jesus appeared before me. He had a ball of Light in his hands. He said, "You forgot this on the pass. You're going to need it." Then he blew the Light into my chest. I felt air rush into my lungs and my eyes opened. It was like waking up from a bad dream. I felt alive! I got up out of bed and made something to eat. I was back.

When my husband returned home, he was surprised to see me up and attending to neglected chores around the house.

"What happened?" he asked.

"Jesus brought my soul back," I told him, and then described my experience. We immediately said a prayer of thanks. The next day I went back to work. I didn't tell anyone what happened, but all these years later it is still a vivid memory. It's good finally to be able to share this story.

Rhonda Ashurst lives a quiet, contemplative life with her partner in Reno, Nevada. She writes a blog: <rhondaashurst.com>, practices yoga and serves the cat. She attends the Reno Friends Meeting.



Jesus and Judas Sit Down to Tea: Reflecting on the Ultimate Love Story

Jennifer Elam

"Judas, why did you betray me?"

"I had to do what I had to do to save myself. If I had not betrayed you, the story could not have happened as it was to happen. It was my part of the story. Why did you betray me?"

"Judas, how did I betray you?"

"Jesus, I believed your faith would save you from me. Why didn't you save yourself? I know that you could have."

"Judas, becoming human was my part of the love story. My faith did save me, but as a fully human being, I was human. It was not my place to be other than human. As a human, you betrayed my trust. I can forgive you. Can you forgive me for my humanness? We each did play our human parts well, as we were given the roles."

"I believe I can forgive."

They had a huge belly laugh about the absurdities and ironies of the human condition and both were resurrected.

Jesus and Judas sit down to tea, again.

Jennifer Elam is a member of Berea (Kentucky) Friends Meeting,

Center Down and Listen Up

Sally Campbell

Voice

C F G⁷

Cen-ter down and list-en up and give your mind a break

C

You may hear with - in your heart a truth to make you quake.

Center down and listen up
Give your mind a break.
You may hear within your heart
a truth to make you quake.

The still, small voice is speaking still,
But we move way too fast
To heed its loving counsel
as folks did in the past.

Moses and Muhammad
George Fox and Joan of Arc
Heard words within the silence
Saw Light within the dark.

Center down and listen up
Give your mind a break.
You may hear within your heart
a truth to make you quake.

Shepherds heard the angels say,
"Fear not!" and "Allelu!"
Martin heard "Stand up, my son,
I'll always be with you."

Despairing I heard "All's for joy"
and later "Work with me"
While walking after 9/11
and gazing at a tree.

Center down and listen up
Give your mind a break.
You may hear within your heart
a truth to make you quake.

This moment is a fresh one,
a chance to start anew.
The wise and friendly spirit
would like to speak with you.

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.

Trickster Jesus

Carl Magruder

Bible Half Hour (Tuesday) at 2020 Friends General Conference

Tradition holds that the start of Jesus' ministry was not his baptism in the River Jordan by his rabbi and cousin John, nor when the Spirit descended on him like a dove, nor yet his 40 days and nights fasting in the wilderness and his temptation by Satan. It was after he had heard that John the Baptizer had been arrested, and then Jesus took up John's cry, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." That's Matthew, chapter 4, verse 17. Now, I am calling on the trickster spirit of Brer Rabbit to help me through the Briar Patch of our old wounds and good instinct against religion that shames so that no Quakers are harmed during the making of this Bible Half Hour. I'm serious about that.

The Greek word that is translated as "repent" is "metanoia" which has the sense of "transform your knowing, expand your consciousness, turn in a new direction." It more literally means "to perceive afterwards". When consciousness expands, we can see what was hidden before. We say, "Hindsight is 20/20." In the midst of his beautiful treatise on the nature of love in I Corinthians 13, the Apostle Paul describes, "for now we see through a glass darkly, but then face-to-face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as also I am known."

Three hundred years after his crucifixion, trickster Jesus and his followers were still being hunted and persecuted on all sides, so they took his story and his teachings and his mystical connection with the Oneness and hid in the most unlikely place you could think of, in the middle of the Roman Empire with the conversion of the Emperor Constantine. Like a foxtail caught in a fox's tail, the seed of truth was carried far and wide. He tucked it into the Nicene Creed even where it peeks out in the subversive placement of God and Jesus above the Emperor.

As with most trickster tricks, there was a high price to pay for this subterfuge, but there have always been those who found the true seed in whatever vessel conveyed it. And they picked out the seed, and grew it and harvested it and passed it on, as St. Francis did. St. Francis was a mystic. He experienced the Oneness of the cosmos directly.

One cost that comes with the credal codification of the Way is the oversimplified notion of repentance as a one-shot deal, which is mostly concerned with your transgressions of the rules and when you have effective repentance by accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, you are saved from your sin once and for all.

The Hebrew word "hata" from archery means "to miss the mark or stray off the path." It is translated as "sin." When you miss your mark in archery, you go get your arrow and try again. Maybe Brer Rabbit tricked you and got away this time. When you wander off the path, you find it again, eventually, or maybe the Good Shepherd goes and finds you and brings you back.

When you become ritually unclean, you bathe in the "micva" the sacred bath. Hata (sin) is not an indelible mark and that fiery pit of hell thing, the Hebrews picked that up from a Zoroastrian metaphor when they were slaves in Babylon. That's Persia today. Prior to Babylon the traditional Hebrew land of the dead is Shaol and everyone went there, regardless. That confusion has caused a lot of unnecessary suffering. Hell and damnation!

We are called to pray without ceasing and I believe we are also called to repent without ceasing. Individually and as a body, we are called to repent without ceasing. Repentance is an iterative process. It is my experience that there may be a big thunderbolt moment after which we are changed. Our consciousness is transformed. And metanoia to perceive after opens our eyes, putting our third eye in an indelible way to what was hidden. And we are changed forever. For mystics that moment stems for the direct encounter with the Divine. "Let those with eyes to see, see." ...

If you once thought that your sexual orientation, or another's, was a sickness, or an affront to God, and you have come to understand that all love is a divine gift, you have repented.

If you once thought that one religion was the only way to know God and have come to a more universalist understanding, you have repented.

If you have ever admitted to yourself, to God and to another person that you are powerless over your addiction, you have repented.

For some of us African-American folks, declaring "Black is beautiful," was a repentance, a new way of perceiving ourselves as perfect in the sight of God. ...

All over Quakerdom and elsewhere Friends of European descent are doing white privilege work, seeing their unearned advantage at the expense of others, examining their unconscious bias, confessing ways they have been complicit in and benefited from the racial status quo. Some

present in this Zoom room are living into a new understanding of what race means to them. This is a courageous and liberating kind of repentance and it is already bearing some fruits of the Spirit.

But our racial justice work is hardly complete. Our piecemeal, awkward, politically correct, sometimes legalistic approaches to healing racism are merely the scaffolding we need to raise the Holy Ghost building of perfect love. Now we see through the glass darkly, but someday we will live effortlessly, joyously, as God intended, as Martin Luther King envisioned. Just as the laws of Moses, an eye for an eye, didn't get the Israelites to shalom, the peace of God, these laws were a big improvement over if you put out my eye, I will kill your whole family, which had come before.

Let us repent, let us change, let us repent without ceasing. Our iterative racial repentance must continue so that the goal of the FGC Institutional Assessment on Racism is to render itself obsolete. We need these efforts to straighten up, on our way to becoming perfect, even as my Heavenly Father is perfect.

Carl Magruder gave the Bible Half Hour at the 2020 Friends General Conference, which was held virtually. Videos and transcripts of these presentations are available online <fgcquaker.org/connect/gathering/schedule-glance/gathering-schedule-and-handouts/virtual-gathering-videos>.

Love

Michael Resman

These eyes have never seen You
My love,
and I know they never shall.

I am content to contemplate
the merest glimpse of you;

reflection of a buttercup,
dew drop's gleam,
green of a hillside painted with a forest.

I will look for You with my heart,
where I see You shining
through a million suns.

Nor will this skin be touched.

But my soul,
what you've done.

I'm immersed in a Love
bigger than time
past space.

My every particle
infused, saturated.

Michael Resman is a member of Rochester (Minnesota) Friends Meeting and the What Canst Thou Say editorial team. This poem was posted on a WCTS blog on May 31, 2019.

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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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c/o George Hebben, Postal 2811,
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*Jesus:
Love in Action
(Supplemental)*