

Day One

Introduction

I woke up this morning with my mind stayed on Freedom

Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelujah!

I'm marching and talking with my mind stayed on Freedom

Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelujah!

Ain't nothing wrong with keepin' my/your/our mind stayed on Freedom

Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelujah!

I'm singing and prayin' with my mind stayed on Freedom

Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelujah!

Good Morning, and Welcome again, Friends, to Friends General Conference Gathering, 2020. My name is Carl Magruder. First off, we've got a little bit of housekeeping to do. FGC is recording this, so if you don't want to appear on the FGC YouTube channel for all posterity, you should turn off your camera. —Turn off Camera, then on again— I was just demonstrating. Second, if you want to send me an email with sincere questions or helpful comments, or in response to a request or prompt, the email is: ecomunications@fgcquaker.org That address will be in the chat. Please put "Biblio" in the subject line. As you may have noticed, it is possible that some singing will occur during the Bible Half Hours this week, for which I apologize in advance. You are encouraged to sing along while on mute, but simultaneous singing on Zoom doesn't work because of the delay, so stay muted. This means no-one can hear you, so sing loud!

So, again, my name is Carl Magruder. My habit is to use he-him-his'n pronouns, but I am open to continuing revelation around that. I am a cradle Quaker, and a member at Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting, which meets in Berkeley, CA with membership covering Ohlone and Miwok tribal lands. I currently live in north San Diego County, on the tribal lands of the Luiseno people. I grew up in Pacific Yearly Meeting, which is a brand new affiliate with FGC! The overnight accomplishment 70 years in the making! You all are on mute, but can I get an "Amen"? Amen! Pacific Yearly Meeting covers the areas of California, Mexico, Guatemala, and Hawaii, where the original groups of Native Americans and Native Hawaiians are too numerous to mention. I have lived for the last five years in northern California on the traditional land of the Yurok, Karuk, Hupa, Wiyot, Chilula, and Tolowa people up around Humboldt Bay, where I work as a hospice and palliative care chaplain, caring for people with life threatening illness, some of whom are completing their life journey. It has been a privilege to provide

spiritual accompaniment for Native people in my capacity as a health care chaplain, to visit their homes, to eat traditional foods of salmon, smoked eel, venison, and acorn mush; to be invited to camp out on the river and participate in traditional dances and ceremonies, to hear the death songs and preach the funerals of people I have loved and miss. It is my joy to report that indigenous medicine around the world is rising, rising, rising! These are the keepers of salvific wisdom for the healing of our world. Let us give a deep inward bow of respect.

——Pause——

Thank you, Friends. It's good to be here, and to see your tiny, shining faces. What a long, strange year it's been, and it ain't over yet! We've still got an election to get through!

When FGC's Worship Committee approached me about the Bible Half Hours, we were prayerfully considering an in person gathering, we'd never heard of a little old virus bug epidemiologists were calling SARS II, now COVID-19, and there was only as much civil unrest in this country as one would expect given social conditions, threats to the biosphere, and the—um— unique leadership style of the Occupant at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

I woke up the morning after one of my anchor committee meetings with two reverent words in my mind: “Trickster Jesus!” With this came a sense that the Bible Half Hours had indeed been laid on me. I settled into acceptance of that, but then fate played a cruel Trick on me—on all of us. First the pandemic hit, then FGC went virtual, then we discovered the incredible racial disparities in access to care and in COVID deaths, and then people caught fire metaphorically and cities caught fire literally in response to the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, Oscar Grant, Eric Garner, Philando Castille, Samuel Dubose, Sandra Bland, Walter Scott, Clifford Glover, Claude Reese, Yvonne Smallwood, Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell, Jordan Davis, Jonathan Ferrell, Aiyana Jones, Mike Brown, Freddie Gray, Corey Jones, Tatiana Jefferson, Rayshard Brooks, Botham Jean, Martin Luther King, Jr. Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, Emmett Till, on back to the year 1619.

——Pause——

We find ourselves in a time of reckoning, Friends, standing on the verge of chaos, facing a radical discontinuity in the course of human events and the life of the planet. Will we find deeper faith in this time of the Great Unravelling?

With all that was going on, and the way folks have been feeling, it began to look like a playful Trickster approach wasn't the right leading any more. But the Trickster is very serious, as we shall see, and even given to lamentation.

So, here we are at FGC, not as we expected to be, and perhaps not as we would wish to be, but I am inviting you to have a spirit of Adventure. Early Friends met in cow sheds, open fields, peoples' homes, and in jails. Someday, and God is willing, Friends will meet floating in zero gravity on the tenth Gaia Space Station as they wait to board the starship Woodhouse

voyaging to planet Simplicity IV, with her six moons: Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Sustainability. This week, we are meeting in virtual space, which has made our Gathering more accessible, more affordable, and still pretty well attended. Virtual FGC is terra incognita, new territory. There WILL be glitches—which are really just a call to prayer in disguise—and, of course, the aforementioned deficit of hugs in a year when a Friend could really use a hug!

If you would, please join me in prayer. “Spirit of Love and Light, we offer thanks for the opportunity to come together in this virtual meetinghouse for our annual Gathering, to love one another in that which is eternal, to open our hearts to the suffering in our world, and our minds to receive new understanding. Ours is a time of travail, Great Mother, when there is a sickness across the world, and when America’s original sins of racism, genocide, patriarchy, white supremacy, greed and the rapacious exploitation of the biosphere—call out for healing. Oh, Love, our hearts are burdened with the deaths of those we have known and loved, and the deaths of those neighbors we did not know, but are charged with loving as ourselves. Though we have been encouraged to be unafraid, we ARE fearful, Oh Love. Encourage us. Help us to come together as the Beloved Community, to lift one another up with a loving hand, to grieve our losses, including the loss of our delusions and our vain attempts at security and control. Help us to turn toward the nurturing Dark where new possibilities gestate and grow—new life, the Seed, the chrysalis that cocoons the developing wings of a supernatural hope containing the power to bring us alive in the spirit. May future generations look back on this Earthtime as a turning point in the evolution of human consciousness toward peace and justice and Harmony With Creation. May we here gathered be emboldened to serve our part with the kind of fearless Love that Jesus showed us. Amen and Hallelujah!”

Now, traditionally Bible study starts with a text, but since we are putting first things first, we will need to study the study of the Bible, all right? Also, I will make the case for Jesus as Trickster. It is my hope that by considering Trickster Jesus, you will find that you can get yourself into the Gospel texts in a new way, and discover something that you haven’t encountered before, or that you encounter anew.

I am not a cultural anthropologist, and I am wary of cultural appropriation, so I apologize in advance for any clumsiness or missing the mark with regard to cultures and beliefs not my own.

Now, you could be forgiven for not seeing Jesus as a Trickster, though there are lots of clues in the Synoptic Gospels. Synoptic is actually a Trickster Term meaning “seen together” as Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are all reporting on the time of the ministry of Jesus Christ from shared sources. John, the favorite of early Friends is a bit different, written later—about 75 years after the death of Jesus. Just as you would expect, they all tell it a little differently, with different

audiences, styles and agendas, written over the spread of 40 years, Mark, the earliest, written as we have it about 30 years after Jesus died.

First off, Jesus has a Tricky beginning—as tradition has it, born of a virgin. When he gets older, his first Trick—that is, Miracle, is to turn water into wine so that the wedding party at Cana can go on. If you've ever been to a party thrown by 20-Somethings, you know how quickly that place empties out as soon as someone declares, "We're out of beer!"

Tricksters are peripatetic, traveling here there and everywhere. Coyote Trickster stories often start with, "As Coyote was going along..." The Greek trickster Hermes becomes the Roman god Mercury, depicted with wings on his feet, he travels from Olympus to Hades and all around the world. Jesus covers Palestine, mostly on foot, occasionally riding a donkey into town. Tricksters travel between the realms of Life and Death, as well as the godly realm, earth, and underworld, as Jesus does.

Jesus' speech is Tricky—Let those with ears, hear! He speaks in riddles, and parables of paradoxical parables, or "stories." Trickster, in many traditions either invents language, steals language from the heavenly realm, transforms language, or otherwise has power over language, as Jesus clearly does. He is, after all, the Word (Logos) made flesh, according to John. It is Trickster—Hermes, Coyote, or Loki—who invents lying, which we sometimes call storytelling. Often, the stories are even True. Let those with ears hear!

Tricksters live in a world of predator and prey. Sometimes the Trickster is hunting, as Coyote after Duck, and sometimes the Trickster is the hunted as B'rer Rabbit is by B'rer Fox. Jesus is hunting (or fishing, rather) for the faithful, those who hunger and thirst after Living Water. And, of course, he is hunted by the principalities and powers of his time, until he is arrested and the officers of Rome kneel on his neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds, or hang him from a tree, or nail him to a cross. At any rate, he is an ethnic, religious, and racial minority activist who is persecuted and then lynched in a state-sanctioned murder because he wouldn't deny the power of Love. —Breath—

Now, one skill of the pursuer is the art of reading the signs of who has been by. Last week, walking on a dirt path in the coastal desert our suburban neighborhood was built on, my sweetheart, Mica, warned me, "Don't step in that dog mess!" I looked and said, "That's no dog... See how it is full of hair? Tapered at the end? and right in the middle of the trail? That's Coyote, saying hello, maybe letting me know I'm are on the right track with Trickster Jesus!"

In a sense, Coyote was writing us a letter. The animal leaving tracks is a writer, and the tracker, the one interpreting them, is a reader, hoping to catch the writer's meaning—hoping to catch the writer!

In Biblical scholarship, this attempt to read the writer's tracks is called hermeneutics. The meaning dances around a bit, which is why I like to call it the Hermeneut Scoot Boogie.

Definition: Hermeneutics is the English form of the Greek word *hermeneus*, or hermeneut in English, an interpreter or expounder. The Google dictionary tells us that hermeneutics is “the branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation, especially of the Bible or literary texts.” A hermeneutic is a “method or theory of interpretation.” Plato thought of a poet as a hermeneus, an interpreter of the gods, carrying messages from the heavenly realm to earth. The hermeneus was metaphorically understood as a vessel into which murky water was poured, filtered, and then tapped out as clear refreshment. But we postmoderns know that the water always tastes of the pipes. We assume that when John G. Neihart interpreted Black Elk for his book, Black Elk Speaks, he probably ingested pure wisdom from Black Elk, and gave it forth muddy!

In proper, formal, by-the-book Biblical scholarship, hermeneutics is concerned with understanding the context of the text, the mind of the writer, the culture, language, archeology, etc., which lets us understand the text in its original form and meaning. This is called exegesis—nothing to do with that first century Jewish furniture maker we know as Jesus. His mother, Miryam, called him Yeshua anyway, as she laid him in the manger.

Hermeneutics are used for all kinds of texts, not just Scripture. Let’s consider Black Elk for a moment. His biography, claiming to be his voice—Black Elk Speaks—is written by a European-American in English which Black Elk spoke only a little. What hermeneutic would tell us what Black Elk really said in Lokota, and what it meant to him? How was it formed by his cultural location? His social location (as a leader), as a man, as a *heyoka*, which is a kind of sacred clown or sacred fool who embodies Trickster energy? What about Black Elk’s historical context, bridging the time of relative freedom for the Oglala Lakota people to their victory at the Little Big Horn and defeat at Wounded Knee, to touring with Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Travesty in Europe, and returning home to Pine Ridge? He and all his family were baptized Roman Catholic, but late in life he said that he only really believed in the “pipe religion” of his forebears. Neihardt took a transcript of a translation, which he then wrote up, with hopes of commercial success, and we know money is the root of much evil. So, what hermeneutics would give us a clear and respectful picture of Black Elk, his beliefs, his message to us? It’s a tall order. He lived until 1950, so you can see how complicated Biblical hermeneutics that reach back 2-4 millennia are going to be.

It is a quixotic effort—worthwhile, rewarding, and doomed to error, if not absolute failure, and, that matters because hermeneutical errors are used to justify horrific moral failures. The subjugation of women, the enslavement of Africans as the “Tribes of Ham,” the Doctrine of Discovery which said that indigenous lands were there for the taking by Europeans, neo-liberal economics, child abuse, homophobia, transphobia, mandatory sentencing, nationalism, subduing the Earth, and every other kind of oppression in our history has been exegeted from the Holy

Bible through the hermeneutic of hierarchical power over, and the idolatry of a class of “chosen ones.” The Bible is the foundational text of so-called Western Civilization for good AND lots of ill. We ignore it at our peril.

In the postmodern era, we have (finally!) stopped trying to pretend that we can get a pure picture, and so we want to know what the hermeneutic of a given hermeneut—a person who does the Hermeneut Scoot Boogie—, IS, hoping that by understanding the nature of the distortion of the funhouse mirror they are viewing the text through, we will be able to compensate for their hermeneutic (with our own fun house mirror hermeneutic) to get a truer picture of the author’s intent. Lord have mercy!

Should we abandon the effort all together? Perhaps at this point I should tell you that the word “hermeneutics” is named for the Greek deity Hermes. Hermes is a Trickster, a thief, a messenger, and a honey-tongued deceiver. Oh, Trickster is leaving paw prints all up in here today!

In the name of liberation, some womanist, feminist, eco-feminist, *mujerista*, Black, Latinx, queer and other minority scholars have applied their own hermeneutics to Biblical texts. Post modernist feminist theologian Danna Nolan Fewell states: “Like other ideological criticisms...and unlike traditional forms of analysis, feminist criticism makes no pretense to objectivity; it challenges the notion of universals; it is more interested in relevance than in so-called absolute truth.”

Rather than exegete the text—to pull its original meaning out of it, she is suggesting we mindfully eisegete the text—read into it that which has liberating power for us. This is the style of Bible Study that Friend Stephen Matchett, who died this year, brought into wider practice among Friends, healing injuries and alienation many Friends have from early encounters with Scripture. Thank you and Godspeed, Friend Matchett.

Now, before you get all excited about an entirely eisegetic, “anything goes” hermeneutic, let me say that Doctor Fewell could probably do a fair job of recreating the Hebrew Bible out of her head in the original Hebrew, if it were lost. So could Jesus. Stephen Matchett could quote chapter and verse. George Fox said that the Truth was more Holy than the Book, but you could reconstruct much of the Bible from his journals and letters. Before we go freestyle, we should get into the Scripture pool, swim in those waters, wrestle with the text, and then humbly discover the limits of a supposedly “objective” approach to understanding them.

It is important to exegete the text to the extent we are able. In fact, the Bible exegetes its own text. We will dive into the Parable of the Sower, where Jesus exegetes Jesus—oh yes—explaining his own parable. Friend Rachel Findley, a member of my anchor committee, will read the text from the Book of Luke, Chapter 8, Verses 4-15 from the New Revised Standard Version. (Did I mention that all the chapter and verse enumeration we use was added by a French printer

in the 16th Century?) Anyway, I will then offer some queries, which will be posted in the chat with the Scripture, and you will be Zoomed away into dyads, where you will respond to the queries for five minutes—split the time evenly please. Then you'll be whisked back to the larger group for closing worship.

The Parable of the Sower Luke 8:4-15

The Parable of the Sower, Gospel of Luke 8:4-15, NRSV

4 When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: **5** “A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. **6** Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. **7** Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. **8** Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.” As he said this, he called out, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

9 Then his disciples asked him what this parable meant. **10** He said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets[b] of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak[c] in parables, so that ‘looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand.’

11 “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. **12** The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. **13** The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. **14** As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. **15** But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.

Queries: Which of the sower's seeds speaks to your condition? Where have you fallen, or where has the Word fallen in you? Are there ways that you can imagine becoming more fertile ground for Spirit to grow? Do you have seeds of the soul that you are sowing, or wish to sow?

We are going to break you out into dyads now, for — minutes, so you can share your responses. You will automatically be returned to the circle for closing worship.

Day Two

“Repentance”

*Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,
Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and Delight
When true simplicity is gain'd,
To bow and to bend we will not be asham'd,
To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning we come round right.*

Good Morning, Friends. Carl Magruder here in sunny southern California. I did my chaplaincy training—Compassion Boot Camp—at Summit Hospital up in Oakland. When I went to the room of an African-American patient in the hospital, no matter their age, often the response of this sick or injured person to my perhaps impertinent inquiry, “How are you?” was, “I’m blessed.” Several of the staff chaplains there are Black, and the Reverend Stevie Stennis would walk into a patient room with, “Tell me, what’s good?” Neuroscience confirms that colloquial habits of positivity and gratitude like these among African-Americans can actually help people to feel better, and even speed their healing! Reinforcing positive neural pathways helps us to turn and to turn, to transform our minds, our thought patterns, even to help us recover from trauma. So take a moment to answer the question for yourself, “What’s good?” In what ways do you feel blessed this morning?

—Pause—

For me, it’s such a blessing to be here, and it’s been a blessing—a hard blessing—to be prepared by Spirit to bring these Bible Half Hours to FGC in this year of scales falling from our eyes. Do you know the Greek word Ah-po-KAH-lup-sees? It comes to us as apocalypse, and in common usage it means disaster, even TEOTWAWKI—an acronym for The End of The World As We Know It. Armageddon. Cities on fire. Oh, wait a minute...

Well, the original Greek word simply means “to uncover.” Poetically, to lift the veil. This is a year of ah-po-KAH-lup-sees: We see clearly that racism and racial disparities in our world endure, and in some places are getting worse. With regard to leadership, we see clearly that the Emperor has no clothes, and it ain’t pretty. With regard to our house of cards economy, initially built on the greatest land theft in modern history and the labor of African slaves, we are indicted by the prophet Greta Thunberg, who, in the style of Joan of Arc, reproached the

principalities and powers at the UN Climate Action Summit, crying in that wilderness, “How dare you? People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are at the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is the money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you?” We spend half our national budget on the military, which is almost entirely useless in the face of the crises we actually face—economic collapse, racism, pandemic, and climate disruption. And we, Friends, are enmeshed in these systems. May God have mercy for us all.

Well, since we touched on Apocalypse and we’re all still here, what about Repentance?

All right, by a showing of hands, who cringes at the Biblical command to Repent?

Well, it seems I’m in good company. Let’s see if our Mystical Hermeneutic of the Spirit of Trickster Jesus can help us spring that trap without getting caught by it. You know that some deer hunters don’t like Coyotes. They think that that *canis latrans*—the singing dog—eats all the deer. Coyote predation keeps deer herd strong, but roads, loss of wildlife, and cars are what kill deer. Sometimes these hunters will put a rabbit or other carcass out, laced with strychnine, but the coyote’s track comes up and then away—you can’t trick a Trickster. Sometimes the anti-coyote folks set out deadly spring-loaded traps. Somehow coyote is able to spring the trap without getting caught or even injured. Some believe that it is mama coyotes who do this, to protect their young. Once its sprung, she squats and leaves a note for her would-be assassin. So, let’s spring some traps today, and render them harmless to us, and those we care for.

Tradition holds that the start of the ministry of Jesus the Nazarene 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 temptation by Satan. It was after he’d heard that the Baptizer had been arrested. Then Jesus took up John’s cry: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” That’s Matthew 4:17.

Now, I am calling on the Trickster spirit of Bre’r 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” in the text 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, 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 shall I know even as also I am known.”

Now, three hundred years after his crucifixion, Trickster Jesus and those who followed his Way, were still being hunted and persecuted on all sides, so he took his story and his teachings and his mystical connection with the Oneness, and he HID IT. He hid it in the most unlikely place he could find—right in the middle of the Roman Empire! Like a foxtail caught in a, well fox’s tale, the Seed of Truth was carried far and wide. He tucked it into the Nicene Creed,

where it peeks out in the subversive placement of God and Jesus above the Emperor. Now, as there is with most Trickster tricks, there was a high price to pay for this subterfuge, in the distortions that came from taking a religion of the oppressed, and making it a religion of Empire. The conversion of Constantine is the point where many anabaptist faiths believe Christianity went off the rails. It's that same sense that caused William Penn to name his 1696 book, "Primitive Christianity Revived." But even though it was hidden in the largest, richest institution in the Western world, with hireling priests, ornate churches, the buying of indulgences, the Inquisition, etc., etc., there have always been those who found the true seed in the imperfect vessel that conveyed it, and they picked it out of its accretions and nurtured the seed and grew it, and harvested it, and passed it on, as St. Francis did. Francis was a mystic—he experienced the Oneness of the cosmos directly.

One cost that comes with the creedal codification of The Way is the oversimplified notion that Repentance is a one shot deal, that it is mostly concerned with your transgressions of "The Rules," and that when you have effected Repentance by accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, you are saved from your sin once and for all.

Probably ought to hit that "sin" thing real quick while we are here. The Hebrew word is *chata*, (*cha-TA*), from archery, and it means to miss the mark or stray off the path. Well, when you miss your mark in archery, you go get your arrow and try again. Maybe Bre'r Rabbit got away this time. When you wander off the path, you find it again eventually. Or maybe the good shepherd finds you and brings you back. When you become ritually unclean, you bathe in the *mikvah*, the ritual bath. *Chata*, sin, is NOT an indelible mark. And that fiery pit of hell thing? The Hebrews picked that up from a Zoroastrian metaphor while they were slaves in Babylon—Persia. Prior to Babylon, the indigenous Hebrew land of the dead is *sheol*, and everyone went there regardless. That confusion has caused a lot of unnecessary suffering. Hell and damnation!

While we are called to prayer without ceasing, I believe that we are also called to repent without ceasing. Individually and as a body, we are called to repent without ceasing. —Pause —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—including our Third eye—in an indelible way to what was hidden. For mystics, that moment stems from the direct and personal encounter with the Divine. Let those with eyes to see, see. Like George Fox in his apocalypse on Pendle Hill, we repent, and turn toward God. But then the more we see and live, the more we see and live, until to turn and to turn becomes our delight, til by turning, turning we come round right. This is what it means to be Simple in the hymn of our religious cousins, the Shakers, "Simple Gifts." It's not about decluttering or wearing a collarless shirt; it's about a life entirely oriented around Godness. Thomas Kelly starts his book of revelation, A Testament of Devotion, with this assertion: "Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, passing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself." Hallelujah! All I really need to know I learned from reading Thomas R. Kelly.

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 were 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.

Three quick Repentance examples:

Number one: Some time after the crucifixion of Christ, there was a Jew, Saul, who was a Greek citizen and a rabid persecutor of the early Christian movement. He was at the killing of the Apostle Stephen. Yes, he was one of the night riders in his white robe with conical hood—that’s conical, though comical would also apply. They burned a cross on Stephen’s front lawn, and then dragged him out in his pajamas to the edge of town, “breathing threats and murder,” where Stephen was lynched while Saul held the horses. Sometime later, on the road to Damascus, Trickster Jesus smote Saul down and took his sight, demanding, “Why do you persecute me?” Saul fasted and was blind for three days, and received help from one who feared him, Ananias, who laid loving hands on Saul, and something like scales fell from his eyes and he repented to become Jesus’ Number 1 fan, the Apostle Paul. [Chapter and Verse Here]

Example 2: Only 368 years ago, an eccentric looking man with a big nose and shaggy, shaggy locks, sporting leather pants, parked his Harley chopper in front of an English country church and went in. In those days, just as in the synagogues of Jesus’ time, it was possible for a visitor to preach to the assembly, as long as they didn’t blaspheme, of course. This character, bearing the wily Trickster name of “Fox,” inquired: “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?” He was asking if people had repented, turned and surrendered to the Inward Christ. A woman of some social standing heard this call, and later wrote, “this opened me so, that it cut me to the heart, and then I saw clearly we were all wrong. So I sat down in my pew again and cried bitterly: and I cried in my spirit to the Lord, ‘We are all thieves; we have taken the Scripture in words, and know nothing of them in ourselves.’ Margaret Fell then turned to walk in the Light of this apocalypse, this uncovering. She later was widowed, and married that itinerant biker, George Fox.

Example 3: More recently, all over Quakerdom 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 fruits of the Spirit.

But the racial justice work is hardly complete. Our piecemeal, awkward, politically correct and legalistic approaches to healing racism are merely the scaffolding we need to raise this holy ghost building of perfect Love. Now we see in the glass darkly, but someday we will live effortlessly and joyously in harmony as God intended. Just as the laws of Moses, an eye for an eye, didn’t actually get the Israelites to shalom—the peace of God—they were a big improvement over, “If you put out my eye, I’m going to kill your whole family,” which was what had come before. Let us Repent! Let us Change! Our iterative racial repentance must continue, so that the goal of the FGC Institutional Assessment on Racism is to render itself obsolete. For

now, we need these efforts to help us to straighten up on our way to becoming “perfect, even as my heavenly father is perfect.” Wait—perfection is on Thursday.

We can be confident that we will grow closer to the Divine will if we have courage to stay the course. We can look back and see the distance we have come in some things. The nominating slate in my monthly meeting actually has more women than men in all areas of officers and committees, for instance. And we have come a long way in Pacific Yearly Meeting since my early teen years when we were discerning about same sex marriage, and I recall one sincere and loving Friend asking with real care and concern, “If homosexuality is an illness, should we encourage Friends to be unwell?” I believe that Friends have come a long way on LGB—lesbian, gay, and bisexual—in four decades, but some of us really need to—say it with me—“Repent!” and transform our minds with regard to T—trans and gender non-conforming folks. Now Tricksters change their gender all the time—Loki becomes pregnant in female form, and gives birth. Of course, it’s a pretty big metanoia to throw out what we thought we knew about a binary, born-with-it, anatomically determined notion of gender, but let’s all get with the pronouns, because these Friends are courageous pioneers discovering new territories which have salvific potential to liberate US ALL from the gender binary. Oh, Freedom! Also, in all seriousness, trans people, and especially trans people of color, suffer more hate crime than any other group. The wages of my sin is their death, and so I gladly repent.

Repentance is a two parter. First, one must turn away from the old ways, and then engage the new. To turn and to turn will be our delight. Jesus’ new wine will burst old wineskins; NEW wineskins are needed. Early Friends knew that the Truth that had discovered them would not fit into conventional and comfortable religious forms of an elite priesthood, ornate steeplehouses, performative rites, an absentee God, creeds, tithes, etc. Not knowing what they SHOULD do, they apophatically discarded everything that was superfluous to the in-dwelling experience of God, and turned themselves toward that. I gotta say, though, I think getting rid of the music was a bridge too far...

It’s the rest of the statement in Matthew that gives us a clue about the turning toward: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Or the kingdom of heaven is among you, or is near, or is arriving, has drawn near... You get the picture. The word in Greek is *eggizo*, (*eng-id'-zo*) which most literally means “has drawn close,” according to Strong’s Concordance. Schlosser’s notation adds, that *eggizo* ‘expresses “extreme closeness, immediate imminence – even a presence (‘It is here’) because the moment of this coming happened (i.e. at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry).’” Repent for the perfection of God is here?

We’ve heard it interpreted as a warning—Get your act together for God is coming, and if you don’t, you are going to get a smite down! It’s the threat that follows up the shaming and condemnation we have been taught to hear in “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

But that’s not how mystics perceive ultimate reality. It’s not how God-mind is. Jesus tried to rap it down to the Pharisees in Luke, 17:20-22. The Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming.

‘God’s kingdom’, replied Jesus, ‘isn’t the sort of thing you can watch for and see coming.

21 People won’t say “Look, here it is”, or “Look, over there!” No: God’s kingdom is within your grasp.’ Thomas Kelly tells us that the Hound of Heaven is ever baying at our heels!

Now we will get into this some more tomorrow, but George Fox had a radical hermeneutic—He writes, “I saw they could not know the spiritual meaning of Moses, the prophets, and John’s words, unless they had the Spirit and the light of Jesus; nor could they know the words of Christ and the apostles without His Spirit to guide them.” His is the Hermeneutic of Spirit, which interprets the text. It’s a direct contradiction to Martin Luther’s *sola scripture*—“scripture alone,” which was nonetheless liberative in its time because it suggested the people could come to God without the church, which Luther saw as corrupt.

Fox seems to be implying that all the Biblical writers were in the grip of the Holy Spirit while they were writing. Now, I don’t want to make a case for every writer of the Bible—at least 40 of them—having been in the spirit of God when they sat down to write. There are a lot of consolidating power agendas, and several cases of severe untreated Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in the Bible. I’m really earning my Blasphemer B branding this morning, like James Naylor! But the Mystical Hermeneutic of Trickster Jesus absolutely assumes that Jesus, who never wrote anything that we know of, WAS absolutely in an exquisite perfection of God-mind. I don’t have “evidence” for that—proof. I just posited it, when I started Seminary, because otherwise, why read about him? Since then, I find mounting evidence throughout the text, and everywhere! So, I’ve told you my mystical hermeneutic lens. It’s the Mystical Hermeneutic of Trickster Jesus. I’m offering the Bible Half Hours so we can explore it a bit together.

Now lots of deep, scholarly, and even quite progressive Biblical scholarship, Hauerwas, Barth, Cohn, Stringfellow, CS Lewis, some contemporary Quakers, holds with the idea that the man Jesus thought that the world was going to end real soon. In Matthew 16:28 Jesus tells the disciples, Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” His were chaotic times. The economy was changing, people were moving away from their friends and families, and of course Jews were living under an occupation. The mid seventeenth century was pretty apocalyptic for Early Friends too, with economic upheaval, various religious movements, politically it’s the king-it’s Cromwell—it’s the king again—even a mini-ice age! We too are standing on the cusp of a radical discontinuity in the structures of human societies. If you don’t think we’re teetering on the brink of A Great Turning now, well, it’s time to let the scales fall from our eyes. It’s the end of the world as we know it, just as it was for Christ, and for early Friends. You cannot step in the same river twice, because it’s always changing. It’s always the end of the world as we knew it—behold, virtual FGC!

But if Jesus was a deep mystic, not just dipping into that awareness from time to time, the way I do, but living full within it at all times, he knew that the realm of Heaven is always, in all times and places, amongst all peoples, and in all religions, all wisdom traditions—always right here, if we turn towards it. This belief is our spiritual inheritance from our Christian roots, our pearl of great price, Friends. “Turn to it! For the peace of divine love is right here!”

Now, I will pray us into closing worship with a musical prayer by Carin Anderson. If you have ministry from the Spirit for those gathered today, please unmute yourself and share it. If you need to leave at the hour, go in Grace. Some of us will worship until a quarter past, and all are welcome to join.

Guide my feet, as I walk

Guide my feet, guide my feet
Holy, holy
as I walk

hands
mouth
heart
feet

Day Three

Death

Well you know that...

Death come a knockin' on my mama's door

Death come a nockin' on my brother's door

Death come a knockin' on my preachers door, saying come on preacher are you ready to go. Well, They stooped right down, buckled up Their shoes, and moved on down to the Jordan Stream

Some day, Death will come a knocking on my front door, saying come on, Friend, are you ready to go? I will stoop right down, buckle up my shoes, and move on down to the jordan stream and I'll shout, Hallelujah! I've done my duty, got on my travelin' shoes...

—You got some traveling shoes?

Oh, you knew the hospice and palliative care chaplain was going to talk about the miracle of Death, right? Don't panic! Stay with me now! We gon' find some life in it. On Monday we talked about Trickster Jesus hermeneutics and the parable of the Sower. Yesterday's text was short—Expand your consciousness, for the realm of the divine is within you, AKA, Repent for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Today is Death, our nadir, and I'm pretty sure that tomorrow is Resurrection, and Friday is Gifts of the Spirit, but ministry is subject to change without advance notice, in my experience.

In these difficult times, I wanted to bring y'all a bright, cozy, warm fuzzy blanket series of Bible Half Hours, and I hope you can feel the love and care I have for all of you through this

magic light box. But chaplains are called to the practice of mindfully turning in toward the pain, hurt, anguish, sorrow, fear, regret, self-recrimination, loss of self-worth, sense of futility, loneliness, and broken heartedness, that tender human souls experience. Ours is not to turn away, but to accompany. I want to give a deep bow to all of you for hanging in here with me...and Trickster Jesus. I'm hoping to get out the warm fuzzy blanket cannon on Friday, so each of you can have one to take home, perhaps to use as a prayer shawl, or maybe for a picnic—but never as a wall hanging.

My biological grandmother was part of the Great Migration of Black folks from the deep south to the north. Her parents took her to the coal mining town of Du Quoin, Illinois. In the African-American community she came from, when a person was sick and close to their “Going Home,” time, their best suit of clothes—maybe the best clothes that they had ever owned, perhaps bought for the occasion of their death—was hung up in the room where they lay dying. Their good shoes were repaired if they needed it—a new heel put on, or fresh laces, and they were polished to a high shine, before they were set there on the floor underneath where the clothes were hanging. It was a source of great comfort for those who were dying, and those who loved them, to see these “Traveling Clothes,” all prepared, and to know that whatever indignity, poverty, hardship or oppression they had lived through, they were going to meet that dark skinned, dark haired, dark eyed liberator, “My Jesus!” washed and dressed, ready to take his hand and travel with a joyful shout of “Hallelujah!” out beyond sickness, toil, or danger in that land to which they'd go.

Do you know this Mystery? The mystery of the Great Healing? The mystery of Death as the Great Healing, the miracle that cures suffering? Some of us whose privilege it is to accompany people who are ending their lives call each other “Death Midwives,” tending with lovingkindness to the one whose body is laboring with transition so that its human soul can leave that body and cross the threshold of this world. It can be every bit as beautiful and holy as the birth of a baby, when a human soul comes the other way.

*“When you were born, you cried, and the world rejoiced
Live your life so that when you die, the world cries and you rejoice”*

Early Friends held death as a kind of apotheosis. You can hear the word “theo” in there, right, for God? For Friends, that Apotheosis was the culmination of a life lived turning (repenting) toward Spirit, drawing nearer, and when released from the body, finally being utterly absorbed into God-ness. It was a consummation devoutly to be wished.

That's the death of the body. It is the source of much of our existential angst. Due to my time of insecurity in foster care during my first year of life, I've spent most of my life in strong, mostly unconscious fear of death, willing, running, desiring, in an effort to escape that fear... Afraid to trust. Afraid to surrender. Being present to death and dying has helped me to release that fear to a great extent.

Early Friends would have been present to the mystery of death, tended their dying ones at home, like my African-American ancestors, like nearly everyone until relatively recently with the industrialization and professionalization of dying. Death was no stranger. They would have sat in worship with the dying one, perhaps recording any words they uttered, for Friends believed

that the wisdom of the dying came from a place very near Spirit. Quakers caught these words in numerous volumes called Piety Promoted: Being a Collection of the dying sayings of many of the people called Quakers with some memorials of their virtuous lives. Friends and Family would have washed and dressed the body of their loved one. They would have made or commissioned a burial shroud or coffin, and put their person into it. They would have dug the hole. Their own muscles and sinews would have lifted the deceased—surprisingly heavy, surprisingly light—and lowered them into the grave, then closed the grave up.

Yes, Death comes a-knockin' on everybody's door, without respect for persons. Often, when a child dies, somebody will say, "This shouldn't happen." But if you go and look in an old graveyard, you will see that it has always happened. If you sit with the old African American women who live in west Berkeley, which I did on Wednesday nights one winter at the Lifelong Medical Clinic there, you will find that the death of children of any age brings a hard, hard grief with it, but it is by no means a rare occurrence in many places in our world.

Chaplains talk about "dying well," always remembering that it is NOT OUR idea of a good death that matters, but that of the one who is dying—Do your medical advance directive, by the way, so we know what that is, in case you can't tell us, especially in the time of COVID, you might even want to update the one you have. Sorry for that Public Service Announcement. Now, back to our program:

I think it is that very freedom as death draws near that drew me to end of life care. So often, when someone accepts that their lung cancer has spread throughout their bones and the fifth-line chemotherapy their compulsive gambler oncologist has them on is only making them sicker than the cancer is, they discover a kind of Life-filled freedom. Their internal furniture of ways of seeing, enduring traumas, moral failings, estrangement from certain others, regret, notions of a wrathful God—so many things become unstuck, fluid, even ephemeral, blowing away on the breath—the Ruah—the pneuma, or spirit of this Freedom brought by imminent death. Other, healing things can enter in. Spiritual transformation can occur.

When I was discovering the Mystery of Death, Elaine Emily, who has served as my spiritual elder for twenty years, have me a present. My elder for this Bible Half Hour work, is Scott Bell, of Cheyna Ridge Friends Meeting in Fairbanks Alaska. Elders—don't leave home without one.

So Elaine gave me a pieta—that's like the statue of Mary holding the body of the crucified Christ. Only this one is a pieta of Santa Muerta, Saint Death, gently holding the body of a person who has died. It's from Mexico, and as you probably know, from the movie Coco, if nothing else, Mexican culture celebrates death and keeps it in the foreground. I keep the pieta on display, as a reminder, and a way of respecting Death, holding her sacredness near. I moved house recently, and when I opened the box of my desktop things, Santa Muerta was upside down. What did I find on the bottom? A smattering of seeds, as though left by a Sower who went out to sow, and the ancient symbol of Christ, the Greek letters Alpha and Omega. That's the Resurrection waiting in the wings.

[Cowboy hat] I appreciate Tim McGraw's song "Live Like You Were Dying" about the liberation that can come with a terminal diagnosis, but in my experience, people don't want to go sky diving or bull riding. His song comes closer in the chorus when he sings,

And I loved deeper
And I spoke sweeter
And I gave forgiveness I'd been denying"

"Someday I hope you get the chance
To live like you were dying"

This corny country song gives a clue about the meaning of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that is the first thing I want to talk with you about this morning, as briefly as possible, so as not to fall into the common error of thinking that it is Jesus' death, and not his life that matters. It's the invitation to live courageously, without fear. Today is a good day to die.

Ten years ago I was in a Presbyterian church to hear a trip report and see pictures from the pastor's recent sojourn to Haiti to do relief work after the big earthquake. Two things about that evening have stayed with me; One was a desire to provide spiritual care in the midst of the disasters that befall humankind. The unofficial term is "Disaster Chaplain" which you could read a few ways... This is my Red Cross hat, and my chaplain hat, so that when I am on the sight of a disaster, people know where they can find a listening ear and an open heart.

The other thing that stayed with me from that service was when the pastor said that we needed to recite the Apostle's Creed, but that people were invited to say aloud only the parts that they TRULY believed. [We'll put it on the screen.] In those days I was always being a Quaker heretic because I'd realized that I'd grown up in a particular religious ghetto—the RSoF neighborhood, and that I was remarkably ignorant of other religious practice, which was not going to help me serve as an interfaith chaplain. So, I picked up the little leaflet from the back of the pew in front of me and read this ancient credal declaration, saying only the parts I pretty much believed at that time:

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, ~~the Father Almighty,~~
~~the Creator of heaven and earth,~~
And in Jesus Christ, ~~His only Son, our Lord,~~
~~who was conceived of the Holy Spirit,~~
born of ~~the Virgin~~ Mary, —you best respect yo mama—
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
~~He descended into hell.~~
~~The third day He arose again from the dead.~~
~~He ascended into heaven~~
~~and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,~~
~~from whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.~~
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
~~the holy catholic church,~~ I didn't understand Jim Corbett's Goatwalking understanding of that
small 'c' then
~~the communion of saints,~~

the forgiveness of sins,
~~the resurrection of the body,~~
~~and life everlasting.~~

It floored me that of the whole creedal statement, all I could say I believed was God, the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, the person of Jesus and that he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. Besides all the stuff in the Apostle's Creed that I couldn't believe—rest my heart on—and we'll talk about the meaning of belief tomorrow—the Creed is written as a chronology of Jesus' life AND THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING BETWEEN “BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY AND SUFFERED UNDER PONTIAS PILATE. His entire terrestrial life had been redacted. My friend and younger-than-me elder, Valerie Nuttman and I love bacon cheeseburgers—not metaphorically. I am repenting of that in my fifth decade of life, BTW. If I gave Valerie two toasted halves of a hamburger bun with only some lettuce, tomato, mustard, catsup, mayonnaise—hold the pickles, and said, “bon appetite” she would give me her “do better” look. [Shiver] Where's the creedal beef? There's 110 words in the 'Postles Creed, They could have taken out the judging and put in at least one line ‘lived a simple life of radical Love, utterly dedicated to the practical and spiritual liberation of the oppressed.’ Is that irrelevant?

Weirdly, this macabre crucifixion, death, and burial was the most credible part of the Creed to me. I really believed that part. That he died. For us?

Jesus knew about crucifixion. Around the time of his birth, the historical accounts of the historian Josephus report that there was a Jewish revolt in response to the death of Herod, and when it was put down in the area around Galilee, two thousand Jews were crucified. There may be some rounding up in that number, but it would have been a story Jesus and all Jews knew. Crucifixion was a common Roman method of executing Jews, foreigners, soldiers, and various others, including women. It was their 'lectric chair, their lethal injection, their hanged by the neck until you are dead. It was a shaming, demeaning, dishonoring and excruciating way to die. It was the worst death available in first century Palestine. You will be happy to know that when Trickster Jesus converted Emperor Constantine to Christianity, the Emperor banned crucifixion throughout the Roman Empire.

[You, like me, may find the crucifix, where there's an emaciated, usually white Jesus nailed to the cross, macabre and hard to look at. It might interest you to know that the scholars Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker, in thier book Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of this World for Crucifixion and Empire, assert that while the symbol of the cross goes back to early days in the Christian movement, it was LESS common than the dove, the lamb, a fish, a ship, a lyre, the paired Greek symbols for alpha and Omega, the pelican—long story—, or a sheaf of wheat. The cross was usually in the background of frescoes, tying the heavens to earth, with the three rivers of paradise flowing down it, and a vibrant, androgynous person carrying a cute lamb striding in front of it—Jesus. The crucifix—the cross with Jesus on it, is only about 1,000 years old, first appearing in northern Europe where pagans (pagan means country folk, you know—Hicksites)—where pagans were converted to Christianity after a brutal war, at the point of the sword.]

The crucifixion matters to many people for many reasons, some who don't consider themselves Christians. Here's why the crucifixion matters to my soul: He knew, all along, what might happen to him. He knew all along. He started his ministry because his cousin and rabbi, John the Baptizer, had been arrested and murdered, though beheaded rather than crucified, which was quicker, at least, and is what sometimes happens to tall poppies when they draw attention. I wonder if Jesus was totally resigned to his death in the beginning, when he often hid, and told people not to say who he was, and disappeared, traveling to and fro as Tricksters do. Perhaps he didn't marry (if he didn't) because he didn't want to leave a widow with kids behind. But by the end, he was so absorbed in the Love of Godness, that it mattered more to him to testify, to be a witness—the Greek word is martyr—to Love as the ultimate reality, than to recant—to deny God—just to prevent the torture and death of his human body. It's just impossible to imagine that anyone would do that, isn't it? Or is it?

[MLK Mountaintop video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e49VEpWg61M>]

Martin Luther King knew. Malcolm X knew. Oscar Romero knew. Mary Dyer knew. Mohandas K. Gandhi knew. The Buddhist monks who self-immolated during the Vietnam War knew. So many saints of all religions. A few give their life by losing it, but others give their life by living it in service to Love. I suspect that many of us long to live our truth so utterly that we will hold Love as the first motion no matter what, and that some of us are doing that. It's not up to us if we die in service, but we mustn't be afraid to risk being faithful, to live up to the Light that we have, to die in the Spirit. Dorothy Day was such a one. Mother Theresa. Nelson Mandela. Alice Paul. Sojourner Truth. The King's Bay Plowshares 7, many healthcare workers in high COVID-19 infection rate hospitals, or first responders. A lifelong Quaker activist told me once that they consider it a distinct possibility that they might die bleeding in the street at the scene of some civil disobedience. They are surrendered to that. For them, it's not the worst thing that could happen.

Christ died on the cross to save me, to rescue me from my missing the mark, and walking off the path, and falling short—my *chata*, my *resistance*, my sin. He demonstrated indelibly the surrender that is possible through the power of Love. The horrific crucifixion of Christ saves us, because it shows us an extreme, vivid example of what we can endure when we are utterly besotted with God. His witness rebukes my puny ego, its fears, its love of self, its delusions of permanence and control.

OK, that's it for the crucifixion. Everyone take a deep breath, let it out slowly.

So this is a time of dying, of waning, of the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which states that everything moves from more ordered to less ordered states unless there is an infusion of energy—Life. I was going to give you a list of things that are fading, maybe alphabetical—America as a superpower, Bees, Coral reefs, etc. But you know all of that.

So, we are a thanophobic (death denying) and grief-phobic culture, at least the so-called dominant culture is. If you feel sad you should take a pill, take a drink, buy some shoes, binge watch *The Office*. I realized one day that it is SHAMEFUL to be sad, to grieve in this culture.

Well, chaplains also know the sacred healing power of mourning well and thoroughly. Good grief! The Biblical literary form is lamentation. Jesus is both an answer to the lamentation in Jeremiah 23, and—Jesus laments! “He began to be grieved and agitated,” we read in Matthew 26:37. In the next verse set at the Gethsemane Gardens, “he said to the disciples, “I am deeply

grieved, even to death..." He tells the disciples to stay there and remain awake—"and going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, My Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." Have you ever been so struck by sorrow that you had to sit down on the ground? I have. In Mathew 27:46, when Jesus is on the cross, he cries, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

When I first studied that text, it broke my heart to think that Jesus died having lost his faith, his supernatural love, and felt abandoned by God. But that's not it. Jesus is using a single line to invoke a whole Psalm. Psalm 22. I'm going to read the first eleven verses from the NRSV, and we will post all of it in the chat. It is a song of bitter lament, but it is addressed to God, and so it turns us toward, rather than away from the divine, as sorrow can sometimes do:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

2

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.

3

Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.

4

In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.

5

To you they cried, and were saved;
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

6

But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.

7

All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

8

"Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver—
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"

9

Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.

10

On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

11

Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near

and there is no one to help.

It is a beautiful piece, and prophesies Jesus' position. In 14 it reads,

I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;

Can you feel that? Does it speak to thy condition? We have so much to grieve in these times, from the personal to the global. I encourage you to put your own pen to paper, and write a psalm of lament for the sorrow that is in your heart in these days. Carry it with you, share it with a loved one, or burn it and let it rise as smoke, set it in that special space in your home where things are hallowed. If you feel moved, share it with the Bible Half Hour by emailing it to ecommunications@fgcquaker.org, in the chat.

Friends, grief is the other side of the coin of love, inevitable, a human universal, it breaks us open so that the Light can pour in. We must grieve well, Friends. We must undertake grieving as sacred work that we engage mindfully, and when it sneaks up on us in a wave, that we allow it to crash over us, knowing that we are bouyant, that we have one another and that the world needs us whole.

12

Many bulls encircle me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

13

they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.

14

I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;

15

my mouth[a] is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.

16

For dogs are all around me;

a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;[b]

17

I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;

18

they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

19

But you, O Lord, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!

20

Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life[c] from the power of the dog!

21

Save me from the mouth of the lion!
From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued[d] me.

22

I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;[e]
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

23

You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

24

For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,[f]
but heard when I[g] cried to him.

25

From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

26

The poor[h] shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the Lord.
May your hearts live forever!

27

All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Lord;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.[i]

28

For dominion belongs to the Lord,

and he rules over the nations.

29

To him,[j] indeed, shall all who sleep in[k] the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.[l]

30

Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord,

31

and[m] proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.

Day Four **Resurrection**

"By The Mark"

When I cross over
I will shout and sing
I will know my Savior
By the mark where the nails have been

By the mark where the nails have been
By the sign upon His precious skin
I will know my Savior when I come to Him
By the mark where the nails have been

I will know my Savior when I come to Him
By the mark where the nails have been

Continuing in worship, I invite you to put one hand on your heart, and one on your belly. Your belly is the source of your power, and your heart is the source of your love. Breathing in, say inwardly, "May my love be powerful." Breathing out, "May my power be loving." "May my love be powerful....may my power be loving....May my love be powerful....may my power be loving...."

When you are an interfaith healthcare chaplain, occasionally people try to test you. Of course, the problem is that the people who try to test your orthodoxy are people who believe there is a right way to do spirituality, or more accurately, religion, and this means that YOU ARE

ALWAYS GOING TO FLUNK THE TEST. It is a given that an interfaith chaplain does not believe there is only one approach to spirituality, or they would be off knocking on doors with someone they shared a wardrobe consultant with, trying to convince people that their one way was the right way. I have developed some truths that don't get me booted out of the room immediately:

Q: Are you a Christian?

A: "I love Jesus!"

Q: Do you believe in the Bible?

A: "I have it near me at all times."

Q: Do you believe in the Resurrection?

A: "Christ lives!"

Well, do YOU believe in resurrection?

I apologize, but I may have to be a bit fundamentalist on this point. If you don't believe in resurrection, you are just not paying attention. Resurrection is everywhere all the time!

I'm going to tell you a story about traveling between the realms of the living and the dead, and then we'll do a little bit of harder work, and close with some really cool resurrection examples, o.k.? Do you know the old Quaker expression, "and God is willing"? It reminds us that we are not in control of everything. It's our Quaker "Inshallah."

Some years ago, when I was staying in a little town called North San Juan, on the Yuba River in northern California, I was collaborating on a performance art piece with the creator of the Carnival of Resistance, Tevyn East. Website in chat. Awesome disruptive liberation faith-based performance. Check it out. Tevyn was traveling west in her new Honda Fit with her brother, Daniel at the wheel. Somewhere in the Nevada Desert in the middle of the night, after a gas stop in Winnemucca, Daniel saw, out of the corner of his eye, a sudden blur pass just in front of the car, and felt a solid impact at highway speed? Daniel hit the brakes and pulled onto the shoulder. He walked around the car, but could see no damage to the front of it. Then he jogged back to where he thought he'd hit something, but could see no sign—of anything. So, they got back into the car and headed out again. Car ran fine, steered fine, everything. They got in to North San Juan at o dark thirty and slept late the next morning. As I was making some breakfast, I heard a startled cry from the front of the place. We all rushed out, and could not believe our eyes.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-R9zZCznWs>

That's when Coyote first really entered my consciousness. Years before, when I lived and worked at the John Woolman school on the other side of the Yuba River, I had heard coyotes howl in the night, but one night they held a singing circle in the pasture below Tree Frog House, where I lived. I stood on the porch in my pajamas, shivering, listening to the ancient sound for long minutes, as it stirred the wildness in me. When the singing stopped and seemed to be over, I sent my own howl toward the skies —howl—. I had just turned around to go back to my warm bed when I heard an answering call. —softer howl—pause.

So, we know that Coyote can cheat death, in the story of fishing with kingfisher, Coyote is killed by his own hubris, and Kingfisher steps over Coyote four times, bringing him back to life. That's right. Coyote is resurrected, like Jesus, like Lazarus.

When Jesus raised his beloved friend, Lazarus, from the grave in John 11, he tells the people to roll away the stone from the tomb. 'When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" **44** The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go.'" Lazarus has lain in the tomb for four days, dead. It's a warm climate. His sister tells Jesus not to roll away the stone because there will be a stench. But by the power of God responding to Jesus' request, Lazarus is raised from the dead, and he comes out of the tomb and the linen strips wrapped around his body and the shroud for his head are still on him, and need to be stripped away.

When Mary the Magdalene discovers Jesus' own tomb empty in John 20, she runs to tell the disciples, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." **3** Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. **4** The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **5** He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. **6** Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, **7** and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself."

Jesus' grave clothes are already off when his followers arrive at the tomb, and laid neatly. For both Jesus and Lazarus, the return to life means the stripping off of the old, bloody, stinking, stained burial wrapping and shroud. What clings to us as we are renewed? What do we need to remove for our spiritual freedom?

I received some emails yesterday. Folks are using the ecomunications@fgcquaker.org email. There are some folks in this room doing some hard work in these times. Hard work. It is hard work to give birth to yourself, even if Spirit is the motive source of power. Resurrection—being born again—yes I did just say that—can be very sweet and soft, but it can be excruciating. This Friend said it better than I can. Listen to their testimony:

Carl, I don't know where you are going with resurrection tomorrow, but I know that I have my life back in a way that I can't even explain because I was willing to follow God and do the things that most scared me. And I was able to do that because I was accompanied along the way. [I'm going to anonymize the message, like I would protecting privacy in healthcare, so I'm not going to say what this Friend went through, but it was not hard like going on a consumer fast and not buying clothes for a year; it was a walking through fire; it wasn't quick; it was healing old trauma by turning into the heart of it. The Friend goes on:] I felt the hooks released from my body and the weight lifted off of me, and now I am free. [It sounds like the stone was rolled away, doesn't it?] I know that was possible because I was willing to love when I didn't want to love. Because the Grace of God was there for me and for all of us at that critical moment. I know that what God has planned is bigger and better than I could ever imagine. And I know that I am simultaneously knocked to the floor and shouting from the mountaintop because of the gifts I have been given.

Normal, everyday people are transformed by the power of God and are then able to transform the world.

Going half way doesn't do it. It requires a full surrender.

Oh, amen and halleluja. Amen. Amazing grace. It knocks you to the floor and lifts you up to shout from the mountaintop! It's not a fuzzy blanket, it's a scratchy, musty old wool blanket that is strong and sheds water, and blocks the wind and is warm when its wet. Resurrection is a triumph, but that does not mean it is all fun. We Friends have mostly lost touch with our legacy of discipline, method, the conversion of manners, rigorousness, and daily practice to bring about our spiritual deepening, but early Friends had them, and we need to dig them out, as Rex Ambler has done with his work, Experiment with Light, or we need to discover such disciplines elsewhere and engage them. Many of us have combined our Quakerism with Buddhism, for instance, as Friend Steve Smith tells about in his book, A Quaker in the Zendo. I realized a while ago that a lot of the Friends that I know as spiritually mature are Twelve-Step folks. Their dying in the flesh and being renewed, as they will tell you, "one day at a time," is hard, hard work, and their renewal involved some serious confession, repentance and repair and amends and becoming whole by "working the steps" on an ongoing basis.

Lloyd Lee Wilson has told me on occasion that if your view of what is possible involves a list of things that God cannot do, you need to start over, because you have made a mistake somewhere. "All things are possible in Spirit." Nonetheless, and at the risk of ruffling some feathers, I am going to say that while anything is possible, a spiritual life composed of going to meeting of a Sunday and serving on Finance Committee is unlikely to result in our catching fire and then rising, Phoenix-like, renewed. If the words of Psalm 42, V 1-3 vibrate within your heart with an inexpressible longing, it may be time to dig deeper, Friend. Please hear whatever word works for you where I read "God."

As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.
When shall I come and behold
the face of God?
My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me continually,
"Where is your God?"

That's surrender, to want to see the face of God, for no one can see the face of God and live—that is, live in the old life, in the old grave clothes that don't fit and aren't needed anymore. Thomas Kelly, in his handbook for Quakers and other mystics, A Testament of Devotion, puts it this way: "But to some at least He gives an amazing stayedness in Him, a well nigh unbroken life of humble quiet adoration...Here is not ecstasy but serenity, unshakeableness, firmness of life-orientation. We are become what Fox calls "established men." We would say, "established

Friends.” I hate to say it, but we throw “weighty Friend” around too casually for it to have this profound meaning anymore.

If your Quaker Meeting is a people of faith determined NOT to be on fire, if it is a fellowship of asbestos Friends, look deeper, or look elsewhere. Kelly talks of the *ekklesiola in ekklesia*—the little church within the church. Find your peeps. Know one another in that which is eternal, lift one another up with a loving hand. But, apocalypse from Ben Pink Dandelion, “Quakerism is a means to an end, not an end in itself.” WHAAAAAT?? That’s right. The point is nearer, my God to thee. If the vehicle isn’t carrying you, and you really want to go, fix that vehicle or find one that rolls, preferably with some happy, dedicated souls inside.

So, we are invited to resurrection. We can repent—turn ourselves to God, and find new life, but like Lazarus, the grave clothes are still hanging on us. They are not right for the living.

Long ago Friends stripped off the grave clothes of set prayer, professional clergy, ornate steeple houses, an absentee clockmaker God who set the world in motion and then left it. These grave clothes were for something that was dead, but those Friends had come alive, and so the rags were left in a heap at graveside.

What grave clothes do you need to strip off, personally, to enter more fully into the life of the Spirit?

What grave clothes does your meeting or the Society of Friends more broadly need to leave behind?

OK, we have Belief and Resurrection in the time we have left. Who thinks the FGC Bible Half Hour should be an Hour? Is someone counting those hands? Put it in your evaluation form.

Some of you will know that I am an EarthQuaker. I draw spiritual sustenance from the whole tradition of Friends, including our regard for the Bible, but I also draw inspiration, meaning, moral teaching and a sense of being a part of the Oneness by reading the Scripture that God wrote with Her own hand—the living Earth, the sun, moon, and stars, the cosmos. John Woolman was the first EarthQuaker. St. Francis read this scripture too, and indigenous peoples everywhere live amongst its pages. Go, you, and do likewise! These examples are EarthQuaker examples.

In the beginning—I mean the beginning of the Universe, almost 14 billion years ago, there was matter, hotter than the hottest hotness, and a million times denser than gold. Then all of that energy rapidly expands. Stephen Hawking postulated that if the so-called Big Bang had been any bigger, it would have just gone whoosh into nothingness. If had been any smaller, the Universe would have expanded to the size of a beach ball, and then collapsed back into itself. It’s all hydrogen at first, but coalescing, and then the galaxies come to be at the only time they could be made—not before or since. Then the stars, gas giants, are spread throughout, and in their nuclear hearts new elements are formed, and then those stars go supernova—they die, spewing those early elements out to make more stars which die, giving more complex elements. Putting one hand on your heart, and one hand on your belly again, consider: the elements of your human body were forged in the dying hearts of stars billions of years ago. You are made of stardust. You are a star resurrected.

Second example, and you can put your hands wherever it comfortable for you. The California sequoia sempervirens, up on the north coast where I lived until recently, are the largest single living things on the planet, if you don't include fungi webs, or the planet itself or something. The largest living thing on the planet that will fit on a postcard. Sempervirens means always vibrant; always green, but this is an exaggeration. It seems like "always" to humans because we live for an eye blink compared to them. There are trees standing which were saplings when Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount.

But they do die, and when they do, they fall with an indescribable WHUUUMP that you feel in your body and through the soles of your boots as much as you hear it. Mica and I heard one fall one very windy day hiking in Redwood National Park. We picked up our pace after we stopped standing in awe. And here's the thing. These mighty living beings which pull water out of the air, and also transvaporate it into the air hundreds of gallons in a day, which harbor in their canopies species that don't exist on the forest floor, which sequester carbon and release oxygen, and when they fall, leaving a hole in the canopy for light to reach the ground where it can nurture new life, and their bodies decompose, they become "nursing trees" which support more biodiversity than the ever did standing, and are gradually reduced to nutrients that are taken up by another tree for a millennia or more. Resurrection again.

Third, the little caterpillar. We live in the migratory path of the Monarch butterfly, also known regionally as The Wanderer—that's a Trickster name if ever I heard one! In the perverse way of the Industrial Growth Society, many neighborhoods here are named for the beautiful insect which is in decline because those neighborhoods have destroyed its habitat and forage. Anyway, the little larvae, the hungry, hungry caterpillar, goes through five moulting stages in less than a month as it grows to be as much as nine times its original length. Then, it spins a cocoon and takes a nap. And while it is sleeping, certain of its cells, called imaginal cells, clustered together in small groups called imaginal discs, and previously dormant, start dreaming of a butterfly. The body of the caterpillar releases enzymes which begin to dissolve it into a nutrient rich soup. The imaginal cells start to find each other and to collaborate on creating new body parts—eyes, wings, digestive tract, legs, etc. These systems are totally different. A butterfly is not a caterpillar with wings. It is a wholly new entity which eats many more kinds of forage, has compound eyes, and who FLIES! It is a pollinator, helping plants to propagate, and hold soil, hold moisture, and provide habitat, increasing the resilience of the biotic community. Then they migrate great distances—intergenerationally, benefitting other biomes. Resurrection..

And, here's the thing about that caterpillar. It trying to tell us something about our society, eating, eating, consuming, excreting, growing exponentially, like cancer. Caterpillars can wreak havoc on a habitat. Perhaps Hungry Hungry is in the thrall of the Windigo Trickster Spirit of the Ojibway, who tricks us into consuming until we are destroyed, allowing the Earth to recover from her parasites. When the organism of our society is glutted to the max, it collapses on the couch and spins its cocoon, in which it dissolves. It dies. Oh, the caterpillar has been laid in its tomb—it does not survive the Resurrection process. But inside the glutted carcass of the Industrial Growth Society, the Great Unravelling has begun. These individual imaginal cells, lets call them, um— "Quakers," cluster together into imaginal discs, which we will call Monthly Meetings, and then they connect with other Monthly Meetings and a host of other imaginal clusters which contain the building blocks, and perhaps more important, the yearning, to give

themselves to the Great Turning toward the Life Sustaining Society. And when the stone is rolled away from the mouth of the chrysalis a new thing is born which allows all creatures, systems, habitats and cultures to exist in a mutually beneficial symbiosis called The Ecosystem of Heaven!

I gotta take a breath. I have never understood why we are told not to mix metaphors, unless its just like a host of other fun things we are told not to do. I'll take my metaphors shaken, not stirred! Metaphors be with you, Padawan.

But, you can feel it right? That the Caterpillar of our collapsing culture cannot molt one more time, it's out of options. It has to change. It's true that in our case, the rotting dying carcass of the caterpillar is having some pretty ugly death throes, but the imaginal cells are activated; you can almost smell the potential for winged flight, soaring even. The Industrial Workers of the World say, "We will build a new world in the shell of the old."

So, Resurrection, yes. If you think you are seeing a linear process anywhere in the cosmos—inception, process, ending, you probably just haven't zoomed out far enough to see the return. Everything is cyclical.

But, what if I told you that I not only believe in the present miracle of resurrection in the Gospel of the Earth, but that I actually believe in the Resurrection of Christ? Well, I do. I do. I believe.

Part of the confusion lies with our modern understanding of "belief." Decartes kicked off the Enlightenment with, "I think, therefor I am." This is what the tree shepherd, Treebeard means in JRR Tolkien's Two Towers when he says of the wizard Saruman, "There was a time when he was always walking about my woods. I think that I now understand what he is up to. He is plotting to become a Power. He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as far as they can serve him for the moment..."

We come closer to the true meaning of "belief" when we say to an anxious kid facing a math test or a dance recital or a wrestling match, "I believe in you." (It's good to follow this up with, "and I love you no matter what.")

James Fowler treats of this in his book, "Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning." Faith, religion, and belief get tangled up, and faith becomes a function of belief, or confused with it. The Sanskrit word for faith, Sraddha, used in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, means "to set one's heart on." This is what it means to be faithful. In Islam, the word is iman, which Muhammad calls "a knowledge in the heart, a voicing with the tongue, and an activity with the limbs." In Hebrew, the word is 'emunah', the Greek is piste, and the Latin is...credo. "Credo," meaning "I believe," is the Latin start to credal statements. Now Quakerism rejected credal statements from the get-go. Understand that although I got into the Apostles' Creed yesterday, it's not actually the content of the creed that is why we have rejected it. It is the creed itself. It's the mind of metal and wheels.

Does this mean that we cannot then say, "I believe"?

Credo is made up of the word *cor*; or *cordia*, meaning heart, and the word *do*, meaning to set or place, or to give. To trust in, rely on, place confidence in. To give your heart to.

The Greek word, pistuo, and the Latin credo are translated from Biblical texts into English as "believe." Before the Enlightenment, "believe" meant to hold as precious, to set one's

heart on, to love. Modern German uses the word *belieben* to mean, to cherish or hold dear, to beloved.

During the so-called Enlightenment in Europe, the meaning of belief changed to our modern understanding, indicating something that wasn't a personal statement, but an observation of a supposedly universal, empirical, provable, objective truth, like a geometry proof. Per the dummies.com website, “A **geometry proof** — like any mathematical **proof** — is an argument that begins with known facts, proceeds from there through a series of logical deductions, and ends with the thing you're trying to **prove**.” But deductive reasoning, reductive reasoning, inductive reasoning, or adductive reasoning will never get us there. Belief is a Mystery. It is foremost a journey of the heart, for Love is the first motion.

What happens if we start to think of “believe” as meaning “to rest one’s heart on?” I believe in the basic goodness of people. I rest my heart on that. I believe in a world without war. Oh, yes I do. I believe that the world we pass on to the generations following us can be a better one. I believe that the essence of those who have loved us still accompanies us after they have passed on. I believe in the Resurrection of Christ. I rest my heart there. That his story didn't end with the cross on Calvary, but that he lives on, working miracles, inspiring folks to love one another, healing the sick, comforting the afflicted, and you know Trickster Jesus is going to afflict the comfortable! I believe in so many things I can't prove, and, you know, they are all the most important things. I rest my heart there.

With this understanding of “believe,” what do you believe in?

—END—