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# GOD'S FRIENDS

JOINING AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN WORSHIP  
AND LIFE EXPERIENCE

## **SOMETHING WHOLE EMERGES**

*by Donald Schell*

## **THE ENERGY I FOUND THERE: VARIOUS EXPERIENCES OF FAITH**

*by members and friends of St. Gregory's  
edited by Joan Stockbridge*

## **A HALF-JEWISH PAGAN WRITES ABOUT JESUS**

*by Lisa Garrigues*

**A**ND IF MY EYES TELL YOU  
 HOW MUCH LIFE I HAVE LIVED  
 AND HOW MUCH DEATH I HAVE DIED  
 THEY CAN ALSO TELL YOU  
 HOW MUCH LIFE I HAVE DIED  
 AND HOW MUCH DEATH I HAVE LIVED

—VICENTE HUIDOBRO



©1996 Diane Fenster

Above:  
 CANTO THIRTEEN/THE  
 INTERIOR LIFE OF THE DEAD  
 Iris print, from the *Hide and Seek*  
 series by Diane Fenster ©1996.

On the cover:  
 Detail from *SPRING*, painting  
 by Miles Stryker ©1986.

Please see page 11 for more  
 information about the artists  
 whose work is featured in this  
 issue of *God's Friends*.

## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This is a very personal issue of *God's Friends*. In it you will read correspondence from members of St. Gregory's to one of their rectors. He had emailed the congregation, asking people to describe their personal experiences of Jesus, and received almost 150 pages of replies. Out of those emails, we have selected most of the writing in this issue.

To be truthful, the selection process was extremely difficult. First I had to overcome my own prejudices, which were whispering to me, "We can't publish *that!* We'll get in trouble. We'll offend people. We'll be laughed at. And besides, it's a dumb idea anyway." It was a startling moment when I recognized the depth of my own prejudices, my unconscious assumption that Jesus really looked a certain way and that anyone who thought of Jesus in a different way was basically unenlightened.

In the end, I tried to select writings that showed a diversity of beliefs and experiences. I looked for writing that felt immediate, experiential, and honest. And, of course, I selected writing that the writers were willing to have published.

As I have thought about this issue, an old story from India has come to mind. Five blind sages were trying to describe an elephant. One, grabbing hold of the tail, exclaimed, "The elephant is like a swinging rope." The second, pressed against the elephant's side, shouted, "How could you be so mistaken! The elephant is like a wall." A third, kneeling by the feet, said calmly, "The elephant is like a tree trunk." And so on. With this issue of *God's Friends* you could say we are looking for an elephant. Blind sages all, we would be well-served by listening to each other, awe-struck, wondering what kind of Being could be so various, so puzzling, and so wondrous as to invoke such varied reactions in so many dedicated seekers.

— Joan Stockbridge, Issue Editor

# SOMETHING WHOLE EMERGES

by Donald Schell

## ST. GREGORY'S, LIKE MANY OTHER INTENTIONALLY OPEN CONGREGATIONS, IS RELIGIOUSLY DIVERSE.

For us that diversity includes Episcopalians, people from other Christian traditions, people who have significant experience in exploring Buddhism, Sufism, and other non-Christian religious practice, and people with no previous religious training or experience. Such diversity brings interesting questions. Where there is no creedal consensus, how do we build community patterned on Jesus' community of disciples? How do we help people open themselves to larger commitments? How do we nurture one another's growth in courageous action, compassion, and faith? And how is a congregation with such a wide breadth of religious experience actually Christian?

Many visitors and newcomers to any church are also asking similar questions. Perhaps they wonder whether they really belong with religious people and in a Christian congregation. They fear that their personal experience, sufferings, and joys set them outside the bounds of a Christian community and may exclude them from Christian faith and practice. Or they watch carefully to see if participating in church will require some dishonesty of them. Others, with a relatively clear and confident faith, struggle to become even more open-hearted and to appreciate friends who experience faith in very different ways than they do.

Legitimate skepticism and unprecedented religious diversity are the marks of our age, and both quietly pervade the contacts of ordinary life. Daily experience leads us to ask whether there is a way to be truly christian that does not exclude, condemn, or marginalize experiences that are not christian. I use the small "c" for "christian" here in exactly the way some use a small "c" for "catholic." St. Gregory's invites people into catholic christianity, where the small "c" suggests that we don't mean to claim exclusive right to either identity. At St. Gregory's, we intend to embrace and follow Jesus while acknowledging that any effort to draw a circle of belonging will be narrower than God's daring embrace of all humanity.

So, in this issue of *God's Friends* (as well as in the previous baptism and preaching issues) the same questions keep surfacing:

What makes us one? How do we meet and embrace Jesus (or know his embrace)? How can we embody Gregory of Nyssa's discovery that, by the grace of God, all humanity is already one?

In the previous issues we had a look at just how those questions shaped and refined St. Gregory's preaching and sacramental practice, and here we should recall that we pattern our preaching practice quite intentionally on Jesus' teaching work and our sacramental practice on his ministry. One way we follow him and hold close to him is by imitating what he did. Listening to all the voices in this issue, we may hear how those same questions bring us back to a clearer, richer appreciation of common faith in God through Christ. The keyword here is "common" or "shared." Protestant fundamentalism and the Catholic Inquisition in the Renaissance both attempted to purge Christian communities of individuals who held imperfect opinions about God, Jesus, or the work of God. The scrutiny was on individual faith. St. Gregory's does not believe that everyone believing the same things about Jesus would make us more christian. We don't teach or indoctrinate individuals that they must take Jesus "as their personal savior." We don't ask people to assent to a particular set of beliefs. Our community life and practice do not focus on each person's private faith.

Among our many voices, some skeptical, some deeply committed to Jesus the teacher, some mystical (or at least manifesting intuitive knowing and recognition of Jesus), one faith emerges. That faith lives in the chorus of our many questions, intuitions, experiences, and simple certainties, our sorrows and joys, our compassion and love and desire to serve others. Something whole emerges from the many different ways we hold Jesus. And as we listen to one another's diverse expressions of faith, many people with many experiences find that our holding itself is held in a compassion and love as large and fearless as Jesus' love. ☉

Donald Schell is Rector of St. Gregory's and a Fellow of the College of Preachers.

SOMETHING WHOLE  
EMERGES FROM  
THE MANY WAYS WE  
HOLD JESUS.




Above, and on pages 5, 6, and 8:  
GREAT LENT, woodcuts by  
Miles Stryker, ©1999.

# THE ENERGY I FOUND THERE: VARIOUS EXPERIENCES OF FAITH

edited by Joan Stockbridge

In the winter of 1999, Donald Schell, a rector of St. Gregory's, spent six weeks doing a writing fellowship at the College of Preachers in Washington, D.C.. His subject was the connection between preaching, risk-taking, and authentic experience. While in Washington, he emailed the congregation, asking for help. "I've been missing your voices in this project. I'm having a really rich time writing and reading and thinking and praying, but I also find that writing this material is like preaching in an empty church. I would welcome anyone's response to the question: How do we hold Jesus in our community, a community that welcomes a diversity of experiences including agnosticism and non-Christian experience? So I am asking any of you to write me a bit about how you yourself hold (which could mean embrace, understand, think about, or even avoid) Jesus."

What follows is a collage of responses, compiled from the 150 pages of emails he received from people in the congregation. These responses are intimate glimpses into people's religious lives. Some reveal uncomfortable issues about personal belief conflicting with dogma. Some are very clear about an ongoing and comforting relationship with Jesus. Some are full of questions: Who is Jesus anyway? What about all those contradictory things in the Bible? Taken together, the emails are a portrait of a group of people with completely different life stories and paths of religious development, yet a group of people drawn together with sincerity and love on Sunday morning — a description that holds true for virtually every congregation. ☉



TORSO  
painting by  
Miles Stryker,  
©1986.

**Re: "Holding Jesus." I like your phrase. It's fresh and it makes me uncomfortable.** I don't really think much about Jesus. Still, just this morning, when I arrived at 500 De Haro for church, I was listening to a new recording of the *B Minor Mass* on the radio. As I listened to "In remissionem peccatorum," the contrapuntal development of the theme led into two or three tight places — places from which only a great musical mind could find exits. I stayed in my car, and as the force of the words hit me along with the miraculous music, I felt tears beginning. Now I need to tell you that I have not wept for many years, but the eruption of even the feeling of tears coming is such a rare thing that I value it above just about anything. There is a passage in *The Messiah* that has the same effect on me: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

—Esther Kissling

**It has become apparent to me lately just how embarrassed I am when I have to admit to being a Christian.** And I have become aware of how much my skin crawls when I hear people declare that they are Christian. I have begun talking to Rick about what "holy catholic" means, really, and what the universalist church is, really. I am very interested in United Religions and the possibilities it raises. At the same time I am longing for God, and desiring my relationship with Jesus to grow more and more. Suddenly I have found myself reading the prayer book of all things! Which for this born Methodist is quite astounding.

So what does it mean to be a universalist Christian? Well, I got a lot out of Paul's rambling introduction [to Corinthians 1:1-8] this week. It was as if he were telling me not to apologize for my Christianity by qualifying it with labels. "Just admit that you're a Christian! Goddamnit!" And from that place, I can genuinely meet other people and unite with another religion.

I think, that for me now, I must allow myself to embrace Jesus, and Christianity as my map toward friendship with God. Even though I find so many more truths in M. R.'s teachings from the Sufi tradition than from Biblical teachings. Even though I desire to further explore the Tao and Zen, those are all tools, just like Christianity. (And I believe it's crucial to recognize that religion is a tool. A discipline, a map toward spiritual re-union, and re-membrance with God. A technique for faith. As soon as we put our faith in a religion, instead of God, we've lost the graceful gift of that religion, which is friendship with God.) That said, I am a Christian because to deny the religion that leads me to falling in longing with God, is to deny the graceful gift inherent in that religion, which is friendship with God.

—Nathan Palmer

**When I was a little girl Jesus was very real to me as a compassionate being, probably because of all the Sunday school and cultural propaganda: "Jesus loves me," etc.** I used to draw crayon pictures of the crucifixion. I particularly liked to color in the blood spurting out of his body, and then put white wooly sheep on a hill below him, which was always colored green. I used to see sheep grazing in farmland meadows on the way up to my grandfather's house in Shelbyville, Kentucky, and I associated them with "the Lord is my Shepherd, he maketh me to lie down in green pastures" from the Psalms.

When I got older (but long before mass recognition of the current feminist movement) I rejected Jesus. I realized that a lot of the best stories in the Bible centered on men. What did it have to do with me? Absolutely nothing. As for the women in the Bible, I didn't identify with them at all, especially Mary the mother of God, who seemed really boring and passive. I resented her as a role model. Why did she have to be the mother of God? Why couldn't she just BE God? But, no, men got all the best parts. What's clear (like the alcoholism in my family) is that the Bible is full of woman-hating bullshit and that was never acknowledged by anybody when I was growing up. It was just another secret, another big lie that weakened the whole Christian schtick.

Come to think of it, I'm not sure I rejected Jesus. It was more like he rejected me. I didn't have a penis so I couldn't be a member of his club. And to do so through the female models offered in the Bible actually felt harmful, like it would diminish me as a person.

Child of my generation, I drifted towards Buddhism. I did a lot of sitting practice and was peripherally involved (through a boyfriend, how unliberated!) with Trungpa Rimpoche's community in both in Kentucky and Colorado, and with the Zen Center in San Francisco. But it seemed to me that their traditions and practices were almost as excluding and demeaning of women as Christianity was, although at least they had more female deities, and more powerful and interesting ones, than Protestantism seemed to offer.

I never officially joined any Buddhist communities. I ended up doing sitting practice by myself or with a friend or two, reading books, going to an occasional lecture by some "spiritual" person, and performing my own private rituals and prayers. One of the friends I explored spirituality with brought me to St. Gregory's. She never pressured me to join, but her involvement drew me deeper into the community. I was attracted to the energy I found there. Still, I resisted joining — even after I had come to know and love a lot of people there.

Finally I did join, but I still had a lot of questions and doubts, not only about Jesus, but also about my role as a member of the Christian community. I'm still struggling with the issue of whether I'm a Christian or not. If not, do I still belong at St. Gregory's?

—Catherine Shallcross

**Personally, I never give a thought that Jesus is not with me, as I have always known even as a small child that he certainly was.**

I have never doubted or questioned that all these years. Even in my saddest, most difficult moments, I know deep in my heart that he is always with me.

I rarely discuss my feelings with anyone about my religious beliefs, but I am sure I must be one of the humble, believing servants that simply knows and accepts Jesus.

I am sure the years in my early childhood when my mother was my Sunday school teacher made a very deep impression on me, as well as did attending Bible camp the summer I was twelve. At that camp either Jesus or an image, i.e., an angel, revealed himself to me, just confirming he was with me, as I already knew.

—Pat Butler

**I think of Jesus as a presence permeating the space, the building, and the people, and only able to act through us.**

His body is the molecules of creation. So the art of yielding becomes foremost (*taiji*). I see my photography, as others see their gifts, as being the hands and eyes and mouth of Jesus acting in the world today. What our little minds believe hardly seems important, only that we allow God to act in and through us. How he holds us is with acceptance — and humor.

—David Sanger

continued on page 6

I'M NOT  
I'M NOT SURE I  
SURE I  
REJECTED JESUS.  
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REJECTED  
HE REJECTED ME.  
JESUS.



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## THE ENERGY I FOUND THERE

Continued from page 5

WHAT  
LOOK. PAY  
YOU SEEK  
ATTENTION.  
WHAT YOU SEEK  
IS RIGHT  
HERE.  
HERE

**Jesus' presence is subtle at St. Gregory's. This is important, especially to those who've had negative experiences in places where "Jesus" is used to further unfortunate agenda.**

In the Eucharist, in the celebration of the Resurrection, in the preaching, Jesus' presence is not so much talked about as it is treated as a very accessible mystery. We do not claim to know what Jesus said, nor do we claim to know exactly what Jesus is to everyone. There's lots of room for plurality of experience, based — and this is important — on a clear concept of Jesus as the essence of love and desire. All of this provides an environment in which Jeff (a Jew) and I (a Christian) can get past lots of American silliness about Jesus and have an ongoing experience of Jesus that is both extremely fulfilling and challenging.

—Katherine Powell Cohen

**I realize that I hold the Jesus of the Bible rather tentatively. Hearing his voice in the Bible confuses me.** I hear those paradoxical parables, and I just don't know what to make of them, even after ten years of hearing them almost weekly. I also hear a kind of impatience in his voice that makes me feel ashamed for not getting what he is saying. And I get even more confused trying to unweave the strands of the stories that are the writer's voice or the early church speaking. When I hear your voice or Rick's or M. R.'s break open the Biblical text and show me a way in to a story of radical love and redemption, then I am comforted. I think that is why I have never been able to sustain a practice of reading the Bible, but I have sustained a practice of coming to church even though it is far away and a big job to get our whole family there on a Sunday morning. I so want to come hear those stories and to be led into them. I need to be led in again and again.

The Jesus we find in our experience I hold with great tenderness. Often with tears. When an experience moves me to tears, I know I am holding Jesus. When people stand up at church to share their stories, I feel I am figuratively holding them on my lap like I would hold one of my children as they tell me something really important. I come to church longing for that moment when I am holding either the preacher or the sermon-sharer, looking into his/her eyes and listening closely for something powerful, a story that makes my blood course with the sweetness and sorrow of this life: Then I am holding Jesus. Because I think that is what Jesus told us to do: LOOK. PAY ATTENTION. WHAT YOU SEEK IS RIGHT HERE. Of course that doesn't happen only in church. It happens a LOT at home — obviously in the joyful moments, but also in the painful, hurtful exchanges between us, because I know that we are engaged in a lifelong journey that is a manifestation of our desire for union with God. Sometimes we pull away from each other, but it is part of the same struggle for union.

—Tracy Haughton

**I was reared as a fundamentalist Southern Baptist. I didn't like the Jesus introduced to me in Sunday School, the Sunbeams, or the Royal Ambassadors of Christ.** My greatest fear was that I would actually "let him into my heart," an act that was entirely expected by the adults supervising my religious education. I knew my heart was a vital organ, and I did not want some creature lodged in there, perhaps disrupting things.

Jesus had brown hair, wore a white dress, and always acted "nice." I was brought up to be a Christian Gentleman. This I did, until things ended cataclysmically when I turned 17, was condemned as gay, and forced to leave home and church.

Because of all this, I am still hesitant about embracing and talking about Jesus. When I find myself doing so I often recoil, imagining I sound exactly like the people who cast me out, years ago. I am usually repulsed by sentimental talk about him, by people claiming to love him, by those claiming to be "born again in the Lord." (I have no earthly idea what this means.)

The only way I can hold Jesus is to see him in the flesh. It is perfectly clear to me that Jesus is a ghetto baby, a junkie, a drunk passed out on Sixth Street, a gay man beaten to death in Wyoming, the guests at Martin de Porres, the people who serve them. The resurrection occurs every time I see Jesus, and this is often: at Martin's, at Communion, on the street.

—Dave Hurlbert



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***“How we hold Jesus” is not resonant with me. I barely remember Jesus being mentioned*** in the Disciples of Christ church of my childhood. I have seen/heard Jesus myself three times at least, two of those in images. Those experiences have not altered my life in the “Damascus” sense. They are more like bright stars in the firmament of experience, perhaps defining new constellations (but perhaps not). These experiences are like a skein of yarn hanging from the loom at which you are weaving your life: they may be woven into the fabric, but it may not be clear yet where or how.

—Scott King



Detail, THE MAN WHO HAD NO WEDDING GARMENT, from *Secrets of the Magdalen Laundries* installation by Diane Fenster ©2000.

***When I was a young adult, my relationship with Jesus was rather like that of a wild animal approaching a watering hole — desperate need, terrible fear.***

I wanted to live my life with the single-hearted purity of Jesus’ own. I wanted to be righteous; I wanted to live in integrity; I wanted to be redeemed. I was also terrified of being rejected, certain I was beyond redemption, and much too proud and frightened to give away that much power over myself to anyone. It was an untenable place to stay in for very long. In attending prayer meetings at college, my defenses were finally breached far enough that I gave in to my desire — partially. I wore a tiny cross and considered myself Christian, but was too ashamed and proud to admit my faith in public.

It was somehow the very concreteness of Jesus that created a barrier for me. I could encounter, define, and believe in God the Spirit however that made sense to me; faith in Jesus felt far more demanding. There were too many stories, too much dialogue, too clear a life lived in a particular way. The stories asked you to swallow them whole (or perhaps be swallowed by them) and I couldn’t let myself do that. I was sure that if I ever gave myself up to full faith in Jesus, I would actually have to go and do as he said. My fierce longing for integrity would leave me no other choice. That terrified me, I refused to do it . . . and yet I kept feeling this powerful longing.

It was the preaching at St. Gregory’s that helped me imagine a faith generous enough to embrace the complete truth of who I was and what my life had been, as well as the life and experience of Jesus himself. The preachers clearly had a sustaining and lively faith in God and yet there was a lot of permission to ask questions, even hostile ones. They examined the Gospel stories openly but without ever devaluing them or negating their spiritual authenticity. And during the sharing, people listened to one another’s hard experience, trusting that even there, God was really present.

It no longer felt to me as though it were all or nothing; in fact, it was rather like discovering that solids are composed of atoms. I began to see that faith could actually be an open and living framework shaped around Jesus, its heart. A framework composed of the truth of who we are and our real, often hard experience, living in honest and fearless relationship with the spaces in-between, spaces large enough to accept and sustain important questions and painful doubts. All held holy, its God-given power and mystery still intact, and all revealing the shape of God, who enlivens and defines it.

For me, this was the way forward that I’d been both seeking and resisting for so long, the final step into a larger faith in Jesus. A faith generous enough to encompass me, my experience, my longing, my fear, my sins, and my joy. A faith by which I could encounter God in Christ Jesus and yet live: cleansed, reshaped, made far more whole than I ever dreamt of. A faith with which I could finally turn completely and honestly to face Jesus — and then freely and joyously accept that compelling and so long denied invitation to go and do as he said.

—Mary Grove

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 FRAMEWORK

## THE ENERGY I FOUND THERE

Continued from page 7

LET MY MIND AND  
SHOW ME WHAT IS MISSING

HERE. SHOW ME. LET MY MIND

AND HEART GROW BIGGER.

***I think maybe I'm still the Unitarian at heart. When I hear people like Michael Barger for whom Christ is the center of spiritual life talk about Jesus, I am amazed. I just don't see Christ as a deity.***

The Trinity isn't something I think about. When I pray, I think of God, the One, the Force, the Great Creator. As little Unitarians we were taught that Jesus was the best man who ever lived. I'm not sure I'm not still there.

When I think of Jesus, it is as the symbol of the great mass of humanity, suffering. That's why the crucifixion is so important to me, because in it I am identified with all other humans, in pain and compassion and love. I have prayed the Jesus prayer many times, and have felt my prayers answered. In it I feel I am lining up with all humanity. I am saying, "Show me what is missing here. Show me. Let my mind and heart grow bigger." Inevitably they do. Is it Lord Jesus who answers my prayer, or is it me getting in line behind Jesus, waiting on the Lord?

—Barbara Jay



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***How do I hold Jesus? Jesus lives in my heart. He lives there by invitation.***

This took place at a specific moment. Shortly after a Cursillo weekend, at a fourth-day group meeting, Jake asked me if I had invited Jesus into my heart. "Oh, sure," I said, perhaps even thinking, "Hasn't everyone?" Jake persisted. "I mean really asked him to come into your heart, to offer your life to him." This bothered me. Jake was really getting over the top, I thought.

When I got home, I thought about it. I wasn't really certain. I prayed about it, looking for a particular spot for Jesus. And finally I got down on my knees beside my bed and said, "Jesus, please come into my heart. I offer you my life. Let it be yours."

And there Jesus has been, ever since. Like wallpaper. You know how it is with wallpaper. One gets used to it, sometimes not even noticing its presence. And then, while topping one's egg, one notices and says, "Isn't this wallpaper beautiful. So welcoming at the beginning of the day."

That's a bit how it has been with Jesus; I can forget about his presence, barely noticing him, and then, without even thinking about it, say, "Jesus, what am I supposed to do with this?" And there he is: with me, clued in, not needing explanations or details but fully up to speed and WITH ME.

Now God is another question. He can be pretty remote. And the Spirit? Who can predict the Spirit? She comes and goes willy-nilly. But Jesus has taken up residence and is there. I do not need to worry about alienating him, and for me, with my great sense of being alien, this may be the only place in my life where this is true. With Jesus I am not called to explain or apologize or wonder how things are. The intimacy is immediate and persistent.

—Norma Harrington

***Jesus, Who????? You mean that guy we drag out on Christmas and Easter, right? That aspect/person of God "that dare not speak his name"?***

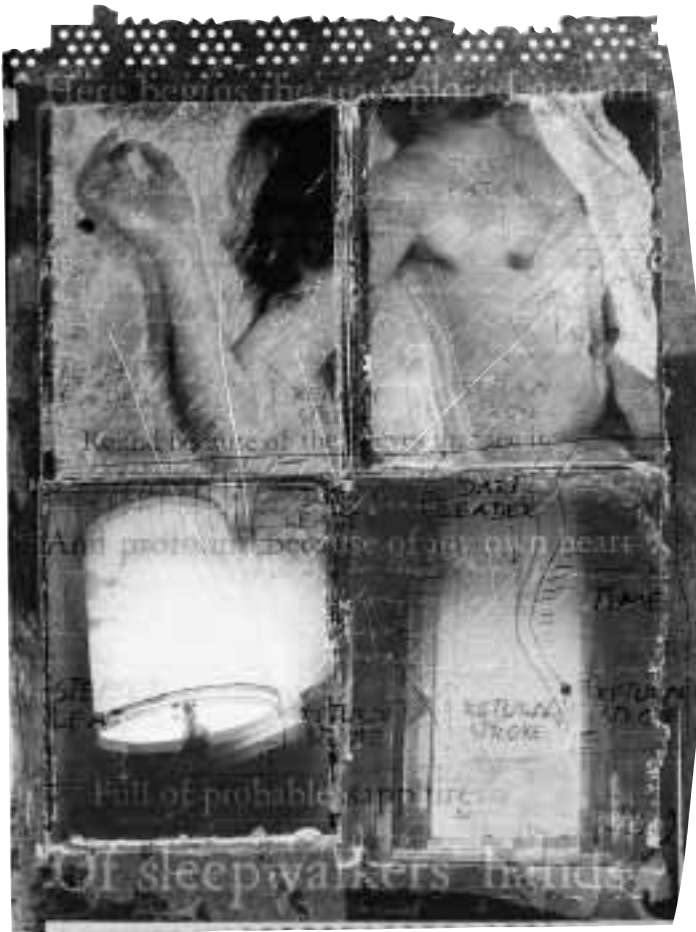
Jesus shows up SO powerfully and beautifully in your more inspired Eucharistic prayers and so discordantly in the collects at the end of our community prayers. He just can't find a comfortable way into the sermons and sharing. And unlike God, with whom we seem to be content to wrestle, Jesus seems to get left outside like Rick in that snowstorm, or relegated to our smaller groups — Taize, the Bonhoeffer group, and others — where people are already more comfortable. It's almost like Jesus is the "inner mystery" we save for the initiates.

Part of it is clearly a desire not to exclude or alienate in a congregation that not only contains a very broad diversity of faiths, but that also seems to be an open door into faith and the church. The "preacher's chair" seems to have the easiest time talking about Jesus as historical/academic figure, challenging but not threatening.

In my adult life, I want an easy statement or creed. The Sh'ma and the Shahada — both are perfect, both are big, airy spaces to discover a growing and changing faith. I really want to leave the room when the creed pops up. I don't believe much of it, even metaphorically. I feel like a hypocrite for saying it, like an infidel for not, and like a weasel for only saying the parts I can honestly say. I get increasingly angry at being encouraged to mouth the words at a baptism when I want so desperately to learn to say what is true for me under the umbrella of a shared proclamation like the Shahada or the Sh'ma.

Jesus seems most real to me as a man given great vision and inspiration, who was faithful to his calling and who used very bit of the gifts God gave him. As he used what God gave him, God poured more and more of Himself into Jesus to the point that they became One. The Resurrection for me looks more like Paul and Mark's Gospel than like Luke or John's.

—Leesy Taggart



**The only thing that makes a church, synagogue, or mosque different from an AA meeting, or a bridge club, or a bunch of guys watching hockey in a bar, is that everyone stops to listen together to a story that has been told and retold** and amended and reworked and retold and added to and retold for five thousand years. The story is so good (and flawed and disturbing) we all tend to think we know it already, but something about it always catches us by surprise.

One of the kinds of surprise that resounds most powerfully in the silences of our worship is the experience of meeting Jesus. A saying or act recounted in the Gospel will unexpectedly impart the direct sense of the man himself, of his living personality. Whatever contemporary scholars may say about these passages and their historicity, I know it when it happens. The force of Jesus' words and deeds will reach across centuries and pierce dense veils of theology, piety, doctrine, and custom, and speak to me in an immediate and powerful way.

Jesus is an embodiment of God's longing to be human, to share in the full depth of human experience, including the experience of being a unique, conditional, limited and particular human being. He is especially, and in greatest measure, an embodiment of God's longing to know the human experience of longing for God. There are many points along the spectrum of human desire, and I hold Jesus as a brother, or friend, who knows them all.

—Daniel Green

**There is an experience of God that I have frequently, and it doesn't seem to be tied to any activity or environment.**

You know how when you're sitting reading or doing something you're absorbed in, and there in the room with you is someone you love, and they are also reading. Every now and then you look up and catch their eye and you smile at each other without saying anything, and then go back to reading. I feel that way with God: Whenever I look up (or in?) there's that same sense of brief, loving contact and then it goes, or sometimes it lingers, but I usually can't take it for very long. Maybe because I'm afraid I'm kidding myself...but this is a pretty reliable sensation. I feel it a few times a day sometimes.

But I also want to say more about my experiences in liturgy. The feeling of intimacy with God most frequently comes for me during the Eucharist. I almost always find the Eucharist moving, but sometimes this goes beyond being moved. This sense of love washes over me (or wells up). I feel physically warmer, and often the lights will seem brighter, or the quality of light richer in some way. Sometimes (rarely), I get trembly, but I often get an excited feeling in my stomach, like nerves almost, so that at the end of the service I will feel exhausted, my legs weak. (The New Year's Eve service was like that for me.) It's a kind of sexy feeling, but without the sense of hurry! I know that it's "from God," as we used to say, because at the same time I love everyone in the room and want nothing more than to serve them. And what's more I want to keep loving them — even people I KNOW I don't like. Loving everyone doesn't seem nauseatingly Pollyannish when I'm in this glow; it seems strong and delightful and full of power.

—Lizzie Calogero

**Re: How we talk about Jesus. My experience is that Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists like to hear about Jesus,**

kind of like the guy, admire him for his courage and his insight. So we don't have to be defensive. We do have to be sincere and honest about our relationship with Him and be as clear as we can about who Jesus is to us. Usually I wait for the other person to bring the subject up. In Laos, where Christians sometimes get in trouble just for being Christians and Christianity is very much a minority religion, I am particularly careful. Nevertheless, when the subject of religion comes up I try to be as honest and forthright and comprehensive as I can be about my Christian convictions. I love Jesus. In my mind Jesus never kowtows to the lowest common denominator. He always met people authentically.

—Lee Thorn



Above left:  
CANTO SEVEN/THE PATH  
OF LIGHTNING AS IT  
DESCENDS FROM THE SKY  
Iris print from the *Hide and Seek*  
series by Diane Fenster ©1996.

## (A HALF-JEWISH PAGAN WRITES ABOUT JESUS)

by Lisa Garrigues,  
from *Sky Full of Holes* ©2000

Lisa Garrigues has been featured at various poetry readings throughout the Bay Area. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and won first prize in the *Pacific Coast Journal's* 1999 fiction contest. Her poems range in tone from the whimsical to the passionate, covering such topics as social injustice, bats, Jesus, and human feet.



FRENCHTOWN, painting by  
Miles Stryker, ©1986.

I reach my hand  
    deep inside      my poetry box  
pull out  
    a beard, a head, the cross  
    blood and nails  
How can I  
    sing the song he sang  
Who am I  
    to try  
and even worse  
    Do I care?

Jesus  
    was the word  
    spit      in a sigh  
from the old lady  
    in the Greyhound Bus Station  
with the sore feet

Jesus  
    was the ominously well lit around the head  
    no-flesh of a man with the overly kind eyes  
    and too long robes and hair  
at the backs of Bibles  
    that other kids had  
while my family was mixed up  
    in a vinegar salad of commies Agnostics & Jews

Jesus  
    was the gooey eyed  
vacant faced Christian boy  
    with the button-downed shirt  
wanting me  
    to come to his Bible study group  
or else

Jesus  
    was the name      flung  
    from the lips      of the manifest  
destiny  
    priests & cowboys  
    scarred      with the lash into  
    the flesh of Indians

Jesus  
    was the scream of the inquisitors  
    watching my sisters go up in flames

Jesus  
    was the reason  
    6 million of my aunts and uncles died

Jesus  
I want to hate you  
    for the lies that have been committed  
    in your name

I want to hate you  
    because you haven't returned to stop it

Jesus  
I want to hate you  
    because you are white  
    and a man  
    and a virgin

Jesus  
I want to hate you  
    because you let them kill you  
    over and over  
    every time they say your name

Jesus      how  
can I turn this poem around  
help me  
    show me the way

With that  
a voice  
fell out of the ceiling  
and landed  
in a pool of light  
right next to me  
and said:

*Girl*  
*Just grab your pen and write*  
*its in the doing*  
*its in the fight*  
*You think I'm a wimp*  
*an upstart pimp for some backwards dog*  
*Get with it girl*  
*Have you forgotten how to laugh*  
*Don't you remember how to dance?*  
*Make me who I am*  
*Make me who you want me to be*

*Quit waiting for my resurrection*  
*eliminate your cosmic vivisection*  
*pull your head out of the sky*  
*and see me here now*  
*in all the flesh you see around*  
*Call me Sonny or Pablo or Lee or Denise*  
*Taisha or Moishe or Kazimbe or Jane*  
*Ride your roller blades in the shade*  
*with me cuz I am down*  
*to the ground*  
*all around*  
*Jesus is my name*

Excuse me  
    (I said)  
for my criticism  
    though I appreciate  
your witticism  
    I'm looking for a little more  
mysticism  
    something  
    more  
cosmic  
    more  
ethereal  
    more  
rays of light and second  
    coming into sight and angels mending  
    my broken wings and....

*Girl*  
*(he said)*  
*unzip your poem*  
*and step outside of it*  
*it's time      for you to see*  
*that you've always been free*  
*to meet me as I am*  
*however you want me to be*  
*breathe    your soul*  
*and live    the light of it*

Saying this  
he reached inside my brain  
and pulled out  
the recognition of his name  
Since then  
I've never been the same

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**DIANE FENSTER** has been called an important voice in the development of a true digital aesthetic. Her work has been internationally exhibited, in such places as the San Jose Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and at the Centro Cultural de Belem in Lisbon, Portugal. Her latest project, *Secrets of the Magdalen Laundries*, was shown at Gallery Hensch in New York City. Fenster believes that her art works through myth, spirit, science, and technology. She calls herself a “modern alchemist who transforms electrical patterns into art.”

“I want to uncover the sense of mystery that guides me to create certain images and uncover recurring forms. For me, the imagination is a threshold to an inner world. I uncover the tension between an image that conjures its mutable revelations and the *idee fixe*. My work embodies the hidden poetry of the ordinary, making visible what previously was hidden.”

**MILES STRYKER** received a MFA in Painting from the Academy of Art College in San Francisco. His work is shown in galleries in San Francisco and in New York. He is also the founder and director of the Society for the Development of Fictional Archeology, an organization that explores the relationship between art and society.

“I want to make symbols for the emotions and push the borders and outlines of the figures you see. There is the illusion of solidity yet the work is primarily about the boundaries that define the figure — the flat outlines of the border, the uncomfortable territory we all trace as we move toward memory. I am concerned with information, the juxtaposition of image and its subsequent dialectical relationship. I am concerned with visual data and how that generates human emotional response and attitude. I am not afraid of the word ‘emotion’ or of emotion’s place in all of artistic endeavor, no matter how conceptual.”

For more about the artists, please visit Diane Fenster’s website at [www.dianefenster.com](http://www.dianefenster.com) and Miles Stryker’s website at [www.bete-noir.com](http://www.bete-noir.com).



I RECEIVED YOUR KIND LETTER, dye sublimation and image transfer prints on found cotton bedsheet, from *Secrets of the Magdalen Laundries* installation by Diane Fenster ©2000.

**GREGORY OF NYSSA**, a fourth-century bishop, theologian, and patron of St. Gregory’s Church, saw life as unending progress towards discovering God at work among humanity, and sin as refusal to keep growing in this discovery. In this journal, which takes its name from his writings, we aim to further Gregory’s vision by featuring two kinds of work:

⊕ essays on liturgy and church practice, focusing on fresh and ancient approaches to corporate worship that honor human experience as an opening to God;

⊕ writing and art by people who are searching for truth in their lives.

We are committed to the sharing of authentic personal experience as opposed to ideas or opinions. We welcome the voices of Christians, people of other faiths, and people of no particular faith.

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# WE NEED TO HEAR FROM YOU

**T**HIS IS TRUE  
PERFECTION:  
NOT TO AVOID A  
WICKED LIFE  
BECAUSE WE FEAR  
PUNISHMENT,  
LIKE SLAVES; NOT  
TO DO GOOD  
BECAUSE WE EXPECT  
REPAYMENT, AS IF  
CASHING IN ON THE  
VIRTUOUS LIFE BY  
ENFORCING SOME  
BUSINESS DEAL.  
ON THE CONTRARY,  
DISREGARDING ALL  
THOSE GOOD THINGS  
WHICH WE DO HOPE  
FOR AND WHICH  
GOD HAS PROMISED  
US, WE REGARD  
FALLING FROM  
GOD'S FRIENDSHIP  
AS THE ONLY THING  
DREADFUL, AND WE  
CONSIDER BECOMING  
GOD'S FRIEND THE  
ONLY THING TRULY  
WORTHWHILE.

GREGORY OF NYSSA

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*Thank you for your support and encouragement over the past six years. We're hopeful and excited about the future of **God's Friends**, and pray that you will continue to be part of it.*

*Wishing you the peace of God,*

Tracy Haughton  
Editor

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