

F R I E N D S I N C H R I S T

*Volume One, Number One * Spring 2001*

A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

JENNY IRELAND

THROUGHOUT MY EARLY CHILDHOOD I believe I experienced a fairly easy harmony: God was in heaven, my parents loved me, and I them, and the days flowed naturally, yielding mostly happy experiences and contentment. Since I was not raised in a churchgoing or a religious family, the ideas I formed about God were ones I gleaned on my own. I did sometimes perceive a mystery, something holy, which I associated with God.

By the time I was in college, I felt such a discontinuity with this period of my life that it might as well have been someone else's childhood. What faith I had was easily upset by arguments questioning the existence of God, given the suffering of innocent people. However, something that I never dreamed of happened one beautiful October when I was in my late twenties. God tapped me on the shoulder, so to speak, and I knew, as I had never understood before, that He is very real and very present. It was as though I had awakened to a new universe.

I could barely scratch the surface when I tried to share this experience with other people I was close to, and I quickly gave up trying. I had no contact with a faith community, and did not even know that such a community might be possible. For some years I had an abiding sense of the presence of God, albeit at times I felt that He was more a judge than a close Friend. Yet there has been no doubt in my mind that He has sustained and healed me and continues to do so every day.

The faith community I was blessed eventually to discover was a Quaker meeting. My daughter was six years old when we started attending meeting, and I remember listening to the sweet voices of the First Day children singing "The George Fox Song," and feeling such gratitude to be a member of this community, a feeling which characterized much of my experience of worship there.

We attended this meeting regularly for six years and were involved in the community in a variety of ways. The experience of the "gathered" meeting or the sense of the oneness of
continues on page four



PLEASE TURN TO PAGE THREE FOR A WELCOMING MESSAGE FROM OUR EDITOR.



MISSION STATEMENT

Our goal is to assist people into fulfillment as children of God through a living relationship with Jesus Christ.

CORE VALUES

- We are committed to seeking God through Jesus Christ.
- We are committed to fulfilling God's desire for us and others to become children of God.
- We are committed to living Jesus' command to love one another.
- We are committed to sharing God's love with others by bringing them into a loving spiritual community.
- We are committed to the Bible as an essential resource for spiritual growth.
- We are committed to the immediate experience of the Holy Spirit as an essential guide for spiritual growth.
- We are committed to prayer, in its varied forms, as an essential method for our fulfillment as children of God.
- We are committed to communal worship as the community's expression of its relationship to God.
- We are committed to using expectant waiting as a vital form of prayer and worship.
- We are committed to a serving ministry assisting the healing of brokenness and the implementation of justice.
- We are committed to recognizing, nurturing and developing the gifts for ministry and leadership in all.
- We are committed to unity with others in the body of Christ in a common effort to witness the Good News of Jesus Christ.

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FRIENDS IN CHRIST, INC.

6006 Greenbelt Road, Suite 110
Greenbelt, MD 20770
(301) 773-8007 (24-hour voice mail system)
<http://www.fic.uni.cc/>
E-mail fic@friendsinchrist.net

We hold our weekend worship gatherings at the Greenbelt Community Center, 15 Crescent Road Greenbelt, Maryland, 3:30-5 PM on Saturdays; please call fiC for directions or visit our web site.



FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader:

Welcome to the first issue of the Friends in Christ newsletter.

Friends in Christ began several years ago when John Smallwood, Bill Samuel, and Lincoln Cory were called start to this Christ-centered ministry. Nobody is paid for this work. We are all seekers of Christ together.

I pondered this newsletter for a long time. It's difficult to capture the essence of our worship experience in words, or to explain what draws people to Friends in Christ when there are so many other good churches, often closer to home. What is it that makes Friends in Christ different?

I can say that our worship experiences are both gentle and yet authentic. They are simple, and focused on sharing our personal experiences in light of the Bible. Our worship is imbued with the Holy Spirit.

Nobody in Friends in Christ acts out of pretence. All are looking for a religious community without encumbrances and without falsehood.

When this newsletter project began, I hoped some of the spirit of our group worship would come across in the writings. I don't know if we succeeded, but I hope that some glimmer of who we are comes across.

Bill Samuel's web-based ministry has been discovered and appre-

ciated by people all over the world. Many people participate in Friends in Christ through him, without coming to our worship sessions. For you, this newsletter is way to keep in touch. We would love to hear from you and know more about you and your spiritual journey. At it's best, this newsletter will bring together both 'sides' of the Friends in Christ ministry and allow us to reflect (on) our full diversity. The more voices participating in the newsletter, the better we will tell the story of who we are. To add your thoughts to the newsletter, please send e-mails to direynolds@earthlink.net.

Sincerely,
Diane Reynolds

FEED THE HUNGRY

JENNY IRELAND

You may not yet have discovered this site. Simply by hitting it, you help provide food to starving people. At a minimum I click on this one daily because in a matter of seconds you can actually accomplish something that really matters.

Here's the site:

www.thehungersite.com

FRIEND IN CHRIST BIBLE STUDY

The fiC Bible study group is studying the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke side-by-side. This is a closed group, but new Bible studies should arise every 3 months or so. Keep an eye on the Friends in Christ web page at <http://www.fic.uni.cc/>

"JUST AS I AM IS ENOUGH"

JACKQUELINE PHILLMORE-ANTOINE

There's a joy in my heart each time I realize,
Just as I am is enough in my Creator's eyes.

I feel his love so deep in my soul,
What a wonderful gift for me to behold.

At night as I pray, I hear his sweet voice say,
"It's all right it's all okay, I will comfort you along the way."

When I'm down and feeling depressed,
Thinking that life is such a cruel test.

He'll take me in his arms and guide me through.
Just to ask him, is all that I need to do.

So I lift my voice up to the heavens in praise,
Giving thanks for all of my previous days.

It's the Creator's work that we must all do.
For His only plan is for what's best for you.

continued from page one

the group with the Holy Spirit, and the knowledge that He is present to each human being, and is the Loving Guide to all truth, are fruits of worship with this meeting. These years affirmed as well my belief that creed is insignificant in comparison to the inward disposition of a person's heart, and that the words and writings of people of faiths other than Christian reveal God in a myriad ways. I do believe that Christ supremely reveals to us the face of God, and that it is He who speaks to us in the New Testament, and in our hearts.

For the past year I have had the joy of being a part of another faith community, Friends in Christ. Our worship together has been deeply sustaining, and truly the Spirit is tangibly with us each gathering. It has been a very rich and healing experience to be guided into fellowship with these friends. My faith continues to be nourished and to grow, and for this and many, many blessings, I thank God.

THE WAY

JOHN SMALLWOOD

In the beginning, it was simple.

There were no churches or cathedrals. There were no fixed liturgies or mighty choirs. There were no clergy or laity. There were no creeds or denominations.

There were, simply, followers of Jesus.

And they called themselves: the Way of the Lord. (Acts 9:2; 19:23; 24:14)

The Way.

"I am the Way," said Jesus. (John 14:6)

The Way. Doorway. Pathway. Roadway.

The Way. Manner. Method. Procedure.

Jesus offers us something which is not a place. He gives us something which is not rigid or fixed.

He provides us with a process, to fulfill ourselves as children of God. And his course way is fluid, as it flows over the cataracts of our lives and swirls around the eddies of our experiences.

You do not stand in a doorway; you pass through it. You do not sit on a pathway; you walk it.

We start with Jesus himself. We follow his life way. We discern him in our everyday experiences. We listen to him in our daily challenges. We heed him through our own life way.

We, Friends in Christ, have returned to a very simple premise. Like the very first disciples, we try to understand the mystery of Christ, among us, in our lives. But...most of all, we try to stay close to Jesus and follow the Way.

MY JOURNEY

LINCOLN CORY

After attending Adelphi Friends Meeting for many years, suddenly one Sunday during Meeting for Worship, I felt the need for a different Worship group. I looked around and found no one to share my new concern. Later, Bill Samuel encouraged me to join Christian

Quakers north of Baltimore. Since that time I have been involved in many Christian activities included Advent retreats, Easter sunrise Meetings, a revival, and the Traveling Meeting with Conservative Friends of Virginia. We had communion when the group felt it appropriate. I was one of the four founders when Friends in Christ started to evolve; first in Hyattsville, now in Greenbelt.

I find reading the Bible and relating it to my personal life to be very helpful. I want to spend more time on the inward journey with God and Jesus. Personal devotions will become part of my daily life. It seems time for more changes in my life.

MY JOURNEY

REGINA LANNING

I think the most profound experience in my life has come from living the present moment — it's attentive as well as waiting. I didn't know this at one time — of course I was too much in a hurry and my perspective was questionable.

At this one time in my life, about 10 years ago, I was waiting silently for God to tell me what he wanted me to do for Him. Many months later I would hear, "Be present to the moment." Well, that was certainly lackluster and vague — so I thought. It did not fall under the "do-ing" aspirations I had envisioned.

But, just the same, a prayer was answered, and I focused on being present to the moment where ever I was. It made me slow down and

notice nature, people, silence and my own spiritual gifts from God's direction. Grace developed a very thank-filled and light hearted spirit.

There is so much enlightenment that flows through the heart of any moment that being present is a preparation for seeing, hearing and responding. Think of it as an acorn. It is so small. Many are missed on the ground. Look for the smallest you can find. Pick it up and grasp its tiny life and it will speak of strength, hope and wisdom. This small acorn speaks of how it will grow to be as large as a might oak. Already on the way to is growing, some day this one acorn will make many other little acorns. Our being present to the moment is the acorn and the growth is God's mysterious Grace. In the present we let go of fear and preoccupation and live trust. "God's word gone out will not return empty."

WHAT FRIENDS IN CHRIST MEANS TO ME

DIANE REYNOLDS

I resisted Friends in Christ for a long time. I didn't want to change my place of worship again; I didn't want to drive so far; the worship was initially difficult to fit into my busy schedule. Yet I came, and have never left.

Friends in Christ meets in the Greenbelt Community Center. We sit in the center of a 1930's classroom, in a circle, on folding chairs. Light flows in from the tall, old-fashioned windows that line one

wall of the room. Quiet music plays at the beginning of each worship so that we can center and pray. Then we read a Bible passage, usually a psalm, and talk about what it means to us in light of our own experiences. After that, we read another Bible passage or two, usually a story or stories about Jesus. One or more persons in the group will have prepared some thoughts on the passage or passages, which they will share. Then we share what the stories mean to us. People speak if they feel moved to do so or stay silent. We end with vocal and silent prayer. Afterwards, we have a social period with refreshments.

I remember one woman sharing an experience of encountering a homeless man on a bus. This homeless man asked her a question: Why does God take care of some people and not others? After she provided a stock answer, he rolled up his sleeve to reveal an arm red like raw meat. As she recoiled in shock, he explained a rat had bitten him one night as he slept in an abandoned building, and the bite had gotten infected. He had a prescription from the hospital, but no money to pay for medications. The question why does God take care of some people and seem to abandon others took on new meaning in light of that experience. Where is God in this? How do we respond to these real experiences?

I have found the group to be gentle, open, and caring. People from all sorts of backgrounds attend. People arrive from different cultures, and at different points in their spiritual journeys. In fiC, anywhere you are on your journey is OK, and there is no pressure to be

something you are not. Some people come only once or twice and receive the healing they need. Or they come a few times and transform us with what they say.

The focus at fiC is Christ-centered and experiential. We are interested in how to live as followers of Jesus—to live as Jesus did—in our daily lives. In this way, we are following in the footsteps of the earliest disciples, before creeds and forms were introduced into the church. Some of us had negative experiences with religion and are seeking healing. For some, the group is a way of finding out if—and how—they can believe in Jesus. Others want to continue a Christian transformation already well underway and deepen an already mature belief. Different backgrounds and traditions make our worship a rich exchange. People interact with each other honestly and without pretence. A loving presence—the Holy Spirit—is almost always felt upon entering the room.

For me, the group has been an answer to prayer, offering me a Christ-centered worship focused on the essentials. It has been accepting, loving, and healing. It offers community with people seeking an authentic relationship with Christ, people who are honest and willing to be vulnerable, people who will not judge me if I do not agree with them. I feel gathered with this community and excited about where we may be led.

A FRESH START

BILL SAMUEL

*God, make a fresh start in me,
shape a Genesis week from the chaos
of my life.*

*Don't throw me out with the trash,
or fail to breathe holiness in me.*

*Bring me back from gray exile, put
a fresh wind in my sails!*

*Give me a job teaching rebels your
ways so the lost can find their way
home.*

(Psalm 51:10-13, *The Message*)

Sometimes we feel a need for a fresh start in life. Our life may seem empty, dull and without meaning. We want more zest in our life.

There are many ways people try to make a fresh start. Perhaps a new house, bigger and more opulent. Maybe a face lift or a tummy tuck. Or a new wardrobe. Perhaps a new lover will bring us the excitement we feel we're missing. Maybe a new job, making more money. How about a shiny, fast new sports car?

The possibilities are endless. So is the potential for disappointment. The things of this world can give brief excitement, the illusion of a bright new day. But the excitement doesn't last, and pretty soon life seems empty once again.

The psalmist doesn't write about doing any of these things.

In fact, he doesn't consider that a fresh start is about something he does. Rather, he recognizes that a true fresh start will only come from letting God work within him, shaping meaning out of the chaos of his life.

God yearns to work within each one of us, filling our empti-

ness and bringing order out of the mess of our lives. Rather than rushing out and doing or buying something, we need to humbly and prayerfully ask God into our lives. This is the secret to a true fresh start, one that can provide a sense of peace and fulfillment that truly lasts.

And when we have allowed God to do this work in us, we will be filled with gratitude and eager to share the possibility of new life with others. We will see the rebellious and lost with the love that God does, and yearn to tell them what God has to offer them.



THE LIVING BIBLE

BILL SAMUEL

"In my experience, the Bible as a static, one dimensional document ceased to speak to my condition years ago. However, when I came to know it as a window into the ongoing dialogue between God and people struggling to know and to understand God, it began nourishing my faith once more."

— Jay Marshall, Dean,
Earlham School of Religion

"...what once looked like immutable cement blocks of words and meaning are more truly shimmering layers that need to pass through the human heart before comprehension can begin."

— Tyler Dancy, Pastor,
Winston-Salem Friends Meeting

There are so many different ways people think about the Bible that sometimes it seems like they

aren't talking about the same book. Some people have been turned off to the Bible by it being presented in a way that made it seem to them cold and distant. People often need to reorient their thinking about the Bible in order for it to have real meaning in their lives.

Much of the Bible consists of stories — stories of how people understood their history as a community, stories of how a variety of people lived their lives, stories (often called parables) used as teaching devices, etc. The stories seek to communicate how God manifests the divine presence in the lives of individuals and communities — and indeed in all creation.

We use stories in teaching children because stories catch their interest and open them up to things we want them to understand. Bible stories have similar value unless the way they are presented closes off people rather than opens them up.

A beautiful thing about most scripture is that it has a number of layers. You can read the same scripture a dozen times, and find a fresh insight each time. To read scripture as having just one narrow thing to teach is to miss much of the great gift scripture is to us if we really take it into our hearts and lives.

The Bible not only shows the dialogue between God and humans in centuries past, but it invites us into that dialogue. It shows people facing timeless issues, ones that we face every day in somewhat different contexts. When the Bible is used well, scripture illuminates our lives and our lives illuminate the scripture. The history of God's interaction with people and our interaction with God today are just



different dimensions of the same basic story.

For the Bible to truly speak to us, we must read it not only with our minds but also with our hearts. Jesus rebuked those in his day who took a legalistic view of the Hebrew scriptures but failed to live out the deeper messages about mercy, compassion, forgiveness, etc. He often pointed to those who had not always kept the rules but whose hearts cried out to God as much better examples for us. If we truly open our hearts to God, we find God speaking through the scriptures in ways that we can not even imagine if we read the Bible with a legalistic mind.

God will transform our lives if we let Him. If we approach the Bible in the ways suggested by the writers quoted above, we will find God speaking to us through the scripture and using it in this transformative process.



BOOK REVIEWS

THE DRAGON DOESN'T LIVE
HERE ANYMORE: LIVING FULLY,
LOVING FREELY, BY ALAN
COHEN

REGINA LANNING

Although the word “dragon” is not mentioned until very deep in the chapters, we quickly get the picture that a “dragon” is any fear or feeling that holds us back from what we are to animate or express with our lives: love for God, neighbor and self. I am rereading *Dragon* for about the 4th time as I go through yet another life-altering

change. I need to review just what perspective or perception I am working with that could alter what is true. With each meditation I highlight the phrases I find useful with a different colored crayon. There is a lot to be learned so my book is a very colorful keepsake for the spiritual journey. “Dragon” is great help on the spiritual path for the tenderfoot or the wise sojourner. The help received is positive and meaningful to today's need for healing that which holds us back from being free and alive.



A PLAIN LIFE: WALKING MY
BELIEF, BY SCOTT SAVAGE

DIANE REYNOLDS
First of several parts

I first became aware of Scott Savage late in 1998. I found *The Plain Reader*, a book he edited, in the simplicity section of the public library. By this time, I had well-immersed myself in the simplicity movement, and so borrowed this book with a reluctant sense of “been there, done that.”

The book however, pushed beyond the boundaries of simplicity books I had read to date, in both its embrace of a radical—“plain”—approach to simplicity that repudiated most of modern technology and in its spirit-filled, Christ-centered core. Here was no façade, no putting on of the exterior “look” of simplicity, no using of simplicity to make life more convenient, but a Christ-guided, religiously-motivated approach to living.

Savage is a Quaker. He and his wife Mary Anne and their children

live as “plain” or Wilburite Quakers, dressing in “plain” clothing akin to that of the Amish and following as closely as possible the example of seventeenth century Quaker founders who believed Christ could speak directly to individual hearts without any need for an intermediate clergy. Savage and his wife contributed essays to the book, as did Amish contributors and contributors from the ecological movement. While the Amish influence on the Savages is strong, due both to their study of the Amish and their actual proximity to an Amish community, in becoming Quakers they are following the more individualist path of letting God speak directly to them.

All of this is a lengthy pre-ambule to a review of Scott Savage's latest book, *A Plain Life: Walking my Belief*. In this book, Savage, who has given up his car for pedestrian and horse-and-buggy forms of transport, takes an eight-day journey—or pilgrimage—to Columbus, Ohio to turn in his driver's license. The walk is a symbolic act of defiance against a culture of the automobile that Savage believes is destroying the fabric of American life. It is also a spiritual journey in which Savage reinforces his ties to his particular place of being and contemplates God as he travels.

Woven into the narrative of his travels is the story of how he and Mary Anne arrived at this particular spiritual and geographic landscape. Because they come out of the same secular background that many of us have experienced: administrative jobs, daily commutes, consumer-driven living and no place for God in their lives, their

story is real and compelling. The unfocused dissatisfaction they initially feel with the way they live—the way most people in our culture live—is akin to what many feel. In their case, they are able to understand that God needs to be at the center of their lives. Their Christianity is deeply felt and believable.

Structuring the narrative is Savage's attempt to memorize a different beatitude every day of his walking trip. As he mediates on the meaning of the beatitudes in general and in the particular context of his journey, our understanding of both the beatitudes and Savage's spiritual quest become deeper.

While I find *A Plain Life* a deeply provocative book, I have to work to adapt Savage's experiences to my own leadings. Like him, I

have struggled with the impulse toward a simpler, more Christ-centered life, yet have never felt an impulse toward rural simplicity. I love nature, and I love the IDEA of a bucolic farming existence, but in reality, I am led in the direction of urban simplicity. Thus, while I agree with his critique of the car, such solutions to the problem of auto transport as driving a horse and buggy, which makes complete sense for Savage's life, are not viable for me or the vast majority of Americans who live far from Amish communities and the resources such communities provide, such as hitching posts behind the local stores.

What the book motivates me to do is to look for comparable urban solutions to the same prob-

lems that beset the Savages. If our family decides to give up our car, can we become activists in promoting viable bus and streetcar transport? Are there other ways to make a car-free life viable in a suburban-urban environment? How can I promote walking in my community? How can I develop urban simplicity? Where can I find models? Can I be part of transforming, not leaving, a suburban landscape?

While Savage's particular path to simplicity is not identical to mine, his book and his life have motivated me to more closely question my own immersion in a consumerist society and the spiritual costs of that immersion.

Next time: choosing to get rid of the TV and one of two cars.

FRIENDS IN CHRIST
6006 GREENBELT ROAD
SUITE 110
GREENBELT MD 20770-1000