



Sample
Issue

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

Sample Issue

Getting Real with God

Jennifer Elam

I had finished graduate school only the year before and gotten a temporary assistant professorship at the university where I had gotten my master's degree. It was going quite badly. My ex-professors turned colleagues could not make the switch, and I was devastated. I was living on campus, and one day I was home and very sad. I was crying, wailing actually. And I started screaming at God. Being a person taught to fear God and be polite and please *everyone*, I never before had considered doing such a thing and actually did not consider it that day. It just happened.

I screamed at God for hours. I knew no one was home next door, but suddenly there was a knock on the door. I asked, "Who are you and what do you want?" It was the campus plumbers coming to fix something I had asked them to fix weeks prior. I told them to come in at their own risk, because I was quite upset with God and was busy yelling at God at the moment. They started laughing and told me to give God a couple for them too.

They soon left and I continued to yell and scream and cry. I had

had it. After about two hours, I suddenly got very calm and heard a soft, gentle voice say, *It's about time you got more real with me. I can take whatever you have to give me.* Alone in my apartment, I was startled to hear the voice that was not mine. An image of God smiling came to me.

My relationship with God changed that day. It was forever to be different. Many times since then

when I have been upset and fretting (about nothing worth fretting about), I have gotten an image of God having a belly laugh. And God's belly laugh always puts things in better perspective!

Jennifer Elam is the author of Dancing with God through the Storm: Mysticism and Mental Illness. (From November 2005 WCTS, God's Humor.)

What is What Canst Thou Say?

What Canst Thou Say? is a worship-sharing group in print for Quakers with an interest in mystical experience and contemplative practice. This sample issue has been produced to introduce you to the range and depth of articles found in WCTS. These articles are excerpted from past issues. If reading this sample issue feeds a hunger in you for sharing on matters of the Spirit, we invite you to become a subscriber, a writer, and even a member of our production team. You will find subscription information and writer's guidelines inside.

WCTS was started in 1994 by two Friends in North Pacific Yearly Meeting, Jim Flory and Jean Roberts. It is now produced cooperatively by a group of Friends from around the country, who, themselves, have felt the movement of the Spirit and who wish to deepen their understanding by interacting with others. Over the years of publication more than twenty Friends have been a part of the editorial and production team, and hundreds of Friends in the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain have shared their stories.

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, and Rhonda Ashurst.

Tell us your stories! **WCTS** is a worship-sharing group in print. We hope to help Friends be tender and open to the Spirit. Articles that 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.

Send via email to <wctseditors@gmail.com> or hard copy to **WCTS, 815 9th Street SW, Rochester MN 55902.**

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For subscription rates, see page 9. Send subscription correspondence to Michael Resman <wcts-subscriptions@gmail.com> or **WCTS, 815 9th Street SW, Rochester MN 55902.**

What Treasures!

Bob Barnes

Living in Northern California means I am blessed with the opportunity of walking to meeting for worship (and many other places, too!) through the flora and fauna of the Gold Rush foothills. Increasingly and happily over the last few years a marvelous phenomenon takes place:

Suddenly I stop (but not so quickly as to stumble!) and find that I'm nearly stunned:

Everything has changed.

And nothing has changed.

The shrubs, the trees, the hills, the rocks, the clouds are all the same as they were—except there is a qualitative difference in their colors, even though the colors are just what they were just before the shift. To say it is marvelous is the understatement of the century. Words are too miniscule to carry the weight of the experience. What can I do except gaze in awe, in wonderment at what is happening, to throw my arms wide open, make a little circle dance and over and over exclaim,

Thank you, Thank you! Whoever, whatever, wherever you are: Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

(Expressed in as many languages as I can recall.)

Thankfulness inundates me, envelops me, as though I were standing in a Niagara of gratitude.

And then it passes, more slowly than it began.

These precious flashes—but they are longer than just a flash—occur in other settings as well. Sitting in Meeting, seeing the many familiar faces, sensing those presences as well as knowing their presence in the room. Digging a ditch and being lifted up in the gratitude of hard, heavy, sweaty meaningful work. When I read the call for this message from **WCTS** the room came vibrantly alive as I glanced over to the card table, the cedar walls, the papers laid out on the carpeted floor.

Oh! What treasures!

***Bob Barnes** is a member of Grass Valley Friends Meeting, California. He spends as much time in prison as he can—he is a facilitator for Alternatives to Violence. He says, "If my life does not speak, my words are hollow." (From August 2005 **WCTS**, Seeing.)*

WCTS Has Two Blogs

1) Quaker Mystics: Gathering for Discernment of God's Guidance <quakermystics.wordpress.com> was originally created to support gatherings sponsored by *What Canst Thou Say*, but since we are no longer sponsoring gatherings, this blog is available for other purposes. Michael Resman has been publishing his wonderful poetry. Readers are encouraged to become followers of this blog.

2) Soon after creating the Quaker Mystics blog, the editors found the need for another blog to support the journal *What Canst Thou Say* <worshipsharinginprint.wordpress.com>, for continuing conversations like that with William Shetter. Also on that blog is a series of essays on "Attachment and Detachment" by Mariellen Gilpin.

To contribute to either of these blogs, contact Judy Lumb <judylumb@yahoo.com>.

The Plea of an Old Dog

Linda Theresa

Sitting on the toilet was hardly the place I expected for a lesson in love.

Blind and deaf, my dog Kelsie escaped the back yard. My health prohibited me from going after her. Chronic fatigue syndrome put me flat on my back most of the day. To walk twenty feet felt like willing dead legs to go just one more step... just one more step. Now my loving companion of 17 years roamed busy streets without a clue what was going on around her.

My calm reaction surprised me. Any other time there would have been a panic: worry and a sickening feeling of helplessness. Instead, I remained in a place of clarity and peace carried over from a lesson in love.

A few days before, I had dizzily gotten out of bed for my major outing of the day: hugging the wall on the way to the bathroom. As I sat on the toilet, my faithful companion joined me. *White shadow*, I called her, because ever since she was a puppy she

clung to my side. Her hair bleached whiter as she got older, but she never lost her long eyelashes framing her large, dark brown eyes.

I groaned at the thought of petting Kelsie. Every movement used some of my nearly depleted energy supply, and cost me dearly. Anger swelled up. Kelsie had recently lost bladder control. "You are so much work!" I told her, "And now you want pets too."

As I stared at her I couldn't help but soften. "All right, if this is the last thing I am able to do today, I give you what little energy I have." As I buried my fingers in the soft, curly hair of her back, time stood still. She turned, and our eyes locked in embrace. Without warning I became her and she became me. I *knew* her more intimately than myself. For that moment in eternal time, I understood her and knew she had goals in life just as I did.

Then it was back to my aching muscles, and I inched my way back to my bed. However, that night I dreamed I was being loved unconditionally. The feeling was the same as between Kelsie and me, only God

was loving the scared and helpless parts of me as if they were treasure.

Before, I thought of love as the strong desire to share your life with someone. Although my love had a caring quality, it also was possessive. I expected reciprocity and attention. But now, as I realized my beloved dog had run off, my first thoughts were, "Go for your goals, Kelsie. Live your life to its fullest!" It was a new kind of love.

I called friends and shelters trying to find my companion. When we were still unable to locate her the next day, I still could not make myself worry. Later that afternoon, I received a phone call. Some cheerleaders were preparing to practice next to the high school football field. They noticed a white patch in the middle of the field and went to remove it. There, curled into a little ball, *was a dog*. They *presumed* it was dead since it didn't move when they touched it. But when they shifted the collar to look at the tags, it opened its soft brown eyes.

A friend drove me to the high school, a few miles away. I wasn't strong enough to walk to the field, so I sat in the car and watched several girls huddling around a white mass. My friend knew Kelsie well, and I sighed with relief when Kelsie got up and limped along beside him.

Since she was nearly blind, Kelsie didn't recognize me until she came really close. Then she sprang into the air. She leaped and jumped. In the car, she bounded into my lap and couldn't stop licking my face. She had braved the wild, and come home for her last remaining days of life.

For a couple weeks after she died, every once in awhile I'd feel a loving energy in the room, and I knew Kelsie was checking up on

Encounters with Jesus

Joyce B. Adams

When I am alone, sometimes a Presence, like a second breath, has animated the space around me. As I work or walk alone, my concentration yields. I look up to feel the divine breath, intensely concentrated yet unseen and unheard. It is too alive, warm, vibrant to be abstract Spirit. The eternal "I am" has taken individual form. Many speak of meeting Jesus in a mountaintop experience or deep crisis. In truth, I do not base my witness on a particular moment of glory or relief. I experience the fullness of Jesus' presence not in a vision or emotion, but in the unique closeness of the encounter. The Presence is inseparable from what I identify as Self.

Joyce B. Adams is a member of Bloomington Meeting, Indiana. She has a concern for the relationship between spirituality and creativity, contemplation and writing. (From May 2006 WCTS, Jesus.)

me. She seemed so happy and ready for her next adventure. It was easy to let her go. In some mysterious way, I knew none of us ever really part.

Linda Theresa gives thanks to the editors, staff, readers, contributors and authors of WCTS. Reading and writing for WCTS is a joy. (From August 2005 WCTS, Seeing.)

My Golden Pond

Patricia Reitemeyer

I was teaching in Massachusetts, keeping house, single, caring for my children alone, and working on my dissertation. I was lonely, greatly overworked, and had become very depressed. My responsibilities were overwhelming, life was simply terrible, and I was frightened of both the present and the future.

It was a hot day, and a colleague suggested taking off and going swimming. I knew of a nice pond not far away in the Blue Hills, but I hadn't been there for several years so couldn't vouch it was still usable. Nevertheless she got me to agree. I gathered some things and a towel, and we drove out to the pond. However, those several years had changed the area. The pond was now a lively gathering place for the Hispanic and Black communities, complete with loud music. We were disappointed and I was about to turn back.

But my friend was determined to persevere, so we spread out our towels on the beach. I went in the water, although with some distaste for its murky condition. To avoid the crowd I went out beyond the ropes to where it was so deep I could do a strong swim. I swam awhile and it felt good. As I started to wade back toward the beach, a young black boy stood up in the water a few feet be-

fore me, and laughing, yelled, "Hey, lady!" and threw a beach ball toward me. I was going to ignore him and the ball, when for some reason I reached out and caught it instead.

As soon as I did, the water began to shine and mysteriously turn gold—a deep, beautiful gold. Immediately my analyzing brain reported that the gold was a reflection of oil on the water's surface. Surely.

I was in no mood to play, but I did throw the ball back to the boy. As it went through the air, it shone with surprising golden outlines. The boy caught it and laughed—and as he did, his dark brown skin began to glow golden. He looked stunningly beautiful. I was overwhelmed and stood

I knew that he and all the other golden people on the golden beach were my people, and I was theirs. No separation of race or culture. We were all, every one, united in an enveloping, ethereal, golden glow.

paralyzed in the water for a moment. Then I turned, much puzzled, and looked around to the other people, to the beach, the shore, the trees beyond, and all, all of it, was a beautiful glowing gold, the whole landscape, even every leaf. A soft, soft gold. I held my breath, transfixed, as I stood in the water. I could hardly believe my eyes. It was beautiful beyond description.

Then the boy threw the ball at me again, and as I looked at him, all golden, I saw him for what he was: a strong, joyful, beautiful, shining young spirit. I picked the ball out of the water and threw it back to him. Then in some unfathomable way I knew that he and all the other golden

people on the golden beach were my people, and I was theirs. No separation of race or culture. We were all, every one, united in an enveloping, ethereal, golden glow.

After a moment of trying vainly to understand, and then quickly seeing that I couldn't, I began walking slowly into the glow. I felt transformed. But as I approached the shore the golden glow retreated before me and began to fade. I tried to hold onto it, but couldn't. By the time I got back to our place on the beach and my friend, it had disappeared. I sat down on my towel in a daze, and she looked at me, puzzled, and asked what had happened. I couldn't tell her, couldn't find words. How explain to her that I had seen the world and all of us within it as it really is: somehow gloriously enfolded together in gold! I couldn't talk about it. I just knew I'd seen something from another reality. I knew I had been graced with a vision.

After a few minutes, for no logical reason, I saw that my miserable life was not only actually okay but in reality was very, very good. The heavy depression that had plagued me for months was gone! I felt protected, reassured, even loved.

The depression came back a little as the days wore on, but I held on to the fact that the reality we live in isn't limited by our three-dimensional world, that there is another dimension entirely that interpenetrates, in which all is well, all is golden, all people are connected and glow with the Spirit within. I had literally seen it.

Patricia Reitemeyer is a member of Bloomington Friends Meeting, Indiana. She has studied metaphysics for over 40 years, and writes, "There is so much more to consciousness than we can know, or even imagine...but I keep trying." (From May 2007 WCTS, Unseen Hands.)

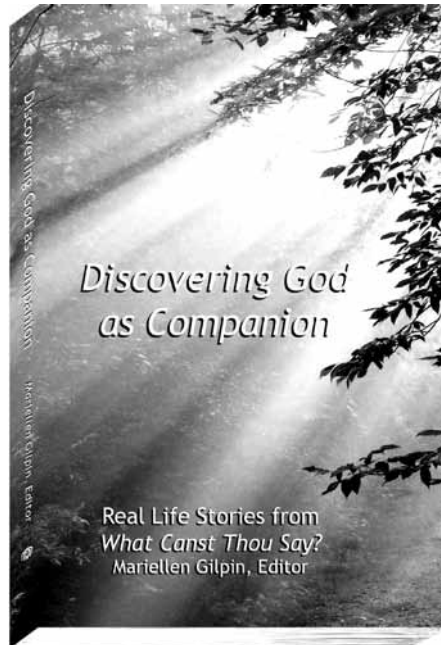
Discovering God as Companion:

Real Life Stories from What Canst Thou Say?

Mariellen Gilpin, Editor

Sixty-five *WCTS?* authors share their stories of spiritual openings and of God's grace in their lives. These stories tell of finding Divine presence and guidance in situations as ordinary as brushing teeth, as awe inspiring as a desert sunset, or as frightening as critical illness or sexual abuse. Share the joy of discovery with these authors, all of them ordinary people who have had extraordinary experiences. To read these stories is to see a world of wondrous possibility.

The authors are: Kate Ahmadi, Stephen L. Angell, James Baker, Diane Barounis, Ray Bentman, David Blair, Heidi Blocher, Carmen Bruce, Marlou Carlson, Carol Cober, Elspeth Colwell, Jennifer Elam, Sabrina Sigal Falls, Jennifer Faulkner, Alvin Joaquín Figueroa, Jennifer Frick, Mariellen Gilpin, Kathryn Gordon, Kat Griffith, Steven Gross, Hazel Jonjak, Lauren Leach, Linda Lee, Connie Lezenby, Alison Lohans, Judy Lumb, Dorothy Mack, Keith Maddock, Marcelle Martin, Marti Matthews, Patricia McBee, Elizabeth Meyer, Dimitri Mihalas, Jay Mittenthal, Terri Mittenthal, Peg Morton, Dorothy Neumann, Christine O'Brien, Amy Perry, Maurine Pyle, Allison Randall, Mike Resman, Jean Roberts, Dalton Roberts, Carol Roth, Scott Russell Sanders, Lynda Schaller, Brad Sheeks, William R. Stimson, Wayne Swanger, Bill Taber, Kathy Tapp, Ken Tapp, Linda Theresa, Carolyn Smith Treadway, Carolyn Wilbur Treadway, Rita Varley, Mary Waddington, Theodora E. Waring, Demaris Wehr, Judith Weir, Nancy Whitt.



What do Friends Say about Discovering God as Companion?

"In a context in which an intimate interactive relationship with God is not always highly valued, understood, or actively nurtured, and whose importance as the root of social action is sometimes overlooked, this book witnesses to the action of God in the lives of Friends today, and their response to it. Mysticism at work."

—Frances Taber, Ohio

"The stories range all over the human condition and encompass such a broad variety of people's experience of God that when one needs to read the words of another human being wrestling with an experience similar to one's own—it is possible to find it among the many stories. All of us have so much of the world in our lives, dragging us away from faith, that this kind of book is what we need."

—Rita Varley,
Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Library

"I feel humbled and honored to have my piece included among all the other articles in this anthology. *What Canst Thou Say?* consistently offers readers stimulating, intelligent and spiritually nourishing works. I have deep appreciation for all the writers, for their willingness to allow us to reflect and learn from their experiences."

—Carol Roth, New Jersey

"*What Canst Thou Say?* is led by the Holy Spirit."

—Priscilla Makhino, Kenya

"*Discovering God as Companion* is a fine accomplishment after a decade of devotion."

—Carmen Bruce, Pennsylvania

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Everlasting Love

Carmen Bruce

*There is a fallen tree
which, if one passed by too quickly,
one would not see.
She has fallen into the Arms of Another,
her Holy Other,
and there she longs to be...
throughout Eternity.
amen*



Fulfillment

Joyce Povolny

*In deep fulfillment of my hope and dream
I have seen and probed with open eye
Beyond this massive, man-made world
Where our thought-forms lie
To the shimmering filament of light
In which we all are cast
And have our being
As the one Holy Family of Innocence
Never begun and never to die.*

Joyce Povolny is a member of Appleton Meeting, Wisconsin. "That there is that of God in everyone and the Christ within teaches you himself, without need of clergy or church, perfectly fits my soul." (From August 2005 WCTS, Seeing.)

Do you resonate with what you see here?

Do you have stories to tell?

Would you like to join us?

Definitely!

Then here is how to do it:

1) Fill out and mail the Subscription Form to the right to subscribe to *What Canst Thou Say*?

2) Tell Us Your Stories! Write for *What Canst Thou Say*. Author Information is in the left column on page 2 to help you get started.

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

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Please write for *What Canst Thou Say?*

(See instructions for authors on page 7)



May 2020

Gratitude

Guest Editor:

Marcia Nelson with Judy Lumb

The German mystic Meister Eckhart said: "If the only prayer you say in your life is 'thank you,' that would be enough."

What are you thankful for? Has gratitude made a difference in your experience? Are there times when gratitude is a challenge for you? Have you experienced any situations that have been transformed by gratitude? Do you have any spiritual practices involving gratitude?

Deadline: February 15, 2020

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

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