DreamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul

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Editorial: Thinking and Living Faith

Thinking and living faith: that's what articles in this Autumn 2010 issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* often address. Anil Solanki blazes the trail with an engaging and even witty yet thought-provoking exploration of Jesus' versus the Devil's methods for handling Bible texts. Dan Hertzler complements Solanki's focus with reviews of books on the teachings of Jesus.

Thinking and living faith: that's what articles in this Autumn 2010 issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* often address.

Then Mark Wenger moves us toward practical ways of implementing scriptural values through habits of recreation, routine rituals, relationship, and religion. Denny Weaver ponders lessons from World Cup soccer.

Next two writers place lived faith in a global context. Amid challenges and joys in Nigeria, Brenda Hartman-Souder shares learnings from making chutney. Lisa Gallagher Landes tells us how watermelons and a loaf of bread symbolize friendship among strangers in Turkmenistan. Renee Gehman flips the angle of vision, exploring the U.S. lives of Bangladeshi expatriates. Greiser's review is not explicitly about faith but does catalyze continued reflection on how people build family and community in any number of different circumstances.

My own column is an effort to bridge the gap I at least too often experience between extraordinary works of God and our daily living—and to seek more regularly to see the holy glowing even in what may often seem mundane. In their own ways the poets too, as gifted poets so often do, show us what happens when we allow daily and holy to jostle each other.

Then in her inimitable style, as she tells of Maximus who has not so much a split personality as a split body and poses unusual challenges for his pastor, Noel King helps us not be too sober about matters of faith and life. —*Michael A. King*

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In This Issue

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In Concert with Apollo's Fire

*March 13, 2010, Severance Hall Concert**

Cellophane candy wrappers cease
fidgeting as the audience takes a final breath.
Elbows settle in the upper balcony

scrunched tight between seats. Quiet. Calm.
Binoculars pass hand-to-hand. Men spread
eagle knees to the back of our seats.

Sergei Babayan touches keys of old.
Coughs checkmate each movement
as he lifts his head side-to-side,

his fingers weave golden strands, directing
violins. The patrons loved Mozart as Severance
Hall dreams of a past when life was simple

like home baked bread with churned butter.
But, you too, Mozart, ran out of funds. Striking
notes ring enchant the butterflies aflutter.

I can almost touch the ceiling's gold leaf.
Allegretto, my fingers relax their grip
as Sergei digs deep into circling arms

that pause before speaking. Crescendo.
He leads us like sheep.
Orchid petals fall into our hands.

Concert Note:
The antique German Bluthner piano chosen for this concert developed technical problems due to Ohio's dry winter. The instrument is made of European wood and was accustomed to a mild, humid climate. Therefore, Babayan performed on a light, transparent Steinway concert grand.

Jesus' Method or the Devil's?

The Right Way to Use the Scriptures

Anil Daniel Solanki

Using Scripture verses for one's own purpose has been problematic in our times, throughout the history of the church, and even during the time of Jesus.

The temptation narratives, recorded by both Matthew (4:1-11) and Luke (4:1-13), give insight as to how Jesus uses the Scriptures. We might call the way Jesus uses Scriptures *Jesus' method* and the way the Devil uses Scriptures the *Devil's method*.

In all three temptations Jesus uses Scripture to defeat and silence Satan. The comparison is never clearer than in the Second Temptation, when Satan, the Devil, challenges Jesus: "Throw yourself down, God will command his angels to lift you up," says Satan, quoting Psalm 91:11-12.

Not so long ago a TV news report told of a mother duck leaving her nest on a high ledge of a city building and going to a pool of water, leaving her ducklings high above the street. A banker walking by saw a duckling tumbling out of the nest and somehow caught it. Then one by one others tumbled out and he caught each. Still some remained in the nest, so with a ladder he rescued those remaining and led them all across the

street to reunite them with the mother duck. The banker became an angel for the ducklings!

The temptation narrative is different. In this temptation the Devil asks Jesus to throw himself down purposely to test God—the Devil uses the Scripture to validate and support himself (Ps. 91:11-12). But Jesus says, "It is also written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'" (Deut. 6:16). *The Devil takes verses out of context and uses them in the wrong way to challenge Jesus and to test God.*

The Devil takes one scripture but Jesus takes another scripture and puts the two in dynamic tension, in holy tension.

Some congregations emphasize handling snakes (Mark 16:18)! Some Christian snakehandlers have died when bitten. This is testing God and not a wise use of the Scriptures.

The Devil takes one scripture but Jesus takes another scripture and puts the two in dynamic tension, in holy tension. Two scriptures side by side: *because truth has many sides, not just one.* Compare what one text says with what another text says—they must be seen in creative tension or balance.

Let us apply Jesus' method to two verses that sound strange (1 Cor. 14:34-35). "Women should remain *silent* in the churches. . . . " Some Christians use these verses to silence women in the church and treat them as second-class citizens. Once the ABC Evening News told of one woman, a Sunday school teacher for 35 years, who was prohibited from teaching by a new pastor. Such congregations insist that "Women can't do this; women can't do that." No teaching or preaching—maybe no Amen!

Now let's use Jesus' method. In the same book of 1 Corinthians, verse 11:5, Paul speaks of any "woman who prays or proclaims God's message in public worship" (GNT). And in Galatians 3:28-29, Paul stresses that "There is neither . . . male nor female, for you are all *one* in Christ Jesus."

Discrimination on the basis of gender should not be allowed. At no time in the early church were women *silent*. They sang, prayed, taught, and preached. It was only after Paul's death that thinking of and treating women as inferior and to be silenced came into more widespread practice.

In Romans 16 several women are mentioned as leaders. Priscilla was an important leader and teacher (Rom. 16:3). More women than men are praised in this chapter for their leadership. Phoebe was a minister (deacon) at the church in Centchrea (16:1). She was a benefactor and supporter of Paul. Persis is referred to as "beloved." Junia was referred to as an apostle (So her name was later changed to Junias—no such name was discovered in Rome according to archeological findings.)

Mary Magdalene was the first to announce the good news of the Resurrection. At Pentecost, Peter in Acts 2:17 reports thatyour "sons and your *daughters* will proclaim my [God's] message. . ." (GNT).

So when we put other Scriptures alongside 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, then we realize that here is something strange. We know that the manuscript evidence of these two verses present problems. In some ancient manuscripts these two verses appear after 14:40, and in one manuscript as a notation in the margin. In most manuscripts the verses appear after verse 33. In some newer versions (such as NRSV), these verses are put in brackets. They are considered not from Paul but later interpolation.

However, they are in the Bible so *we have to deal with them by Jesus' method*. Possibly in the Pauline churches, those first established according to Paul's teachings, women had important functions in the worship service. Perhaps these verses were eventually to inspire 1 Timothy 2:11-15, written later.

Jesus' method of using scriptures is also called "horizontal reading." Read one text in one place and another in a different place—and then bring them together in balance. This horizontal reading is not what most people do; rather, we read vertically and then forget to refer to and read the other Scriptures. We need to use horizontal reading of the Bible to deepen our understanding of context within the Scriptures.

Let us look at another example of horizontal reading: King David in Old Testament times ordered a census to count the fighting men. In 2 Samuel 24:1 we read that "God made him do it," whereas in 1 Chronicles 21:1 it says that the "Devil [Satan] made him do it." Who is right? Both! It depends on each writer's viewpoint, perspective, and theology, whatever one may call it. We have to put both verses together and keep them in dynamic tension because truth has many sides, not just one.

There is a story of a rabbi who listened to one man's complaints against another and told the man, "You are right"; the man went away happy. When the man against whom the complaints were made came to tell his side of the story, the rabbi said "You are right"—and the second man went away happy. The rabbi's wife challenged what she felt were inappropriate responses by the rabbi, saying, "They cannot both be right!" The rabbi declared, "*You* are also right!"

Turning again to the Scriptures, read John 3:7. This verse is widely misunderstood. "You all [plural] must be born again [or born from above] Who are "you all"? Nicodemus was a Pharisee. "You all" are Pharisees!

Now if we place this verse beside Matthew 23—which speaks of the seven woes of Pharisees—and especially Matthew 23:23, we get some idea of the issue. Pharisees were tithing mint, dill, and cumin, but they lacked justice (no care for the needy), mercy, and faithfulness. Jesus is saying to Nicodemus and indirectly to all religious people that "You all must be born again to do justice, to care for the needy."

The genius of Jesus, the Master Teacher, is powerfully manifested in the grand example of Jesus bringing two scriptures together side-by-side in Matthew 22:37-40; namely,

Deuteronomy 6:5, "Love God with all your heart," and Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

These two sayings/commandments come from two different books of the Bible and belong to two different traditions. It is possible that the Pharisees believed in the first part "Love God" and interpreted it in a legalistic way in their practice of "giving tithe of mint, dill, and cumin." But they neglected justice (Matt. 23:23) and did not care for the needy.

Jesus combines the *vertical love of God* with the *horizontal love of one's neighbor* like two sides of the same coin. When in an effort to evade responsibility someone asked, "But who is my neighbor?" Jesus told the Good Samaritan story and commanded, "Go and do likewise." Pharisees neglected a part of the Torah (law) which could be hard on their pockets!

In my congregation I teach these two scriptures as "passion for God and compassion for the needy." Pharisees and scribes took only one part of Scripture—the vertical relationship with God—and neglected care for the needy. ("They devour widows' homes," says Mark 12:40—now that is some kind of foreclosure!)

When, like Jesus, we put one Scripture beside another Scripture and try to understand, we follow Jesus' method. But if we use only one Scripture to force our case, it is not Jesus' method; it is the Devil's method. If we follow Jesus' example we must put more Scriptures side by side.

One example from real life:

I have a friend who is a devout Christian and a devoted husband. His wife seems to know a lot of Bible verses pertaining to husbands and men. One day he told me, "Anil, my wife asks me to do this and that and she always quotes some Scripture to support her. She says, 'You must do so because you are *the man*.' What should I do?"

The Devil knows, misuses, and abuses the Bible and so do some preachers and teachers.

I told him, "When your wife is in a good mood after a good dinner in the evening, you sit with her and ask her to read Proverbs 31:10-31. This passage of the Bible describes a wise and industrious wife. She does everything and anything (including buying real estate—31:16) while her husband sits with his buddies in the town square and has a good time!"

My friend followed my advice. Like Jesus he put this scripture (Prov. 31:1-31) side by side with his wife's scripture verses. The result was dramatic. His wife still requests that he do this and that (though less frequently then before), but she does not quote any scripture anymore. Unless a wife is full of scriptures concerning husbands and men, no husband should read to his wife this idealized portrayal of an imaginary wife. Jesus' method of putting texts side-by-side works in real life!

The lessons of Jesus' method are simple and direct:

1. The Devil knows, misuses, and abuses the Bible and so do some preachers and teachers.

2. We need to know the Bible to counter the Devil's wiles and those of false teachers.

3. We need teachers and preachers who use Jesus' method.

4. Truth has more than one side.

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Two More Books on the Teachings of Jesus

Reviews of The Gospel of Jesus and of The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus

Daniel Hertzler

The Gospel of Jesus, by James M. Robinson. Harper SanFrancisco, 2005

The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus, by Peter J. Gomes. Harper One, 2007

Do we need any more books on the teachings of Jesus? As I thought of this, I was reminded of a statement about the Bible attributed to Mark Twain. Then I found that Gomes quotes it: "It is not what I don't understand in the Bible that troubles me; it is what is perfectly clear that does" (73). But just as we do not stop listening to sermons because we have heard it all before, we may find that we can jog a memory or pick up an insight from books such as these.

Of the two, I find Gomes easier to read and more inspiring. Robinson represents a scholarly specialty. His book is subtitled, *A Historical Search for the Original Good News*. He affirms that this is to be found in

the presumed second source used by Matthew and Luke and dubbed "Q" after the German word for "source." Most of us most of the time are willing to settle for Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John even though we may have become aware of editorial and rhetorical overtones. Like Mark Twain we find plenty to make us uncomfortable in what we already understand.

Robinson would propose to get us back to the original source of what Jesus really said. He writes that the best source is to be found in the "Sayings Gospel Q" which "is not readily available to the public, since it is not as such in the Bible; it has to be reconstituted from the tradition behind the shared sayings in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke" (6).

Robinson would propose to get us back to the original source of what Jesus really said.

Robinson perceives that the Gospel of Mark was written for a Gentile Christian audience as noted in features such as "his explanation of Jewish customs for his Gentile readers" (7). On the other hand, "there are indications in the Sayings Gospel Q that it was written for a Jewish Christian audience" (8).

As a scholar, Robinson wants to get behind the edited version to the original. That this tradition—or document if there was one—may have been compiled for Jewish Christians is of interest to me. I have picked up a clue here and there about how Jewish Christians evidently fell by the wayside in the events of the early church. Particularly after Constantine the church became official and Gentile. In a visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem I was told that Constantine (or perhaps his mother) ruled that a person had to eat pork to be allowed to enter the church. Of course a Jewish Christian, according to Jewish tradition, could not do this and so was excluded.

As an example of what happened to the Sayings Gospel Q, Robinson notes that Matthew drew from it for the Sermon on the Mount. "Thus down through the centuries, when the Sayings Gospel Q was completely lost, indeed its very existence unknown, it is the Sermon on the Mount that functioned indirectly to keep its message—the gospel of Jesus—alive" (21).

Robinson devotes a paragraph to the fate of the Sermon, how it was lost when Christian soldiers followed Constantine into battle. It was lost, he says, until rediscovered by Francis of Assisi, Leo Tolstoy, and Martin Luther King Jr. This seems an odd combination. He evidently has not heard of the Anabaptists, the Quakers, or the Moravians, to mention a few. But, of course, Robinson is not a historical scholar.

In chapter 2 we learn that in 1983 Robinson called together 40 scholars "to reconstruct the Sayings Gospel Q word by word." This has been published in a "Critical Edition" and an "Abridged Edition" for anyone who has the fortitude to follow through (22). For those of us less inclined, the text of this presumed document ap-

pears in this book on pages 27 to 54. Most of us will prefer the four Gospels. Cited one by one without context, the Sayings lack something, well, context. The rest of the book is given to citations of Jesus' teaching in comparison with how they appear in the other Gospels, especially Matthew and Luke.

Among the scholarly assumptions that startled me is Robinson's assertion that Jesus may not have been literate since an estimation of literacy in the Roman Empire runs from 10 to 15 percent and "it is not very probable that the son of a carpenter in an Aramaic speaking village in Galilee would have learned to read and write" (63). Rather than "scribal learnedness, one finds a villager's intuitive insight into nature" (65). So in Luke 4 Robinson perceives that Luke has written "a very good Christian sermon. This is precisely what Luke would have done in Jesus' name" (69).

Not being a scholar, I can only observe that New Testament scholar Kenneth Bailey reports that "serious minded Jews would gather and devote themselves to studying the Torah and applying its laws to their day. . . . We can be confident that Jesus was a part of this group" (*Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 146. I reviewed Bailey's book in *Dreamseeker Magazine*, Summer 2008.)

I do find some of Robinson's other observations and warnings appropriate. He notes that after Paul the Gentile church built its faith "around the cross as its primary symbol. . . . The outcome has been the apostles Creed which omits completely Jesus' Galilean ministry as a Jew. . . . It is this glaring omission in her understanding of Jesus that this present book is seeking to fill" (88).

These . . . observations remind us of our temptation to remake Jesus into our own image rather than to take him seriously as a model for us

Among Robinson's observations is that "the only real theological term that Jesus constantly used was a rare expression usually translated 'Kingdom of God' but perhaps better translated 'God reign,' 'God reigning'" (162). As for Jesus' death, Robinson observes that "the Sayings Gospel Q presupposes Jesus' death as a combination of the prophets sent by Wisdom and killed by Jerusalemites, yet without isolating his death as the saving event par excellence as the church is accustomed to think of it" (199).

These and similar observations remind us of our temptation to remake Jesus into our own image rather than to take him seriously as a model for us. If we have the patience to follow through, Robinson's book can serve as a reality check on our perspective about Jesus. In the end Robinson hopes his book may be an evangelistic tract. "Listen to what Jesus had to say, hear his gospel, and let it change your life for good. This is why I wrote this book, for you. Take it and use it for yourself" (228). Yes, of course, even after Mark Twain.

The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus does not require the same level of concentration. Gomes is a world-renowned preacher, so he knows how to reach out to the reader. He also is concerned to present a gospel that can change us if we take it seriously: "It is my highest hope to appeal not so much to those who are already set in their convictions, but to that vast company of readers willing to investigate a point of view that may not be its own" (5).

He who will later quote Mark Twain asks whether it "could be that we spend so much time trying to make sense of the Bible or making it conform to our set of social expectations that we have failed to take to heart the essential content of the preaching and teaching of Jesus" (23).

Each of the 11 chapters is essentially self-contained, probably growing out of sermons and lectures Gomes has given, but they are organized under three topics: 1) "The Trouble with Scriptures," 2) "The Gospel and Conventional Wisdom," and 3) "Where Do We Go From Here?" As Professor of Christian Morals and preacher in the Memorial Church at Harvard University, Gomes has been in a position to hear what is talked about in our culture. The book is a response.

In "We Start With the Bible" Gomes observes that "it is easier to talk about Jesus than it is to talk about what he talked about" (18). "Perhaps now, and in the pages to follow, is the place to look at just what Jesus preached and taught" (23). The chapter "An Offending Gospel" comments on Jesus' sermon at Nazareth, the sermon which Robinson suggests was compiled by Luke. Concerning the sermon at Nazareth, he observes that "the people take offense not so much with what Jesus claims about himself as with the claims he makes about a God who is more than a tribal deity" (39).

At the end of "The Risks of Nonconformity" he observes that "God is greater and more generous than the best of those who profess to know and serve him. This is the radical nonconformity with the conventional wisdom that Jesus both proclaimed and exemplified, and, alas, it cost him his life. Will we hope to fare any better as disciples of his nonconformity?" (63).

In the second section Gomes responds to fear, as in "Where Was God on Sept. 11?" And to conflict where he reports on the sermon he preached before the Iraq war which brought a protest from a military man. But "conflict is the way of the world. The conventional wisdom tells us that there is little we can do about it, yet people of conscience, especially religious people, and most especially Christian people, are compelled by a vision of a world not yet here to deal with a world that is" (129-130).

In the final section, Gomes avers that the gospel is "A Social Gospel" and asks whether it is "possible to imagine a country in which those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ . . . can unite in a social wisdom that goes beyond the Bible and into the whole gospel for the whole person" (186). The final two chapters before the conclusion discuss

inclusivism and hope as growing out of the gospel.

In the first of these he advocates for homosexuals. "If there is an area in which we are to be weighed and found wanting, this is it. It is not out of ignorance alone that we behave as we do to sexual minorities; it is out of ignorance, fear, and in certain cases, malice" (199). As for the second he observes that "If we want to know how hope works, we must look first to those who suffer, for it is only in and through suffering that hope is made manifest" (221).

Finally, Gomes asserts that "I'm convinced of two things, neither of which is novel but both of which are essential. First, what we know of God or about God we know because of what we know about Jesus, and second, Jesus' proclamation is meant to take us from the world that is to a world that is to be" (240).

So we have two writers of experience reflecting on their experience and seeking to focus as an evangelistic message what they have learned. Those of us who read and underline do well to keep in mind the Mark Twain principle. If we get a new insight here, what have we done with the insights we already had?

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Habits That Heal

Mark R. Wenger

Our dog Vinny needs to have his coat trimmed from time to time. He's a Cockapoo—a mix of Cocker Spaniel and Poodle—but without papers. He is an indoor dog, a member of the family for five years now, beloved as only dogs can be for their genuine and undying affection.

Last year we discovered that periodic trips to the groomer had traumatized Vinny. Since then we've experimented with several alternative groomers, even those who say they are good with difficult dogs. For naught. Our docile dog goes wild, disintegrating into a snapping, jumping, and whining beast when being clipped. At least one groomer said she wouldn't work with him again unless he is sedated.

Running out of non-medical options, we bought an electric trimmer at Wal-Mart for a do-it-yourself job. I've never given anyone a haircut, much less to a dog traumatized by such events. Kathy held Vinny gently on a kitchen counter; I went to work with the clippers.

It took a bit to get the hang of it, but we soon were making ragged progress on his back, sides and even head. Then it was time to do his legs. Things deteriorated in a hurry. Try as we might, he just didn't want us clipping his lower legs and feet. He tried to bite me re-

peatedly. I didn't take kindly to this behavior. We kept trying. Treats to distract, compliments to encourage, scoldings to show who was boss.

We finally quit. It had been about ninety minutes; I'd had more than enough. Not only was Vinny unhappy, I had joined him in the land of traumatized. "I'm never doing that again," I vowed. "We're going to either find someone who will sedate him for grooming—or get rid of the dog!"

I sat down quite defeated. I had missed my evening walk along the Mill Stream to take on this onerous task. By habit as much as anything, I dragged myself and Vinny out the door for a two-mile hike together. If I was going, he was coming along like it or not!

The amazing thing is that by the end of the walk, my attitude toward Vinny and the grooming—about life as a whole, it seemed—had changed. I came back sweaty and smiling. "You know, Kathy," I said, "I've changed my mind. I am willing to try it again the next time he needs to be trimmed."

I am fascinated how certain regular practices—habits, traditions, rituals—have the capacity to help re-order life when chaos threatens. Sometimes these habits enable us merely to survive when things fall apart. Many patterned behaviors seem to carry within them the graceful capacity to heal and restore a sense of balance to life.

Clearly that's not the case with all habits. Some habits are bad, destructive to oneself and others. I'm thinking here of addictions, grasping appetites, and obsessions. The friend who is an alcoholic; the young woman who can't break from an abusive relationship; the man who can't control his fascination with pornographic images.

The line between destructive and healthful habits isn't always easy to see, especially in ourselves. It seems to me that one key test is whether the habit reflects love of God, love of neighbor, and care for the self. Another test is whether the habit contributes balance to a multi-faceted life or becomes a pathological center of gravity sucking all of life into its clutches.

These habits practiced over time wear life-giving patterns and contours into our lives.

While acknowledging the reality of destructive habits, I'd rather focus here on the plus-quality of habits and traditions. My healing-hike after Vinny's unpleasant grooming is a simple example, even metaphor, of what I'm talking about. These habits practiced over time wear life-giving patterns and contours into our lives. The activities themselves eventually form and nourish us much like a stream both molds and feeds the surrounding landscape.

Habits of Recreation

I think of four overlapping categories of healing habits. The first are *habits of recreation*. In his latest book, *Hannah's Child* (Eerdmans, 2010), Stanley Hauerwas tells of discovering by chance a way to deal with the stress of his wife's illness. He began to run.

> The more ill she became, the farther I ran. . . . I would run no matter how hot or cold it might be. I would run no matter how hard it might be raining or snowing. I once ran when the wind chill factor was forty-seven below zero. I was determined that (my son) Adam would survive. I was determined that I would survive. I ran, and somehow we survived. (p. 150)

Not all recreational habits are so sweaty and dogged. Recreation can be filling-in the daily crossword puzzle with a mug of coffee in hand. Or tending a garden, pulling weeds, harvesting flowers or fruit in a ritualized daily or weekly rhythm. Playing a musical instrument or singing is another habitual balm for the soul. Hobbies of many kinds have little profit or utility by standard cost-benefit analysis. But many people recount the joy of collecting, tinkering, attending theater, and playing a game.

Routine Rituals

A second kind healing habit I call *routine rituals*. These are the little things that pattern a day or a weekend. Some people lay out their clothes the night before. Boarding school taught me to make my bed. I have unlearned this habit since I'm married, but I'm grateful that Kathy keeps the tradition alive. Our neighbors go out for breakfast with their grade school children every Saturday morning.

Somebody has done a study finding evidence that if you kiss your spouse every morning, you have fewer accidents on the way to work, fewer days off sick, and live about five years longer. Eating three meals a day, getting seven-eight hours of sleep a night, flossing and brushing your teeth, balancing the checking account once a week. Such small routines can help us prepare for and recover from the craziness life throws our way.

Habits of Relationship

A third category is *habits of relationship*. For many years I have met weekly, most every Thursday morning with a pastor friend. We talk about our work, our families, our lives. There's a lot of belly aching and laughter; occasionally there are tears. We pray together at the close of the hour. I once pooh-poohed the Fall ritual of hunting. Although its not part of my relational repertoire, I've come to admire the memories and deep friendships I see formed in hunting camps.

There is no end to the health-giving relational habits: Clubs and choirs, Curves and Cheers, the places where they know your name and are glad you came.

Habits of Religion

Habits of religion are a final type of healing ritual. These are practices in which we practice paying attention to God. Marcus J. Borg has a chapter entitled "The Heart of the Matter: Practice" in his book *The Heart of Christianity* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2003) His goal in this chapter is to de-

scribe and promote religious practices or habits that nourish human life and form Christian identity. He writes,

> By practice, I mean all the things that Christians do together and individually as a way of paying attention to God. They include being part of a Christian community, a church and taking part in its life together as a community. They include worship, Christian formation, collective deeds of hospitality and compassion . . . They include devotional disciplines, especially prayer and spending time with the Bible. And they include loving what God loves through the practices of compassion and justice in the world. (p. 189)

None of these healing habits—recreation, routine, relationship, and religion—is a panacea. But in a culture of high velocity change, information overload, and frenetic mobility, these practices help to anchor the soul in patterns and rhythms that help to steady us, develop resilience or recover our balance. We slow down, we listen, we repeat, we are shaped, and we are nourished.

—Mark R. Wenger, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is Director of Pastoral Studies for Eastern Mennonite Seminary at Lancaster.

When Winning Really Matters

J. Denny Weaver

I am a sports fan and I "own" teams in most sports, college and professional. One reason I like sports is that offers virtually the only arena within which I can be unapologetically partisan without feeling guilty.

I freely admit that games are more fun when my teams win. Thus I am similar to many other people who root for athletic teams—from the local high school to national teams in Olympic or World Cup years. Some retain childhood loyalties even after many miles and years separate them from proximity. Others grow new loyalties as circumstances evolve. But in every instance, wins matter at one level or another. And a win really matters when it signifies history moving in a new trajectory.

Partisanship often goes beyond the emotions of a win or loss. Winning can take on connotations of superiority. With a win a school can become a better place to study. A winning city or state is upgraded as a place to live. A win in a big rivalry game confers the presumed superiority of "bragging rights." The medal count during Olympic games is emphasized. Americans want to proclaim, "We're Number One!" which means "We are the best country in the world!"

We still hear regularly about the "miracle on ice," when the United States defeated the Russians in hockey at the 1980 Winter Olympics. Coming in the aftermath of the Vietnam debacle, the Watergate fiasco, the Iran hostage crisis, and the Russian's rekindling of the Cold War with their invasion of Afghanistan, this victory enabled the nation to feel that it had once again attained its rightful place on top of the world. Even thirty years later mention of that game evokes patriotic pride.

Although I am a partisan rooter, I am bothered by the implied claim of superiority behind the chant of "We're Number One." I am particularly uncomfortable when it concerns nationalistic posturing.

Although I am a partisan rooter, I am bothered by the implied claim of superiority behind the chant of "We're Number One."

Virtually invisible in the nationalistic celebration of the "miracle on ice" is the fact that the team was not nearly the absolute underdog the national mythology has purveyed to enlarge the victory—the team was actually composed of disciplined, fast skaters, thirteen of whom played in the National Hockey League with several enjoying long and distinguished careers. In addition, this win did not even earn the gold medal—the U.S. team still had to defeat Finland to achieve gold.

This kind of "mattering"—"We're Number One and we deserve it"—pales in comparison with two other national situations of winning and losing in my recent experience.

One game concerned the Congo. My wife and I spent March 2009 in the Congo with Mennonite Central Committee. My assignment was to present theology lectures in four different university settings. It was a particularly exciting opportunity for me. My lectures were translated into French for presentation, and I was hoping to handle question-and-answer in French, using the French language skills that I had learned during an MCC term in 1965-68.

We arrived in Kinshasa on a Thursday, with the first lecture scheduled for the following Monday. The long weekend for acclimation was welcome, but I was anxious for Monday, when I would see how adequate my language skills were to the occasion.

I was reviewing my lecture yet one more time on Sunday evening when the phone call came. I learned that the soccer team of the Congo, *les Léopards*, playing in the Ivory Coast, in a game that I had not been aware of, had just defeated Ghana 2-0 to win the African All Nations Championship. The president had declared Monday a national holiday, and everything would be closed in celebration. This meant, of course, cancellation of Monday's lecture.

My immediate response was self-directed pique. Considerable effort and money had been expended to get me to the Congo for these lectures. If a lecture was now cancelled, I small-mindedly told myself, it was their loss. Looking at this national celebration through my particular lens, I saw only nationalism rearing its head. As a guest, it seemed that I just needed to accept that.

And of course the overjoyed Congolese were expressing national pride. A newspaper headline proclaimed, "The Leopards are Kings of Africa." For days, I had only to say "How about those Leopards!" to elicit big smiles and stories about where someone was when he heard the news or what he had done in the big celebration. As my lens got better adjusted, I saw that it was a much bigger deal than I had first realized.

Eventually I discovered yet another layer of meaning that rendered my initial reaction very small. This celebration was not just chest-thumping on the order of the United States claiming its deserved top status. Rather the Congolese victory and the national celebration needed to be seen in the context of the Congo's colonial history and post-colonial struggle.

The people of the Congo were brutalized and their natural resources stolen for his personal benefit by the colonial regime of Belgium's King Leopold. The situation changed little after Belgium wrested control from Leopold and made the Congo a colony of Belgium. Since the native population was not allowed to pursue higher education, at independence in 1960 the young nation was left without real know-how in governing or in maintaining basic systems.

After independence, almost to the present, and certainly with the connivance of the United States, the exploitation of the Congo continued. One cannot read this story in Adam Hochschild's book, *King Leopold's Ghost*, without experiencing some anger.

As the result of the events Hochschild recounts, the Congo today is a country with many problems—high unemployment and few jobs that pay regular salaries, a postal system that no longer functions, and no infrastructure of roads or railroads, to name only a few. In many cases, there is a prevailing feeling among the people that help needs to come from outside because the Congolese themselves cannot make things work. This passivity and fatalism is an ongoing legacy of colonialism.

This troubled post-colonial situation is the context in which to begin to understand the impact of the victory of *les Léopards* for the people of Congo. As I learned from a newspaper account, with a Congolese coach and minimal expenses and training opportunity, *les Léopards* had defeated a supposedly superior team that had spent more than a million dollars on a European coach. This result demonstrated, the writer said, that beyond football, the solution to the problem of the Congo concerned "people, organization, confidence, and will power. And above all, it was love of country. The achievement of the Leopards in Abidjan was there to contradict the wagging tongues of the

Congolese pessimists" (*Le Potentiel*, 9 March 2009, p. 2).

In other words, this win was a demonstration first of all to the Congolese people, and then to the world, that contrary to the learned legacy of colonialism and the low opinions held by foreigners, the Congolese are capable of taking control of their lives and their country and making it work. If this achievement is possible in football, the writer added, "it is also possible in the political, economic, and social sectors." The article concluded, "This is the important national lesson to draw from this victory of our national football team. Bravo les Léopards" (p. 2).

I heard a variation of this application of the victory when I began my lectures. A pastor called the victory "a gift from God." Many people still accept the older missionary message that "blessed are the poor," which tends to create a passivity while they wait for God to change things or for help to arrive from outside the Congo. Against that backdrop, this pastor was seeing the victory of *les Léopards* as a summons to activity, a call to actively confront the injustices of their lives rather than waiting passively for rescue from elsewhere.

This experience with one game in the Congo set up some of my interest in the 2010 soccer World Cup, which was hosted by South Africa. With the rest of the world and some Americans, I was enthralled by this truly world tournament (in contrast to baseball's "World" Series between North American teams). South Africa was the first African nation to host the World Cup. Five African teams were among the thirty-two teams who qualified for South Africa.

Commentators frequently pointed out that all of Africa hoped that African teams would fare well in this first World Cup played on "home" turf. Unfortunately, only Ghana was among the sixteen teams who advanced from pool play to the knockout phase.

Ghana played the United States in the round of sixteen. This game split my rooting interests. On the one hand, with Africans of many nations now behind Ghana and my Congo experience still fresh, I could guess what a win by Ghana would mean. (To begin to perceive the significance of this African solidarity, image the improbability of United States fans rooting vociferously for Canadian or Mexican teams simply because they are fellow North Americans.)

On the other hand, I also wanted the United States team to win—not for national pride but because a win for the U.S. would raise the profile of soccer at home and move the country a bit closer to joining the rest of the world in appreciating this truly global game. As the game progressed I tipped ever-so-slightly to the side of victory for soccer, but I was genuinely happy for Ghana and for Africa when Ghana won 2-1.

When Ghana played Uruguay in the round of eight, I was fully engaged for Ghana and aware of their significance for Africans. An announcer ticked off African cities where people were hanging on the outcome. When he mentioned Kinshasa, it seemed personal—I had exchanged email about the World Cup with a friend I made during our stay in the Congo.

This game was memorable. Ghana scored as the first half ended to lead 1-0. Uruguay tied the game 10 minutes into the second half. The teams battled hard for the remainder of the half, and through the 30 minutes of overtime. In the final seconds of overtime, following a flurry in front of the goal, on what would have been the last play of the game, Ghana hit a sure goal on the net.

I am still thinking about what an African team's win would mean for Africa . . . an opportunity for post-colonial Africa to show the world what it is capable of.

However, a Uruguayan player on the goal line used his hand to stop the ball. A "handball" in that situation calls for an automatic disqualification for the offending player and suspension for the next game, and it awards a penalty kick to the other team.

Penalty kicks are converted at least 75 percent of the time. The player taking the kick for Ghana had successfully converted two penalty kicks in earlier games. A win for Ghana seemed imminent, and it would be the farthest advance ever by any African team in World Cup competition. One successful kick, and all Africa would rejoice.

As the player who would take the penalty kick stepped to his mark, a TV commentator intoned, "He has the weight of Africa on his shoulders." His kick clearly beat the keeper, but it was a couple inches too high. It hit the cross bar and skipped over the net.

This devastating miss forced the game to be decided in a dreaded shoot-out, in which players from each team trade penalty kicks until one team has an unbeatable advantage. Ghana lost in the shoot-out.

Uruguay's team exulted, Ghana's players wept. After being only a penalty kick from victory, it was a crushing loss. The TV commentator called it "one of the cruelest exits *ever* from the World Cup." I pictured my desolate friends in Kinshasa.

Ghana's loss left me shaking. I was probably too wrapped up in thinking how meaningful it would be for an African team to advance. I went outside and walked around my neighborhood for a while to shake it off.

Of course games are only games, and their will always be winners who celebrate and losers who grieve. But, yes, some wins do matter more than others. I still check the results of Bluffton University teams on the Internet. This past winter I added the Milwaukee Bucks to my stable of teams after I attended a game with my grandsons on a reduced-price ticket. After more than 50 years of loyalty, I still hope to see the Cubs win a World Series.

I appreciate Uruguay's win. With the second smallest population of countries in the World Cup, they rightfully celebrate having advanced the farthest from among the football powers of South America.

But now these months later, I am still thinking about what an African team's win would mean for Africa—not only a chance for a little continent-wide breast-beating, but an opportunity for post-colonial Africa to show the world what it is capable of. Perhaps the fact that I am still thinking about it shows that they did in fact make that statement.

—*J. Denny Weaver, Madison, Wisconsin, is Professor Emeritus of Religion at Bluffton University. For twenty-four years he was Bluffton's Faculty Athletic Representative and attended all athletic league meetings and the annual NCAA convention.*

Speak Lithuanian With a Few Words

Night *(nakvoti)*—

A child spends the night
skimming milk she did not have
in Germany during the war.
Weighted lashes speak years
caged in Chicago's displaced
hind quarters—
smell the stockyard stench
of slaughtered cattle. Kerchief
your nose with a wooden
clothespin,
disinfect Halsted street
cars and bus fumes
that choke a woman
displaced once more to an

unfinished *(nebaigtas)* Ohio
home (*namas).*

—*Clarissa Jakobsons' Lithuanian parents fled Russian Communism during the 1940's. She was born during World War 2 in Germany, lived in Austria, Illinois, and Missouri, but settling in Ohio. Her father was captured and placed in Hitler's concentration camps and Stalin's gulag. Artist, poet, and associate editor of the* Arsenic Lobster Poetry Magazine, *Clarissa instructs art and writing classes at Cuyahoga Community College, Cleveland. A popular reader of her poems in the states as well as in Europe, she is widely published.*

As Mangoes to the Fire

Brenda Hartman-Souder

Early in the morning you bring out the recipe and show it to Lydia, your Nigerian house helper, who is good-natured, calm, and game to try anything new, especially on a day that you are working from home and can help with the finer points of a recipe. Magdalene, who also helps you in the house on Lydia's day off and other days as needed, is here because you know that making chutney, along with other household chores, will be plenty of work.

Now, along the side of the road, women sell buckets of ripened mangoes for pennies a mango. But those plucked from trees on your compound for this chutney are still green and sour. Lydia and Magdalene cut them into smooth oval strips, then diced sweet and hot red peppers, purple onions, and pungent ginger.

You take over at this point, adding vinegar and brown sugar before the big aluminum pot goes on the stove. For the next two hours, the mixture cooks down into a fragrant thick stew. You stir and add water, sugar, more water. Only the sugar and treacle which Lydia mixes together to make brown sugar and the raisins, which you'll add at the very end, are imported; everything else comes from Nigeria, so this chutney is

mostly homegrown. Its sweet-sour blend is perfect with curries, pork, and rice. A little of it suffices to infuse a slightly spicy sweetness to a meal.

You've been sitting here, tending to the chutney while writing emails and reading work reports. Your mind is also still clouded from difficult interactions you've had with some of your workers. You want to defend yourself and your integrity, to say you've been falsely accused, misjudged, misunderstood. You want to reach out across the chasm of broken relationships but whenever you tentatively do so, the chasm of brittle insistence that both sides are "right" stretches dark, deep, and seemingly impossible between you.

But here you are stirring mango chutney, determined instead to think of time and how it can soften and blend facts, hurts, and memory.

But here you are stirring mango chutney, determined instead to think of time and how it can soften and blend facts, hurts, and memory. How some relationships can't be easily fixed, or disintegrate no matter what your best actions or intentions. You know that you've been humbled and forced to learn about the sting of criticism, about the difficulties of leadership, about the complexities of individuals.

You know peace between humans is difficult to build and maintain. You know that such a hot fire of conflict has, on this journey, been both painful and necessary. But still, you wish relationships were as easily adjusted as your mango chutney recipe is—developing into something soft and succulent—even if the ratio of mangos to onions to peppers differs based on what's available, what's in the storeroom.

You are tired because you didn't sleep very well and in just four days you are heading out of here for some months in America and you want to take a nap but with two women in the house and the generator repairman tinkering away outside you really can't, and you longingly think of your old life back on Fellows Avenue, where you had to do your own cleaning, cooking, and laundry but once in a while on an odd afternoon when the kids were at school you could lay down without guilt and take a nap.

But you wouldn't be making mango chutney there and sniffing the sweet smell of rain hidden in the black clouds coming from the east. You wouldn't have this time to write, this flexible schedule, this opportunity to live among Nigerians and watch your children make friends with them, along with Danes, Irish, and Canadians.

Your home wouldn't have been filled yesterday with ten little neighbors who mysteriously knew it was your son's birthday and that a cake was cooling on the counter, who sat primly up to your dining room table, said polite thank-you's as you served them, and devoured the moist made-from-scratch-with-real butter-frosting-chocolate cake.

You wouldn't be able to actually dance in church, travel to other African countries or bear witness to those who valiantly believe in the possibility of peace even when a "low-level civil war" is described about the area you live in, even when folks have been killing their neighbors. Your nostrils wouldn't be stinging with the tart, almost angry smell of vinegar as mangoes surrender into a softer, more mellow stew.

It's 1:30 and Lydia and Magdalene have just hung the wash out on the line, even though a storm is on its way. Usually doing laundry would be a cinch with a small, old but trusty washing machine. Today, however, as usual, there is no electricity. In addition, the generator is broken, so they have hand-washed the massive four-day pile of clothing, towels, and bedding.

Now Lydia is boiling water to sterilize the canning jars. The simmered mango chutney will be ladled into them, lids screwed on tight, jars lowered in boiling water.

The chutney will be orange-golden with flecks of pepper and raisins. With the soft ping signifying a successful seal, each jar will be a triumph, a time capsule, a promise.

You wish your life itself could be so beautiful and preserved after fire. But you are still learning to surrender, to die, to forgive, to let go so that your life with its sharp and tart individual components might (the word might being, like the Snitch in Quiddich, such a hopeful, yet elusive reality) simmer down into something so fine as mango chutney.

—Brenda Hartman-Souder, Jos, Nigeria, serves as co-representative of Mennonite Central Committee Nigeria and, along with spouse Mark, as parent of Valerie and Greg.

A Watermelon and Two Loaves of Bread

Lisa Gallagher Landes

On my kitchen counter this morning sit a watermelon and two loaves of traditional Turkmen bread. These three objects, given to us by people who we hadn't yet learned to know, serve as a lovely reminder of a day's adventure. An impromptu day spent among strangers who became friends.

You need to have a sense of adventure when living overseas if you're going to take advantage of what the culture has to offer. Saturday, being adventuresome was taken to a new level.

It was another sunny day in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, and we decided that it was time to dive into local culture. This takes some nerve and a person willing to share in adventure. It also helps if that someone can speak some of the local language. Most Americans here don't speak Turkmen, but when they do, the locals find it fascinating. They tend to engage the speaker; so begins a conversation.

We decided we'd drive out of Ashgabat and stop at some village. My first instinct was to say, "Perhaps we should do something different." But I've lived in Turkmenistan for 14 months and it was now or never to step outside my comfort zone and have what truly

turned out to be a day to remember.

The Kopet Dag mountains line the horizon and lend variety to the otherwise flat desert landscape. In the distance we saw an area that was remarkably green. As we got closer, we noticed a little village at the base of the mountains. We turned right and followed the road to who knew what. The fields were full of young green cotton plants, which stood in stark contrast to the muddy brown color of the dirt and the dry mountains.

Cars passed us. We got lots of bewildered looks as people unaccustomed to seeing strangers, especially foreigners, tried to figure out what we were doing and why we were there. As I've found, Turkmen are as intrigued with us as we are with them. It's a natural part of being human, I suppose, as we seek to discover how we're similar and different and the gentle (sometimes) variations in between.

We meandered through the village. We passed some people who nodded at our passing . . . perplexed looks on their faces. Perhaps they thought we were lost. But you can't be really lost if you don't know where you're going to begin with.

We passed three men carrying two watermelons; they bid us to stop. Greetings were made and they offered us the watermelons. Our offer to pay for one was not accepted, but we could take some pictures. I marveled at the generous offer of watermelon to two strangers who just happened to be passing through.

I saw women in the distance at a home. They waved and smiled. One woman brought out two freshly baked loaves of bread and handed them to me. I was in awe of the continuing generosity, but this was just the beginning.

We were invited into their courtyard and asked to stay for tea. The rug, the blankets and the pillows were neatly arranged on the top-chan and the vinyl table cloth was laid out in preparation to receive the food that accompanied our tea.

Not speaking the language meant that I was allowed the perfect opportunity to people-watch and observe life as it happened. No pretense of anything other than what needed to happen was happening—and I was there. Along with tea, we had some of the smallest sweetest grapes I've had, watermelon, bread, cookies, and candies. These were all things that the family had and shared without giving it a second thought, because this would be traditional hospitality to show to even a visiting Turkmen guest.

The women were busy working on meal preparations. Seated on the ground on a rug, the women were scraping and slicing carrots. One woman who seemed to be the matron of this particular home made sure that we were well fed and taken care of. Another woman was also friendly and outgoing. She had a gentle face and an easy manner of trying to communicate with me. As we lingered, she invited us to stay for dinner. We were having *plov*, and the preparations we were seeing were well underway.

Feeling the need to do something constructive, and as my language

skills were definitely waning and Tony was communicating fairly easily with the men, I turned to the one skill that I could offer; I joined the women on the ground and started peeling onions. Working with a knife, sitting on the ground, sharing in the process of making food felt comfortable. I was at least attempting to participate in whatever event was forthcoming.

I turned to the one skill that I could offer; I joined the women on the ground and started peeling onions.

We moved to the home across the street, and I was taken into the room for women and children. By tradition, the men and women have separate rooms and don't mix. The room had very little furniture. The floors were all covered with carpet, and an occasional pillow was found to make sitting on the floor more comfortable for older guests or for those, like myself, who might not be accustomed to sitting on the floor.

Children are some of the most endearing of people since language doesn't necessarily cause any problems between them and you. They chatter away whether you understand or not. Sometimes, it was obvious that they wondered why I couldn't talk or understand them, but they're a forgiving group and life moves on.

Cell phones are abundant here in Turkmenistan. Kids, being kids, find the games on them a great source of amusement. Trying to add to their entertainment, I found a game on my cell phone to share with them. They squealed with delight when they won! I delighted in seeing their eyes brighten as they played with something new.

Pictures were also a great way of learning about their culture and didn't require language skills. We, two girls and I, looked at a whole stack of pictures. There is joy in chronicling events, and I took pleasure in learning some of the family's history through these photos. The kindly woman and I worked on my learning the Turkmen numbers. It was something that would fill time and in which everyone could participate. The kids loved helping me and the youngest girl took pride in the fact that she knew her numbers better than I!

When we wandered through town to see the sites, my two friends took my hands. No language issues there, just a touch, a feeling of being connected.

On our arrival back at the house, more people had gathered. It seemed that everyone knew their roles. The adage that "many hands make light work" was meant for this setting. The teens readily set about working with seemingly little or no direction from the women in charge. Dishes were washed with water drawn from the neighborhood well; tomatoes, cucumbers, watermelon and some other luscious melon were cut; grapes were washed; pickled stuffed eggplant was sliced and arranged on plates. The work was constant.

I stood back and observed for a while. I enjoyed watching the women

work—in their colorful dresses with embroidery, their colorful scarves which were tied in a variety of styles depending on age, status, and some individual style I suppose, the young girls and teens with their thick black hair tied back or braided, their dark eyes. I was watching life happen in the context of community and togetherness; it warmed my heart.

I worked alongside another woman whose hands and fingers were so fast and adept at cutting cucumbers that she could easily out-cut me. Working silently, but fast and productively alongside my partner was rewarding. We learned each other's pace, rhythm, and technique and made quite the pair.

As the meal preparations were completed, the young men started collecting the food that would be served to the men in their eating area. The young women served the women's rooms.

After dinner, it was time to head home, but not before we took loads of pictures to continue recording our experience. Women and children alike lined up for their photo opportunities. We put our arms around each other like longtime friends. It gave the feeling that we belonged together.

As we left, people gathered beside our car for a proper send off. We waved at the people with whom we had shared dinner. Our bellies were full of food and our hearts with the newness of friendships. As we were saying our goodbyes, Tony said that we were now new friends.

Tony and I filled the drive back with talk of our day, our incredible fortune at being invited to spend the day with these families. We realized that this sort of event would likely not happen in our own country and were feeling blessed by having this opportunity to share as we did.

Friendships made between strangers. People taking risks to reach out to those clearly not like themselves. A watermelon and two loaves of bread– perfect symbols of a perfect day when people shared their lives in simple ways.

—Lisa Gallagher Landes works for the U.S. Department of State as a Nurse Practitioner. She is currently posted in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.

Down the Street in Bangladesh

Renee Gehman

On a sweltering day in July I turned off a street in Pennsylvania and onto a road in Bangladesh. That's what it felt like, at least. Despite years of driving through this suburb enroute to the mall or a number of other commercial destinations, I had missed the development of a whole cultural enclave that had been planted somewhere near a local mosque and then sprawled out like a pumpkin patch on the many side streets along this main stretch.

I had a ways to walk from where I parked my car parallel to the curb. To me, the homes on this street all looked the same, and I could never remember exactly how far up the house was. I felt conspicuous walking up the sidewalk, more so than you'd imagine I'd feel in an area so close to my own home. Bangladeshi children dressed in Western clothes stared at me, sometimes waving, from their yards and balconies—Western children among Eastern grandmothers in their brightly colored . . . saris, are they called?

I felt I needed to give myself a pep talk to come here each week to tutor. When I signed up to tutor, I anticipated working with students who struggled with

learning disabilities or motivation. This girl's biggest struggle was against parents whose expectations of her seemed to have no ceiling.

As a seventh grader, she has taken and done well on her SAT, a test most tend not to think about until high school graduation is approaching. She gets top grades on most of her schoolwork and writes much better than expected at her age. Her older sister has skipped a grade and is still at the top of her class.

As their mom says, "It doesn't matter if you are number one in your class; you can always do better. No matter how good you are, you can always do more." Difficult as I found it to teach more to a student who was already far beyond her peers, her mother made a valid point. So once a week I came, and we did more.

I always planned to stay an extra twenty minutes beyond the hour-long tutor session, because the mother liked to talk about her latest arguments with her youngest daughter, the one I tutored.

In Bangladesh, the children never talked back to their parents, she said. Here, her daughter has no respect. She always wants to be on the Internet or texting on the phone. She doesn't even talk to her mother; it's always yelling. She won't even eat the Bangladesh food.

The mother wanted me to agree with her, to talk sense into her daughter for her, but I couldn't bring myself to so [to do so]. *She's twelve*, I thought. *She is a great student, she doesn't get into trouble, and if I were in her place I'd be going crazy*. I too am a victim of this culture!

I don't imagine most of us walk into 7-11's and wonder whether the man behind the counter might own a business in another country, with 3,000 employees.

Amid these snippets from everyday mother-daughter bantering, I also picked up pieces of their family's story. In Bangladesh, he, along with his brother, owned and operated a textile company with 3,000 employees. She was a university professor. They came to the United States thinking that here their two daughters would have the best opportunities in education and beyond.

They invested their savings in opening up a small convenience store in Philadelphia, but suffered losses from two break-ins. After the third break-in, which involved a drawn gun with his two young daughters in the store, he became disgusted and immediately sold the store for less than it was worth.

They moved to this suburb jobless. She went back to school part time to become an accountant and now works full time. He works part time in a 7-11 and continues to look for something else. I don't imagine most of us walk into 7-11's and wonder whether the man behind the counter might own a business in another country, with 3,000 employees. But this man does.

In my senior year of high school, Dr.

Bishop read us a quote from Viktor Frankl, Holocaust survivor and author of *Man's Search for Meaning*. Here is part of it:

> Don't aim at success—the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the byproduct of one's surrender to a person other than oneself.

I confess to sometimes coveting the success of others, mostly those who are my age or, worse yet, *younger* and have great-paying jobs. When this happens, I quickly discipline myself to remember that I am on the right path for me, and I have found that this serves.

I know this family often wonders why they left their grand, real Bangladesh to come to this little Bangladesh where they can't find great jobs and where their youngest daughter has become an independent thinker who talks back to her parents. I have wondered if the mother thinks the harder she pushes her daughters, the greater the likelihood will be that she will justify their move.

To me, success has already ensued for them, in the form of two brilliant daughters she and her husband sacrificed much for. It is more difficult to see success when it doesn't look like we thought it would, usually cloaked in more money and a better job. But I imagine this family, far from home and their dream as they envisioned it, is somehow on the right path for them.

—*Renee Gehman, Souderton, Pennsylvania, is assistant editor,* DreamSeeker Magazine; *and ESL teacher.*

"The Kids are All Right"

Celebrating Family Ties that Bind—and Gag

Dave Greiser

I never thought I'd say it, but I'm becoming a sucker for family movies. If I'm not careful, I may be required to turn in my membership card in the Curmudgeon's Club.

Not that the families whose movies I'm enjoying are normal—but then, what family is normal? "Juno" was the tale of a sharp-tongued high school student whose pregnancy forced her to grow up. "Little Miss Sunshine" tracked an extended family across America as they entered the youngest family member in a bizarre pre-adolescent beauty pageant.

Now comes "The Kids are All Right," the latest effort from rising director Lisa Cholodenko. The family in this film consists of a long-term, devoted lesbian couple, their son, and their daughter. Jules (Julianne Moore) and Nic (Annette Bening) have each borne a child via the same anonymous sperm donor, thus making the kids half-siblings.

Joni (Mia Wasikowska) and Laser (Josh Hutcherson) are precocious and well-adjusted. They live in a

comfortable Los Angeles development where workaholic Nic is an OB-GYN and dabbler Jules is thinking of becoming a landscape architect.

All is reasonably well in their world until younger son Laser decides he wants to find his donor dad—Paul, played by Mark Ruffalo. Nic and Jules, card-carrying liberals in theory, approve of this—"in theory." In reality, of course, they are quite anxious.

Paul turns out to be a likable, carefree, attractive, heterosexual man who owns an organic restaurant but whose greatest skill may be the ease with which he seduces women. I'll leave to your imagination how that skill factors into the story. It is sufficient to say that with Paul on the scene, the balance of family life is upset.

Given the subject matter of this film, it might be tempting to call this a "gay film." That would be wrong. "The Kids are All Right" is a family film—that is, it is a film about a family. The world the story inhabits is one in which same-sex marriage is an assumed reality. The story focuses not on sexual preference but on the couple's relationship and on the children's search for identity.

Far from preaching a socially liberal agenda, the film actually has a little fun with the psychobabble and hazy fog of liberal thinking. Jules and Nic are "fine" with their children seeking out their "donor dad"—but not really. And they are "fine" (read, horrified) when they suspect that Laser might be gay. This may be the first film I have seen in which a progressive social issue is not treated in a heavy-handed way by its director.

I don't imagine most of us walk into 7-11's and wonder whether the man behind the counter might own a business in another country, with 3,000 employees.

The performances in this film are a pleasure to watch. Bening and Moore may be two of the most talented actresses of this generation. They are given great material to work with in Cholodenko's witty and insightful script, but the complexity of these characters is mostly the creation of its masterful performers.

Bening's Nic is dominant, driven, controlling yet occasionally surprisingly vulnerable. Bening has played characters similar to Nic before, most notably the competitive and driven wife-mother in "American Beauty."

Moore's Jules is Nic's yang, a free-spirit whose search for a career has never quite panned out and whose in-the-moment approach to life clearly irritates her partner while remaining a source of great attraction.

Ruffalo's Paul is multi-dimensional too. Paul becomes enough of a friend and confidant to his donor kids that we find it hard to villainize him for changing the family chemistry.

Cholodenko's script captures with accuracy the affection mingled with fatigue in a long-term marriage. The kids are old enough to see through the inconsistencies and foibles of their moms. Being married with two kids myself, I almost said an audible amen in the theater after Nic explained to the kids that marriage is a promise you make, and sometimes it's really, really hard to hang in with that promise.

"The Kids are All Right" is a story of a family told with a postmodern sensibility, but it *is* a story, too, about families everywhere. See it with someone you love.

—Dave and his wife, Anita Greiser, have survived twelve moves in eight states over their 31 years together. Recently they moved into a college neighborhood near the North Baltimore Mennonite Church, which Dave serves as pastor.

The Burning Bush in Ordinary Life

Michael A. King

Because it's one of the most riveting texts in the Bible, and perhaps in the holy writings of any faith tradition, I've spent much of my life both pursued and troubled by this text from Exodus 3:1-6 (NRSV):

> Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

The problem for me was that from boyhood on I sensed the power of this text but could never find its equivalent in my own life. This was one factor contributing to my adolescent and young adult difficulty believing in God. Now I believe God does sometimes pull back the veil between the holy and our ordinary daily lives. As I age I have more stories to tell of amazing synchronicities, inbreakings of meaning that seem to make sense only if they come from Beyond, twists in my life story I have no idea what to do with if they don't emerge from the same source as Moses' burning bush.

Then the maple shimmers. And for me the bush burns once more.

So I want to keep room for the extraordinary burning bush experiences in my and our lives as well as to remember that the moment in which "I am who I am" (Exod. 3:14) breaks into Moses' and our history is far grander than anything I am to report and should never be reduced entirely to personal experience.

Nevertheless, I have also come to wonder if one reason we or at least I often fail to glimpse burning bushes is that for too long I equated them only with the extraordinary. So I didn't see those lurking even in ordinary circumstances.

I think, for instance, of the day I sat on the porch of that Galisteo, New Mexico, inn gazing south. The rays of the setting sun flamed through heartbreakingly clear air. Out in the pasture leaves on a small cottonwood danced in the breeze, gleaming as if on fire.

On the one hand, just sun, wind, sky, leaves. On the other hand, at least in my spellbound spirit, a doorway into the holy. Whatever it was like for Moses to face his burning bush, this was as close as I'd been to my own burning bush, not only because the actual sight was so captivating but also because it sparked something deep in me at a time of great soul-searching.

When I got home, I saw that right on ordinary Klingerman Road where our name is peeling off the mailbox, the sun also sets, and when the rays get to just the right height on just the right warmish day after a cold front has blown in, they shine on that growing-like-crazy silver maple (which my brother sees as overgrown weeds) I planted at the edge of the lawn after it sprouted from a seed thrown down by another maple. Then the maple shimmers. And for me the bush burns once more.

The Galisteo vision changed not only my but our entire family's life. Because year by year we fell more in love with the visions of both natural and spiritual splendor we could find in our yard at sunset. Rituals sprang up. Just the right haunting music playing. Sitting in the wooden Adirondack chairs handmade by a neighbor. Lighting the chiminea, an outdoor fireplace Joan found on sale. Our burning-bush afternoons and chiminea evenings became havens our children made plans around or invited friends to. Then, from Africa or

college amid the hard times they'd tell us, "Oh, I just can't wait for one of our evenings outside."

After we became more aware of the penumbra of the holy flaring around the ordinary, a daughter once marveled that we had lived most of our lives together mostly ignoring the outdoors. What if we had never stumbled across its blessings? That made me vow again to remember how often the burning bush is right there in my and our ordinary times, blazing away, yet I walk right past it, and to keep my eyes open for the first signs of its glow.

—Michael A. King, Telford, Pennsylvania, and Harrisonburg, Virginia, is Dean, Eastern Mennonite Seminary; and publisher, Cascadia Publishing House LLC.

Flocks

Nöel R. King

At first I assumed they were a Sunday school class returning to the sanctuary for the main service. They moved in a group and seemed to know each other quite well.

Then, "You've got to be kidding me!" I heard one of them snarl.

"What is your *problem*?" I heard another one snap. "Why can't you get with the program?"

"Be nice! Be nice!" I heard yet another one admonish the first two. "No internal warfare! No internal warfare!"

Oddly, they seemed intimately connected to each other—like when a large family sits in the pew together—but hardly aware of the rest of us. And they seemed so compellingly intense. What in the world were they doing here; who were they?

Fascinated, I continued to eye them throughout the Sunday service. I even followed them out to the church parking lot afterwards, where they all proceeded to board a maroon and white 55-passenger bus, which roared off the gravel lot in a cloud of dust.

"Weird," I said under my breath, as I watched them. The pastor was standing right next to me, a lull in the usual flow of parishioners coming by to shake his hand

and wish him Godspeed (to which he always replied, "Thank you, thank you! The same to you, dear sir/ma'am!").

"Oh yes," the pastor replied. "The Max Klines."

"The Max Klines?" I echoed. "Who are they?"

"Well, they prefer to be called Maximus or Maximum now," the pastor said, "but those of us who still remember Max before he became 'the Many' tend to call him/them by his old name."

"Huh?" I said. I was beginning to think the pastor had been standing too long in the hot July sun. His words had perplexed me before, but heaven sakes alive—what did he mean?

"Well," the pastor continued, "Max used to live in one human body like the rest of us. Over a period of time, however, he began finding more and more aspects of his psyche manifesting as real, live persons in his house—and each of them refused to leave once they had arrived."

"You mean like split personalities?" I asked, appalled.

"Sort of," the pastor responded, "only each of these people was a real live person, a different aspect of the whole Max. I soon lost track of which was the original Max, truthfully."

"It sure was rough in the beginning," he added. "In fact, several of them tried to kill each other. At one point, there were about a dozen of them in the hospital recovering from gunshot wounds, attempted stranglings and poisonings, etc. I had the so-called pleasure of visiting them at that time."

"Did they all live?" I asked.

"Sadly, no," replied the pastor. "Three of them succumbed to their wounds. ('Thank you, Mrs. Wiggins. The same to you!') The interesting thing is that within a week of those deaths, Max found two little babies in his bedroom—apparently some new junior Maxes to help replace the expired ones."

"Are they dangerous?" I asked. "Could they hurt me? Not the babies, I mean—the big ones?"

"Maximum is very powerful," admitted the pastor. "When they focus in different directions, it can get quite chaotic. I have had to ask them to leave church more than once when that has happened, frankly. On the other hand, when they are all focused on the same thing, they can build you a new church in a day, raise a million dollars for the Poor Fund, or write a bestselling book in a week. When that happens, my friend, they are veritable miracles in the flesh."

"My goodness," I said. "That's amazing."

"Yes, it is," said the pastor.

He added, "You know, when the Good Lord gave me charge over His flocks of sheep, He never told me that where I would find the flocks would be inside the sheep. They never mentioned that in seminary, either."

"No," I said. "I guess not."

—As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Scottsville, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful or worrisome things, including a flock of persons growing from one Maximum.

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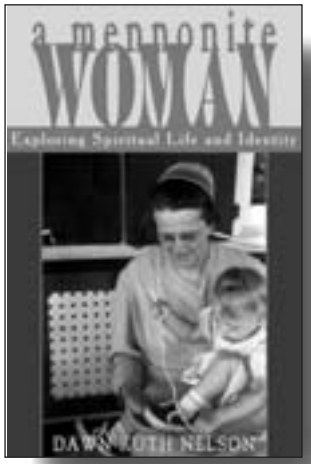

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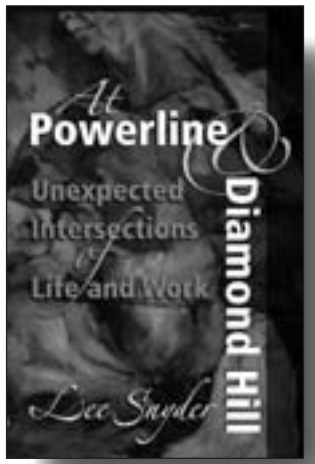

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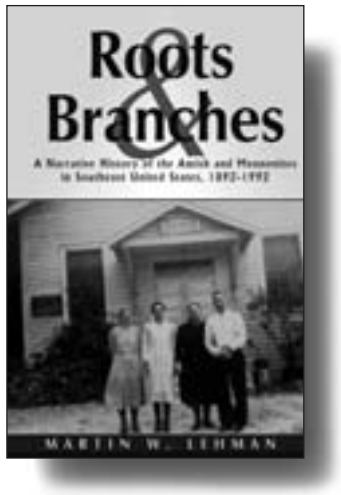

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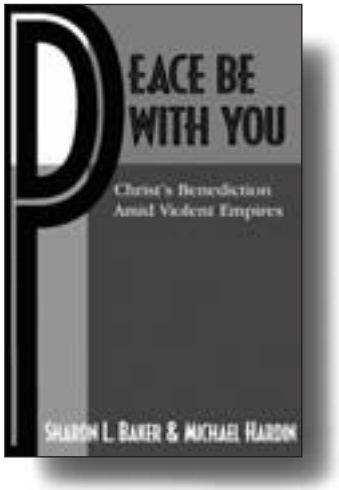

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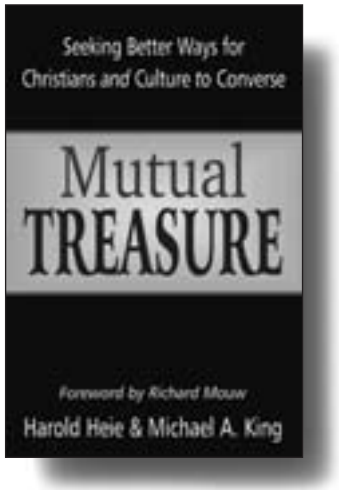

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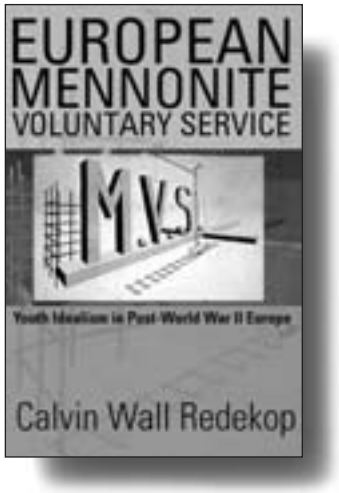

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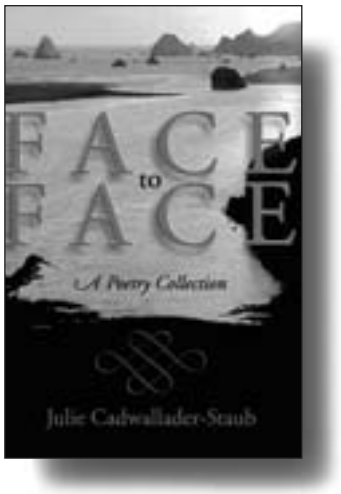

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The Farm Wife Describes Her Mystery Trips

Once or twice a year, I board a bus with strangers,
none of us knowing where we'll be
until we get there. It's like floating in meringue
with no notion of what's below.

I send everyone back home a postcard:
the mouth of Mammoth Cave, dunes that rise
like pyramids or the zoo in Cincinnati.
My sisters think it odd

I never plan for Italy or a Caribbean cruise.
As girls, they studied maps, plotted their escape
from floors they could never scrub clean
and sheets that smelled faintly

of what bedded down in straw. I travel
the way of starlings, clustered like a cloud
that cracks the whip and then lengthens into a river,
leaving and returning, never asking why.

—*Shari Wagner is the author of* Evening Chore *and editor of her father's memoir,* A Hundred Camels, *both books published by Cascadia Publishing House. Her poetry has appeared in many journals and has been read by Garrison Keillor on* The Writer's Almanac. *For more* Farm Wife *poems, see the January 2011 issue of Center for Mennonite Writing, http://www.mennonitewriting.org/*