



The Journal of Patapsco Friends Meeting

June, 2016

Who is Jesus to Me?

Editor's Note:

The topic of this issue of the Quaker Heron is on the topic of Jesus, and What is Jesus to Me? - the same topic as our recent Meeting retreat, led by Mary Lord. The articles give a variety of rich perspectives on this topic.

Thanks to all who wrote for this issue. -

Ramona

My Experience of Jesus

by Leslie Bechis

My God is the sun
Jesus the force that pulls me
I am earth, so small

Ken Stockbridge writes:

Lately, I have found myself dwelling on the various burdens I bear and hoping I could more often embrace them as joys and blessings. In those reflections, I was reminded of this famous passage from Matthew 11:28-30, in which Jesus said: Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Quakers have a very wide range of attitudes and beliefs about Jesus. For some, this passage may provide great meaning and comfort, while for others it may mean very little. Yet I wonder if we all could aspire to

have our Meetings embrace and channel this same spiritual energy so that all who labor and are heavy laden might find rest in our Quaker communities and feel their burdens lightened. I am happy to say that Patapsco does that for me, and for that I am truly grateful.

Jesus to Me by Jennifer Winters

Having been raised a Southern Baptist, I grew up with two Jesus's. One Jesus was a loving friend who was always with me. He stood up for people who didn't have anyone else. Jesus gave us good life lessons and would comfort us when we hurt. One of my earliest memories of really feeling love for Jesus occurred in the children's Sunday School room at South Corinth Baptist Church when I was five. On the wall was a scene of Jesus, sitting on a rock, surrounded by children, who were drawn and dressed to represent children from around the world. This Jesus was smiling, with open arms at the ready for anyone who wanted some love. I really dug this Jesus.

Then, there was the Other Jesus. This Jesus was the second Person of the Trinity. He was tortured and killed by his own dad, and it was all my fault. This was the Jesus of the Revelation, who would come back someday and judge me. If I did things like cuss, dance, drink alcohol (or, at least, be seen drinking alcohol), I would be sent to a literal lake of fire for all eternity. My relationship

with this Jesus depended heavily on my belief in what the preacher taught. I didn't just have to believe it. I had to REALLY believe it, with no doubts. Many a time, I heard preachers emphasize this in their alter calls at the end of church: "Do you know, that you know, that you know, that if you die in a fiery wreck on the way home today that you are really saved?" I walked the aisle several times, just to make sure, before I finally gave up and left the church at seventeen.

Leaving the church didn't mean that I left Jesus. I continued what I feel is a personal relationship with him through my journey in and out of various churches, and through my discovery of the Quakers when I was in my late twenties. While I understand that Quakers are a diverse bunch, with many not identifying as Christians, I certainly consider myself one, even though I'm finding my discomfort with that moniker growing as institutional Christianity seems to be veering further and further away from Christ's teachings.

So, who is Jesus to me now? I no longer believe in the version of God I was taught as a child. I no longer believe in a Trinity consisting of three Persons. Jesus, however, is more real to me now than ever before. Do I believe in a reanimated corpse who only hears the prayers of a few? No. But I do believe that Jesus is alive and in my heart. Do I believe that Jesus went to the cross for me? Yes. But I don't really know what that means. Is Jesus my savior? Yes, though he saves me from selfishness, detachment, and loneliness, rather than eternal torment. Do I believe that Jesus was God, incarnate? Yes. Maybe. Sort of. Ask me later. Do I still believe in the Jesus who has his arms open for everyone, as he did in the cheesy Sunday School picture? Absolutely!

What I love about being a Quaker is that I can love Jesus passionately, and have a close, intimate relationship with him, while also being a bit agnostic. Jesus is my friend, my savior, my example, and my source. How is that so? I don't know, and I'm fine with that. I think that Jesus is fine with it, too.

"Who Do You Say That I Am?" ...and for that matter, who do I say that I am?

by Sam Dixon

Several years ago I played this rather irreverent song I wrote entitled "Jesus is a Swinger" to some friends of mine. Afterwards I made the comment that the song was more in jest than anything and if asked seriously, I thought Jesus was actually really cool. One of my friends' response was "I don't know, I never met him." That confession of total ignorance on the matter and the nonchalance with which he said it stuck with me, stirring in the background of my mind. He grew up in a secular Jewish family and so has quite less skin in the game of who Jesus is than I do. I was raised southern Baptist and strongly internalized that worldview as a child. At age 7, I chose to give my life to Jesus and be Baptized. I chose John 3: 16, a verse with a strong answer of who Jesus is, as the bible verse to be read at the ceremony. I've often looked back on that in recent years, kind of bemused at the total lack of originality in choosing that verse. I remember my father offering to help me find other verses to consider and declaring firmly I didn't want to do that, I knew my verse and that was that. At that point in my life Jesus was for me just who I was told Jesus was, and I had no real interest in furthering my own understanding. Children are like that.

To avoid the long version of the story, I will say that life, and consequently the question

of Jesus, got rather more complicated for me as I grew up. My answers to it have varied widely. I also became faced with a question I had never really asked before, which has wound up being the most revolutionary and the most difficult question ever posed to me: “Who am I?” (Add to that, the most inconvenient!)

My experience at April’s retreat marks a significant turning point in my life. That Saturday morning I arrived conventionally late and on spiritually perfect timing. Mary ushered me into one of the discussion groups already in progress. We were to interpret and act out the story of Jesus and the healing at the Pool of Bethesda. For me what was so significant about the story was the question Jesus asks the paralytic man: “Do you want to be healed?” I volunteered to act out the role of the paralytic. To me, this was quite personal as I have been in my own way lying beside that pool waiting for a miracle for more than half my life. At age 11, I became disabled by a mysterious illness which went undiagnosed for nearly a year, was then misdiagnosed, and then properly diagnosed as Chronic Lyme Disease 5 years after I fell ill. That was in 2005, when I was 16. Now it is 2016, and I am 27 years old. Things have changed drastically over the last decade. I’ve gotten a lot better, but have been kind of stuck on a plateau for the past few years. My stagnation has been a real conundrum for my doctor. It was not until a few weeks before the retreat that I really confronted a hard thing to face. I am actually more afraid of being well than I am of remaining sick. In terms of the “Who Am I?” question, “sick” has formed such a larger part of the answer for a very long time. “Do you want to be healed?” Do you want to be healed... I realized at the retreat that in spite of all my years of desperate search for healing, the real answer was that I didn’t know. I was still clinging to my

sickness and not sure I wanted to be rid of it and all the victimhood, lack of responsibility, familiarity, and self-pity that came with it was a game changer for me. I strongly believe our own intentions play a major role in sickness and health, though I am not at all clear *exactly* what that role is. As soon as I realized I didn’t know if I wanted to be healed, as that secret was brought into the light of consciousness, my attitude about it began to transform. Without forcing the healing of my mind, which is an organic process I am well advised not to control, I have come to the point of genuinely embracing my desire to be healed. I have come to the point of taking the next step and getting up. “Take up your bed and walk,” Jesus said in the story.

So who do I say that Jesus is, and who do I say that I am? I was about to write that Jesus still represents a bit of a mystery for me, but then I heard a voice (probably my own) say “No he doesn’t.” It was pretty blunt. Jesus isn’t a distant figure to me anymore, he is my brother. He is also the image of my own wholeness and divine perfection. That is a wholeness-that is to say wellness-that can be felt tangibly as a present reality. The gospels record Jesus saying he was the son of God, and teaching others to call God Father. I have experienced myself as essentially identical with God and everyone else strongly and recurrently enough to have deep faith in it as a reality. Yet surrounding that essential identity there remains the reality of my humanity-our humanity-and the individual self-ness that entails. So I say I am whole, I am well, I am a child of God, we are all children of God, I am a part of the Big Picture, and I am glad to be alive as myself *right now*. Another question keeps coming back to me, “Your Father created the Universe. What do *you* have to be afraid of?”

Thank you to everyone who is part of the Meeting, and part of the retreat, especially those in my discussion/action group, our facilitator Mary Lord, and our hosts, the Bucks.

"Who Do You Say I Am - My Experience of Jesus"

By Susannah Rose

Do I have an experience of Jesus?

The word "Jesus" is difficult for me. The name calls up sweet hymns, being saved or not saved, pictures of sheep, very white-looking gentle/gentile shepherds, a little baby surrounded by animals. If I let go of these associations and instead think of the stories that Jesus told, the life he lived, his compassion and courage, and the courage he has inspired in some I've met, then all that disappears and I see someone I could respect and love and honor.

When I was in high school, Durham N.C., where I grew up, was a prime location for civil rights action. There were sit-ins, marches, a lot of talk. And to the consternation of the First Presbyterian Church – a downtown church which was closed to African Americans as members but welcomed them to help in the kitchen – our new young minister, Mr. Curry, was right in the midst of them all. He gave sermons on civil rights. He marched. He made it clear that his understanding of what Jesus taught required him to do these things. In embarrassment, the elders asked for and got his resignation, but assuaged their consciences with over-generous gifts on his departure. What this told me was that there was nothing abstract and sweet about Jesus or anything he taught. It must mean something. I heard the civil rights song, "there is a man beside me walking, there's a voice within me talking, there's a word that needs saying: carry it on." That was and is

my sense of this rabbi and healer; inseparable from the Inner Light, but also human and near.

I can't say I've had direct experiences of Jesus in the sense of feeling a Jesus-presence that I knew was Jesus and named Jesus. The word is too charged with unhelpful associations. I have found some of the stories live for me, especially the prodigal son. The sense of inclusion, openness, that there is a love I can't outwalk. And yet, the visceral reaction when I hear people speak of Jesus in the political area, as if he were the head of a club they belonged to that other people didn't deserve to be in, seems to come with the force of a furious denial: "That's not who Jesus is! You lie. You never met him." Now – where does that come from, unless – somehow, in some way -- I do know Jesus...?

Who is Jesus?

By Jean Pfefferkorn

To me, Jesus is the greatest moral teacher and example that the human race has experienced. Just following a small sample of his words will take me my entire life:

"You have been told, 'love your neighbor, hate your enemy.' But what I tell you is this: 'Love your enemies, and pray for your persecutors.' Only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise on good and bad alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward can you expect...There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds." (Gospel of Matthew)

Jesus teaches us to follow the highest standard of behavior--don't stop until we're imitating God, and especially to love each

other. Whether or not Jesus is divine, I don't know. It's a matter of personal faith, but faith does not determine how I live. How closely I follow the teachings of Jesus determines how I live. And following Jesus' teachings will take me the rest of my life.

Who is Jesus to Me?

by Gabriel Cannon

South Mountain Fellowship

I am a seeker of the truth. Through wisdom and experience I search for what is true and pure. During my spiritual journey, I hope to find the essence of God in all mankind.

Today, I practice the traditional Friends testimonies called SPICES (simplicity, peace integrity, community, equality and stewardship). I am a believer of Jesus or Isa (Koran) because he practiced all those traits long before I was born. His teachings and parables are many many years old, but they are still talked about and studied today. Christianity is based on his teachings. I consider myself a Christian. I am a practicing Christian, not just by faith, but by sight.

Jesus said in a Gospel within the Bible, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." His words to me tell me to remove earthly distractions and worldly treasures and live a **SIMPLE** life by getting closer to the Divine. In the Gospel of Matthew, it was written that Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek. . ." and "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." The writings of Jesus have taught me to avoid excessive monetary finance, alcohol, drugs, gambling and man or woman's approval because they are all distractions that do not nourish the Spirit within.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God."

PEACE is the state in which we are in accord with God. Peace activism is an external manifestation of an internal conviction, often expressed in terms of "that of God in everyone." Through Jesus' teachings and ministry, I consider myself a peaceful man who is patient, and not easily angered, and who does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.

I believe Jesus believed that everyone is equal before God. Jesus lived a life that was true to God. His inward **INTEGRITY** regarding honesty is a living testimony. The Bible states that Jesus said that no one should murder, steal, or give false testimony. The essence of integrity is placing God at the center of your life.

COMMUNITY is a necessary foundation for justice and peace. In the Bible, Jesus told a parable about a man who was robbed, stripped of his clothes, and beaten nearly to death. Different types of people in the city passed by him without giving him any aid. However, one man saw him and showed him kindness and pity. This person gave him first aid, took care of him by sacrificing his comfort, and assisted him financially. Jesus commanded man to love one another. This type of community in which residents practice love I find most attractive, and I would love to move there.

In the Bible, Jesus said a great commandment to follow in life is to "love your neighbor as yourself." **EQUALITY** is at the heart of Jesus' convictions, in my opinion. Love your neighbors if they are Muslim, agnostic, or non-religious people, and do not judge them. The rights of women, gays and Gentiles should be considered. Jesus practiced that there is God in every person rich poor, homeless, young and old. I try to practice that faith every day.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus basically said, “feed the hungry, provide water to the thirsty, treat strangers like family, clothe and shelter the homeless, aid and comfort the sick, and visit those who are lonely. I truly believe that faith without works is no faith at all. **STEWARDSHIP** and Christianity go hand in hand. We act as God’s stewards.

Jesus has helped me to find the true way to happiness and peace – to give, to help and to serve the more vulnerable and less fortunate. Thank you, Jesus!

On Jesus by Jim Rose

The first thing that comes to mind is that Susan Norris exclaimed on more than one occasion that she was not a Christian, but a Jesusite. Her point, and I think it an important one, is that the lessons taught by Jesus are in many ways distinctly different from those taught by the Church.

Reading for the second time "Meeting Jesus Again, for the Second Time" reaffirmed this for me. The historical Jesus was about love and acceptance, about relationships, and about community. My view is that Jesus saw the transformation of people, of society, of the whole culture by the conviction that seeing the world through the lens of love can transform relationships into wholesome partnerships.

"The kingdom of God is within you."
(Luke 17:21) It wasn't George Fox who originated the concept of the inward guide, the Christ within, the inner teacher; Jesus maintained that very thing from the beginning. George was really returning to the original teaching which, to me, is central to my understanding of my relationship with the divine. That there is "that of God" within

each of us is the central hopeful message of all religions.

At the retreat, we were led to consider how Jesus is manifested in our lives today. If there is "that of God" within me, if there is Spirit at work, how is that manifested? My answer is bound with the Quaker conviction of continuing revelation: the Book is not closed, not all miracles have been witnessed, not all visions have been seen.

Revelations are not all of the category which Saul met on the road to Damascus: a blinding light revealing a new Truth. They range, I believe, from that blinding vision to an everyday 'Ah Ha!' and everything else in between. In a Quaker Meeting for Worship, we wait in silent expectation that a message, a leading, a Truth will be given: a new revelation will become apparent.

And sometimes it happens! (One doesn't have to be at Meeting for Worship either.) What is the role of intuition in our lives? And how much of that intuition is divinely inspired? These are open questions, but questions that bear directly for me on the presence of the divine, on the working of the Spirit in my life. Jesus, the spirit of Truth, is active in my life, and it is up to me to listen intently to what the new revelation is for me.

Something about Jesus

By Karen Ownbey

Thanks to the PFM Retreat “Who do you say that I am?” I had the opportunity to think about Jesus in a sharing and caring environment. I would not have taken time otherwise to ponder the topic or to benefit from the perspectives of Friends.

With an Episcopal religious upbringing, I had knowledge of Jesus through Bible stories, Sunday school sayings and

hymns. But I would not say I had a personal relationship with Jesus. In more recent years, I have had trouble getting past the patriarchal feeling of two thirds of the Holy Trinity: Father and Son. If a son is more highly revered, if/how does a daughter fit in?

Nonetheless, I am far from dismissing Jesus. His teachings are highly important to how I live my life, more so than a personal relationship with Jesus or his divinity. I was reminded of and grateful for community (again) when the following resources were recommended as preparation for the retreat:

- Pendle Hill Pamphlet #330
“Searching for the Real Jesus”
- Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time by Marcus Borg

I had no idea until I read “Searching for the Real Jesus” that serious Biblical scholars have studied, analyzed, questioned and doubted aspects of the historical and divine Jesus. It was a relief to know that many others had thoughts and questions similar to mine.

In addition to hearing from and sharing with Friends, I find that the annual retreats help me to articulate my thoughts, questions and beliefs better...at least to myself. There is definitely something about Jesus that is meaningful and relevant in how I want to live, learn and grow. For me, Jesus is not the only way, but a highly significant pointer to the Way.