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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*

Gratitude

Gratitude in the Time of Coronavirus

Rhonda Ashurst

I have a confession, something I only admit to fellow introverts, contemplatives and mystics. I love the guiltless solitude coronavirus has gifted me. Delicious hours stretch before me, empty of outward commitments, allowing time to delve inwards. I am slowly coming home to myself.

Why has it continued to be so difficult to create space for myself in my own life? It seems I've returned to the old habit of giving too much of my life away. After two hip replacements, I promised myself I wouldn't do this again, yet here I am.

I was walking with a dear friend the other day who nodded and smiled knowingly when I made this confession to her. She said she was anxious about coronavirus going away and having to return to her previous social life. I could relate. As we strolled along, we wondered why we feel captive to the social norms of society and the needs of others? What about our own needs for solitude, quiet, reflection? How can we speak for our needs and still honor the needs of our more socially oriented loved ones? We mutually decided that would be our work in the months and years to come. I am grateful to have a kindred spirit to share the journey.

My partner is another kindred spirit who reminds me that he deliberately avoids agreeing to as many engagements as I do. I fear I've been dragging him along into a more social life than he prefers. My other gratitude is having more time with him, alone. I adore his company and luxuriate in our longer conversations.

The cat has stopped wandering around squalling for attention, since we are here most of the time and more attentive to him. He is grateful for more connection with us. I talk to my mother every day and there is more spaciousness in my heart for her. My social circle is drawing in closer as I focus on my most important relationships, rather than trying to be there for everyone.

I like the Quaker testimony of Simplicity and the query I most like is: Do I keep my life uncluttered with things and activities, avoiding commitments beyond my strength and Light? Though I have been diligent about uncluttering my things, I still tend to clutter my calendar with commitments beyond my strength and Light. This is a perpetual dilemma for me. I accept that I will always experience some angst around my social vs. solitude choices. As I settle more deeply into this extended retreat, I resolve to retreat regularly in my new future. I pray for the strength to honor this deep need. How can I hear the song of my soul if I don't? How can I compassionately set needed boundaries for myself? When do I choose to connect with others, and which are the most important relationships to nourish?

I suspect I will find my way day-by-day and moment-by-moment. I won't be alone, as all of us will be sorting out these answers for ourselves in the days to come. I am thankful for the time out to consider my choices mindfully. I trust my heart will show the way.

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.

From the Editors:

A year or two back we decided to do an issue on gratitude. We are reminded that in all circumstances we are to give thanks. As we see from the story of Job, God is always with us. We hope this issue on Gratitude will help us through this traumatic time since we have all been affected and will be for some time.

Earl Smith and Judy Lumb

Thanksgiving

Elizabeth "Betsy" Meyer

Many years ago, I was present at a monthly meeting for business seeking to discern whether to hold worship on Thanksgiving morning. Thinking of all the work I would be facing that morning, my contribution to the discussion was, "You all can go ahead and worship Thanksgiving morning, but I will be home baking pies." As soon as the words left my mouth, I felt humiliated. How could I make such an unworshipful comment? Wouldn't Friends think me a bad Quaker for prioritizing pies over worship? After the business meeting, many Friends responded to my comment. To my surprise, none scolded me. Instead, many seemed astonished that anyone knew how to bake homemade pies anymore. Reverently, they said, "You bake pies?"

I love to bake pies, rolling out the crust, arranging the filling, crimping the edges. Is anything more fragrant than the aroma of a pie in the oven? Last autumn when New Hampshire apples were fresh from the orchards, my 97-year-old mother and I baked a pie together. As I rolled out the dough and she peeled and cored the apples, I was filled with a sense of overwhelming gratitude. God was present right there in the kitchen as we performed these ordinary tasks. I felt grateful for the apples and the crisp fall day. I was grateful to have my mother still. Most of all, I was grateful for the overwhelming awareness of God's presence. Then I remembered the business meeting so many years before, and I decided to revise my definition of Thanksgiving worship. To go about our daily tasks in awareness of God's presence with gratitude for everything, is this not Thanksgiving worship?

Elizabeth "Betsy" Meyer is a member of Concord NH Monthly Meeting and author of Pendle Hill Pamphlet 453, A Practical Mysticism: How Quaker Process Opens Us to the Promptings of the Divine.

WCTS Sharing in the Midst of the Coronavirus Pandemic

The *What Canst Thou Say?* editorial team invites our community to share with our fellow mystics in this time of pandemic. We have developed the following queries to inspire, but feel free to respond as you are led:

- How are you nourishing your soul during this time of virus cloistering?
- What struggles have you encountered?
- What have you learned about yourself and God?

We are using the blog that we started to support our gatherings: <quakermystics.wordpress.com>. If you are not yet a follower of this blog, go to the blog at the link above and sign up in the right column. Send submissions for this blog to <WCTSeditors@gmail.com>.

What Canst Thou Say? (WCTS)

<whatcansstthousay.org> 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, and Janice Stensrude.

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.

Although there are themes announced for most issues, we welcome 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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On Quakers and the Cost of Gratitude

Matt Boswell

“You know, you’re just our pastor.” I’ve heard that cheeky admonition more than once from members of my congregation, trying to put me in my place. Always spoken with a twinkle in their eyes, of course.

In reality, I think it is less about sending me a humbling message than it is a fitting and needed form of self-elevation and taking of responsibility among congregants. And rightly so.

When people tell me I’m just their pastor, they’re not saying I’m unimportant. I do matter. But this is taken for granted in much of the Christian tradition—that a pastor matters to the spiritual experience of a community. And a pastor needs to be cared for, of course.

But in my experience, people don’t need to be told that their pastor is a gift to them. People need to know that they are gifts to one another. People who are often overlooked as “gifts” need to be told they are gifts and treated as if they are gifts.

I think gratitude is a pervasive theme in Quaker spirituality. That might seem unremarkable, since most religious traditions might be said to have a fundamental emphasis on gratitude. What makes Friends unique?

Gratitude, to me, is the virtue that enables a person to recognize and receive the goodness that others possess in a way that is self-transforming. It is about awareness but also openness and receptivity and willed dependence.

Ample studies have shown that gratitude can increase personal happiness and health. But there is more at stake than this. Gratitude is important because it is essential to love. The more grateful we are, the

more we can participate constructively, helpfully, and respectfully in the lives of others. And the more we welcome their participation in our lives.

I see gratitude in many elements of Quaker spirituality. Some of this is based on my personal experience of what actually is. Some of this is based on hope: what I imagine Quaker community and presence in the world could be, what I think Friends sense they are called to become.

I see gratitude in our communal practices. Open worship affords participants in worship the opportunity to speak out and listen to one another, typically after and followed by lengthy periods of silence. A fitting response to what is spoken from others is often gratitude: to recognize the spoken words as a gift, whether it warms your heart or makes your blood boil.

Gratitude should not end with “Thanks, God.” It should end with generosity, with justice for others.

Corporate discernment encourages open-hearted listening, challenging the temptation I might feel to enter a decision-making process or a conflict with my mind made up, ready to defend a side. Clearness committees invite the gentle prompting and nudging of others to discover what next steps I ought to take on a particular matter. Both practices require receptivity to the gifts of others—their wisdom, their vision, their voice.

The Quaker concerns for peace and justice reflect gratitude. Peace is more than a surface-level calmness or lack of conflict that exists because people are avoiding thorny subjects

or insulating themselves from such conversations.

True peace, I believe, is present when both parties are heard, valued, and allowed to contribute. However, peace does not typically give equal weight to two “sides” of an issue but gives preferential treatment to the harmed, not the harmers, since the harmers are the ones most thwarting the possibility of peace and thus the ones who most need to listen, withdraw, or make more sacrificial compromises.

My meeting is continually seeking ways to practice justice and notice those who are being left out. We’re not perfect at it, and sometimes obstacles like self-absorption, fear, or even busyness prevent us from seeing others.

But we strive to live without a sense of entitlement. We don’t believe God has “blessed us” if that means God has given us some sort of preferential treatment. Gratitude and justice are intertwined. Saying “Thank you for these things” should frequently be followed by “John can’t say ‘Thank you for these things’ because forces beyond his control are actively opposed to his having these things, even though he has just as much right to them as I do; so what am I going to do about it?”

Quakers claim to value authenticity. We say that others’ voices are gifts and should not be stifled, patronizingly corrected, or received primarily as threats, but welcomed. It’s tempting to control the conversation and silence voices that feel threatening, too confrontational, too potentially devastating to the image we have of ourselves.

But gratitude calls us to release control, and let others be themselves. That's not to say we let others hurt themselves, if being themselves is self-destructive. But it does mean we let others challenge us and make us uncomfortable. Discomfort is not inherently evil and may even be a sign that something really good is taking place.

Quakers use light as a multifaceted metaphor. "Light" speaks to the presence of Christ or the Spirit in all, in you. It reminds us that others are gifts to be taken seriously, not written off. It means discrimination is unacceptable. It means that incarceration that does not actually help but that emotionally and economically shackles people permanently (or that functions as a form of racial segregation) is unacceptable. It means killing another human is unacceptable, because other people are sacred, no matter how much crud has accumulated in their souls over time to conceal or dim this light.

Gratitude should connect us to others. If it isolates us, I think we're doing it wrong. Gratitude recognizes that who we are, what we have, is a gift from "otherness"...from what is not us.

Gratitude should not end with "Thanks, God." It should end with generosity, with justice for others. It should lead us to share what we have because what we have comes only partially from personal initiative and ingenuity and primarily from the gifts of others or from historical accident.

Gratitude should lead us to advocate for social policies that tear down what systematically gives some in our world less for which to be grateful. The worst thing I could do as a relatively privileged person is to tell someone with very little, "Well, God loves you, so be grateful for that." What hollow words! That is not good

Gratitude: A Short Film

Louie Schwartzberg

... You think this is just another day in your life. It is not just another day. It is the one day that is given to you today. It's given to you. It is a gift. It's the only gift that you have right now and the only appropriate response is gratefulness.

If you do nothing else but to cultivate that response that this unique day is. If you learn to respond as if it were the first day in your life and the very last day, then you will have spent this day very well.
<<https://vimeo.com/44131171>>

enough. Not helpful enough to be "true." Easy, lazy love. So not love at all, really, because it requires nothing of me.

I'm not speaking of something impossible—of giving equal attention to every person on earth who suffers, of anxiously trying to solve every problem, of so exhausting myself in the service of others that I physically and emotionally break down, of feeling guilty about every good thing I have. I'm talking about paying a little more attention to the people around me. Of opening myself up just a little more.

I suppose it is like a circle—justice and generosity can lead back to gratitude. Because the more we give and the more we participate in the need-meeting, dignifying, caring, liberating work of justice, the more gifts—people—we encounter. The more otherness that can transform us. The more the gaps in our thinking can be filled in. The more our problematic ways of seeing and thinking can be corrected. The more our fears of what we don't understand can recede.

I feel compelled in this moment not only to "count my blessings" but to adjust my posture toward others. To open my hands, mind, and heart.

To listen to what others are saying. To admit my limitations and affirm others' ability to assist me. To thank God for the actual and potential gifts to me that others are and can be.

And to receive gifts with joy but also concern. Yes, to say "thank you for this food" before a meal, but also, at least for a moment if nothing more, to ask "Is the person who cooked this being taken care of? Are the people who contributed to the journey of this food, from ground and beast to my plate and mouth, being taken care of?" Gratitude is about thankfulness but also about awareness.

It is a difficult place to live—between thankful contentment with my cozy reality and a disquieting concern for the un-cozy realities of many others. But I think it is the place God calls me to live as a follower of Jesus in the Quaker way.

Matt Boswell is a recorded Friends minister, pastor of Camas Friends Church (Camas, WA), theology instructor at the University of Portland (OR), and the author of *The Way to Love: Reimagining Christian Spiritual Growth as the Hopeful Path of Virtue* (2018). An earlier version of this article was published on November 17, 2017, on Matt's website (mattboswellphd.com), used with permission.

Grateful

Michael Resman

Gratitude is a blessed spiritual discipline. It opens our eyes to the glories all around us. It can also bring spiritual joy.

I began a spiritual discipline of gratitude by giving thanks for anything I encountered. Whenever I remembered, I gave thanks for what I was experiencing. It was easy to do when I saw something beautiful, harder when I experienced something unpleasant. I wrestled with being grateful for having a headache and learned to be grateful for all the times I didn't have one. I could give thanks for being alive in this complex, varied physical world. It took some work but it was fruitful to search for gratitude in difficult circumstances.

After some weeks of practicing gratitude, I found that a spiritual joy was growing in my heart. Being thankful made me more fully aware of the great love and gifts God was continually giving me. How wonderful! Glorious! To know that God was so close, constant and loving. That feeling of the joy of God's love became the bedrock of my emotions.

I was confused for a while, for I could feel this constant joy, even though I was also feeling other and sometimes conflicting emotions. How could I be sad or angry and also be joyful? I came to see that the most central facet of my life was God's love for me. It was constant, as was my glad response to being so loved.

Michael Resman is an editor for *What Canst Thou Say* and a member of the Rochester MN Friends Meeting. This topic and a number of others are discussed in his book *A Contemporary Mysticism*.

Spinning

Michael Resman

*Holy One
It's a good thing
I'm so little
A speck
grain of sand
In a universe billions of years old
For sometimes
the heavens may split open from our love
You loving me
I loving in return
What a comfort to know I am part
of what makes the world go round
Not power
Self-interest
Strength*

*But love
All loves
Keep the world spinning
And in the great infinity
Waits
The All*

Glowing

Michael Resman

*Glowing blue ball
floating
God's creation*

*Seething chemical soup
then
benign incubator*

*Hot
cold
airless
blanketed*

*Ever changing
responding
as planned*

*Livening reflection
of God's intent*

Praying

Love

Michael Resman

*Holy one
I have no words to carry
the breadth, height and depth
of my love
while knowing mine
is tiny
next to yours for me*

*those blessed
to know you*

*have long recited
human, puny*

*songs
chants
hymns*

*poems
books*

in reflection

*What I can not say
in words
help me
carry forth
in my heart*

*a particle
of your love
thus*

*made manifest
in this world*

All

Michael Resman

*Life
all life
a miracle*

*Knitted by God's
presence
love*

God created all

*Stayed with
each particle*

Created with love

Remains with love

*Love is the foundation
of everything*

*How glorious
God is not merely with
speck of dust*

Specks carry Divine Love

*I walk in
Breathe in
See and hear
Love*

January 21, 2020

Habits of Gratitude

Janice Stensrude

I have kept a gratitude journal since 1998. Though I find this a way to return to an attitude of thanksgiving, over time it becomes too easy to be carelessly automatic, making entries without entering a state of thankfulness. Even with these shortcomings, it remains a record of my gratitude consciousness. Early entries focus on the small and personal; later entries recognize things so much a part of life that I had quite overlooked how remarkable they are: clean air, clean drinking water, indoor flushing toilets, electricity that lights the dark.

My earliest gratitude ritual was the coaxed thank-yous each time someone gave me a gift or even a compliment. "How pretty you look in your little pink dress," some giant would say to me as they bent down and pinched my cheek.

"Say thank you," my mother would instruct.

I hated the big face bending down into mine and the painful tweak of my cheek. My thank-you was definitely not from the heart.

My second gratitude ritual was the thank-you-for-the-gift letters we children wrote, by maternal edict, as soon as we were able to print the alphabet and form words.

The gratitude rituals of my childhood were learned long before they were felt. The child had said "thank you" hundreds of times before one day she meant it. There's wisdom in the fake-it-until-you-make-it philosophy. When true gratitude raised its happy head, I had a language to give it voice.

The third gratitude ritual that I adopted was saying grace at meals. I did not learn it at home, but rather in Girl Scouts. On our campouts, before

scooping our campfire beans and weenies from the iron Dutch oven, we sang a grace. The one that still lives in my mind is the Johnny Appleseed Grace:

*Oh the Lord is good to me
And so I thank the Lord
For giving me the things I need
The sun and the rain and the apple
seed,
The Lord is good to me.*

Some years later, as a student at the University of Texas, I lived in a campus residence with seventeen other young women. Breakfast was a help-yourself occasion; we took the other two meals together, which were always preceded with a group prayer of thanks.

But mealtime grace was not a habit that survived into my years as a wife and mother when I yielded to my husband's preferences. Jack described himself as a survivor of Catholic schooling. His Methodist family resorted to a segregated Catholic secondary education to avoid the recently integrated public schools. Jack often attributed his disdain for anything resembling religious practice to his memories of nuns sharply whacking his knuckles with a ruler. His resistance, however, dated to a much earlier time. He described the great effort he put into feigning vague symptoms of illness to foil his parents' attempts to churchify him. When they finally lost patience with his Sunday morning illnesses that healed by Sunday afternoon, he was once again hustled off to Sunday services, despite claims of a fever or wobbly stomach—until that Sunday when he spewed his breakfast over the back of the pew in front of him, bathing hymnals in vomit and sprinkling bits on nearby worshippers. He had learned the child's power to embarrass parents

into submission. He was never again required to attend church.

It was our second time as visitors to Jack's childhood home when his father asked him to say grace. We joined hands, bowed our heads, and Jack, in his elegant baritone, recited, "Bless us and bind us and tie our tails behind us. Amen." Perhaps it was our church wedding that had betrayed his father into thinking that marriage had altered Jack's attitude. In any event, though grace continued in our presence, Jack was never again asked to lead the prayer.

My grace habit was revived some forty years later by two happenstances. The first was a dinner group that two friends and I brought together. On first Sundays, one of us prepared dinner for the group. Several members, even those not accustomed to pre-dinner prayer in their day-to-day lives, were accustomed to grace at large gatherings. Just as our group was racially diverse and included both gay and straight food lovers, we were spiritually diverse — some among us devout practicing Christians, others quite resistant to attributing any bounty to a higher power. The idea of a universally acceptable gratitude prayer began to germinate, and I woke one morning with words in my head: "Bless this food to the nourishment of our bodies; bless those who have brought it to our plates, that they, too, may know the blessings of this abundant universe." It was adopted as our official Dinner Club Grace.

I don't remember exactly when my universal grace became a ritual at my every meal, but it has been in effect for most of the twenty years that have elapsed since it first came to me. Standing up or sitting down in a fast-food venue, seated with family or friends in a restaurant — wherever I partake of food — I take a moment to silently bless my food. And a few

years ago, an important extension was added to my meals at home — all due to that other happenstance: a story related to me by one of my sisters-in-spirit.

She was alone at Thanksgiving, but had decided not to let her solitary situation spoil her favorite holiday. She prepared a feast for one, and as she was the only diner, decided she would thank everyone who had anything to do with providing her meal: there were farmers, truck drivers, grocery store cashiers, people who worked in factories packing food, and on and on. When she finally came to the end and opened her eyes, her dinner was stone cold; two hours had passed. Her story inspired me to add something to my personal grace: "Thank you to everyone who has participated in providing this food." Each time, I silently picture some of my providers: the craftsmen who built the building where I buy my food, the miners who mined the metals that are used for parts in delivery trucks and construction materials and grocery store shelves — even the other customers who shop at the same store where I get my food; without them, there would be no store near my home. And there are bankers and accountants and store managers and tire manufacturers and workers harvesting sap from rubber trees to make tires — not to mention the hens that lay the eggs.

Felt gratitude goes beyond words, beyond routines and rituals. It has inspired in me thank-you behaviors — actions as a means of expressing gratitude. For years, I made modest cash donations as a way of giving back, but once I retired on a meager social security, that became impossible . . . but I still had skills.

It was during my nine-year stay in Australia that I first experienced Quakerism. The communal silence

of Quaker worship was such a gift, as was the evolving friendship and kindness of those who sat with me. I was painfully aware of my inability to offer a monetary gift as an expression of gratitude for my spiritual nourishment. And so it was with relief that I learned that, though Quakers don't pass a collection plate, they do pass committee sign-up sheets. There were no paid employees organizing worship times, cleaning the meetinghouse, or managing the records. There was only a community of willing hands. My skills had found a home.

I participated in periodic "busy bees" where some members and attenders dusted chairs and tables, scrubbed floors and cleaned windows, while others mowed grass and tended to minor repairs. My greatest outpouring of gratitude was in the form of the many hours I spent organizing and cataloging the meeting library. This latter was such a source of happiness — rolling in books, like a cat in catnip — that it may have been more a guilty pleasure than an act of gratitude. But perhaps happiness is itself an expression of gratitude.

Like God, gratitude is a verb. At least, that's how I experience it.

I sift through my memories to remember so many moments of felt gratitude. In this lovely time of late life, there aren't enough words nor enough time to embrace the gratitude I feel. As a friend recently posted on Facebook in this time of coronavirus, "I just feel grateful to be alive."

Janice Stensrude has attended the Mount Lawley Local Meeting of Australia Yearly Meeting, Texas meetings in Houston and Galveston, as well as meeting in the manner of Friends with Toni Trees, the lone Quaker in Nacogdoches, Texas. She produced and edited *Proceedings of the Friendly Mystics Gatherings of 2013, 2014, and 2015.*

Gratitude - In All Things?

David Male

Most of us have known some degree of real suffering or sorrow. Even those of us who have led a seemingly charmed life have seen the suffering of others or known the very real sorrow of a dear loved one who has lost all or nearly all, or some who live in a near constant fear of death, physical, spiritual or emotional. It is not pretty. How then is it that we could, or should be expected to be thankful? Now, it could be added, especially in these times, but these times have always been with us, or at least coming, though we may not have recognized them.

Thomas Kelly, in his landmark Quaker book, *A Testament of Devotion*, told us that these times were coming back in 1941, when he returned from seeing the devastation in Europe and announced that the plagues of Egypt were coming upon our house, no matter how comfortable, and all we can do is, "Go inside what house you have and pray that it is founded upon the Rock."¹

Blessed assurance... a foretaste of Glory, divine? Job in his hour of grief insisted, "I know that my redeemer lives." George Fox heard a voice when all his hope was gone that spoke to him as Christ Jesus. That voice is reported to have said, at another time, that it went to prepare a place for other sheep of different flocks, with a promise that each sheep would know its shepherd's voice.² So it seems that there is this Hope deep inside each of us, this Hope that never dies, and it is

¹Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, p. 41 of the 1992 Harper-Collins edition. Kelly references Job 19:25.

²This famous Fox quote is from the 1962 Capricorn edition of *The Journal of George Fox*.

truly that Hope for which, in which, and with which (or whom) we can give thanks in all things.

There are moments, few, when I think I know or understand why it has to be this way. More often I must trust the One who knows, and not "put a question mark where God puts a period," as I have been told, if I am to find real peace. When I come through those times I find that I have been clinging to something or some hope that was not enduring, and my soul knew it anyway, and kept me uneasy until I let it go or it is forcefully ripped from me.

It is only then, Oh then, as Fox has said, that our hearts do leap for joy, and all creation has a new smell, as it did for Paul. When that joy comes, there is no pain we would not bear to obtain it, no price we would not pay to share it with any who would have it.

Why then, does the scripture urge me to be thankful in all things? Is this some cruel invitation to a masochistic existence? What does any of that have to do with a loving God? These are questions that I ask myself, and that I cannot answer for you. It is no wonder to me when folks reject the Bible, or the church, or Christ, as I have done many times, or find my joy hypocritical in this world of so much suffering. What I do know is that I always have a choice, no matter what this life presents me, no matter what pain I see or feel, to be thankful that joy is coming, no matter what.

David Male is a member and recorded minister of Ohio Yearly Meeting and Quaker Outreach Advisor and Educator at Olney Friends School. This article is a meditation on 1 Thessalonians 5, especially v. 15-18.

Editors' Appeal

In the August 2019 issue of *What Canst Thou Say*, the Editors wrote an appeal for submissions, saying that the last few issues had few submissions and were mostly written by the Editors, while there has been no decrease in subscriptions.

We received a very thoughtful letter from Louise Champagne making several suggestions which we have adopted. Afterthoughts was one of her suggestions and Margaret Katranides was kind enough to contribute afterthoughts inspired by the February 2020 issue, which also fit into the topic of Gratitude.

We added language to our author instructions to make sure that it is clear that we welcome first-person statements of mystical experiences at any time, whether they fit into a certain topic or not, another of Louise's suggestions.

Another of Louise's suggestions was for us to accept second-hand descriptions of mystical experiences from literature, media, or other sources. Because the strength of WCTS has been publishing personal experience, the Editors were reluctant to open WCTS to second-hand descriptions of mystical experiences, but we asked for readers' perspective on this issue. On the next page is "Oh Dear! Oh My!", the response from John Burdick.



Oh, Dear! Oh, My!

John Burdick

On the idea of allowing submissions based on mystical experiences of others, we know how suspect our own memories are, and how they can change a little every time we dredge them up and repack them. Which is fine. Our own experiences have molded us and can continue to give us insight when our memories float up with new importance in the present.

I would be really leery of doing this to the memories of others; we would be inclined to repack them with our own tastes and needs. Taking into account "do unto others," if the person whose experience this was recognized it, but it no longer matched their own memory, or they attach a different meaning to it, this could be quite disturbing for them.

Just as facts are true, truth is the meaning behind the facts. We could honor our friends' experiences by encouraging them, and helping them to put it in writing and submit for themselves. Let them tell their own truth from their facts, using words they approve.

Thanks for providing such a caring platform for people to share the valuable lessons they have learned!



Afterthoughts

Margaret Katranides

Judith Favor's article in the February 2020 WCTS really struck home with me. I have lost two parents, two husbands and a brother to death, over the years. Never present at the moment of death, but present during the dying of all but one, I can say thank you to her for the clear expression of "I'm right where I need to be." And I'm not surprised by her comment "it felt strangely like joy."

When we are able to be with a loved one as their time is getting closer, as we witness their withdrawal from this corporal life, as we let go of what we might have wished and sink into acceptance of what is, we are ourselves drawn into the Eternal. God surrounds us and fills us, and all else drops away. We are where we need to be, and there is joy in knowing that. So thank you, Judith, and thank you, God.

WCTS Subscription Manager Needed

WCTS needs a new Subscription Manager. The task involves about two hours a month. The main tasks are to produce mailing labels every three months, record subscription payments as they come in, acknowledge renewals with an email or a thank you card. Checks are sent to the treasurer every other month. The Subscription Manager maintains the spreadsheet with names and addresses of our print subscribers. The work of the Subscription Manager is essential for WCTS to exist.



WCTS SUBSCRIPTION FORM

The WCTS website <whatcansstthousay.org> has back issues up to a year ago and all web issues.

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Please write for *What Canst Thou Say?*



August 2020

Poetry as Prayer

Guest Editor:

Janice Stensrude with
Michael Resman

Robert Waldron writes, “The source of poetry is our deepest inner selves.... Poetry, like the mystical prayer of the saints, plunges us into the spiritual depths where there can be a real encounter with the Divine.” Have you read a poem or poems that have brought you into that “real encounter with the Divine”? Have you been inspired to write poems as an expression of your “deepest inner self”? How has this experience affected your reflective life?

Deadline: May 15, 2020

November 2020

Jesus: Love in Action

Editor: **Rhonda Ashurst**

The Religious Society of Friends is rooted in Christianity and has always found inspiration in the life and teachings of Jesus. How do you interpret your faith in the light of this heritage? How does Jesus speak to you today? Are you following Jesus’ example of love in action? Are you learning from his life the reality and cost of obedience to God? How does his relationship with God challenge and inspire you? (Advices and Queries #4, Britain Yearly Meeting)

Deadline: August 15, 2020

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 have you overcome adversity in your life? What strengthens your resilience? Who helped you find your way back to the Light from a dark night of the soul? How has this affected the rest of your life?

Deadline: November 15, 2020

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Gratitude