

North Pacific Yearly Meeting
Missoula, Montana
July 30, 2004

Eden Grace

Wandering in the wilderness — discovering deep obedience to God

Greetings Friends! I'm glad to be with you this morning. As you heard, I've been appointed as field staff for Friends United Meeting, working in partnership with the Yearly Meetings in East Africa. This is an exciting venture for me, my husband James, and our two boys! But since we haven't begun that work yet, I can't speak to you this morning about how the Lord is prospering in Kenya. Rather, I want to share with you how the Lord has prospered in my life over the last two years as I've been led to this ministry in Kenya.

For me to even say that "the Lord prospered in my life" indicates how I am interpreting my experience, since by any measure this has been a time of trial. Therefore I begin with 1 Peter 4:12-14: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed."

I do indeed rejoice in the fiery ordeal. I want to tell you my story, and share how, through prayer and Bible stories, I have come to rejoice in sharing Christ's sufferings, and shout for joy that his glory is revealed through this time of trial.

I went to Kenya with my family in July 2002 for the FUM Triennial, and to travel as part of our discernment process for ministry in Kenya. The trip came on the heels of an exhilarating period in my ministry. I felt open to whatever God would bring next in my life, and confident that I could go to the ends of the earth in obedience to God.

From the beginning of the trip, I felt aware of how little I understood, and didn't like the feeling of not knowing what was going on around me. Within a few days, I was aware of feeling very anxious, teary, ungrounded, having frighteningly vivid dreams, confused about what was real and what was illusion. Some of this is a natural response to a cross-cultural experience, but I'd done a lot of international travel before and never felt that unstable. The trip did contain wonderful moments, but it was also full of a vague fear and sense of unease and ungroundedness. I had a feeling it might be related to the anti-malarial drug I was taking, called Larium, which is known to cause psychiatric side effects in some people.

By the time I got home from Kenya, I felt foggy-headed, disoriented and vaguely physically unwell. My anxiety continued to increase. I described a feeling of "shifting sands" in my journal. I went to Switzerland for the World Council of Churches just two weeks after arriving home from Kenya, and had a major crash there. I was unable to sleep. I felt gripped by a panic and sense of unreality that I had to mask at all costs. I was responsible for leading worship and Bible Study one morning for this gathering of 300 Christians from around the world. With a sense of gasping for air in a smoke-filled room, I faked my way through the worship and Bible Study, then walked out of the plenary hall and broke down in total exhaustion and despair. The World Council staff arranged for me to see an English-speaking doctor. I was convinced there was something terribly wrong with me — I had been laying awake at night believing I would be dead by morning. This doctor understood what was really happening to me. I was having an intense psychiatric reaction to the Larium. I was having a panic attack. There is great power in naming that which plagues you. I stopped taking the drug, and felt a little better by the end of the Switzerland trip. But my confidence in myself had been shattered.

I continued to discern about going back to Kenya to work for FUM, and I read a lot about African current events. I became engulfed in a sense of my own lack of understanding. I became aware of how deeply culture determines our patterns of thinking and knowing, such that I could no longer have confidence in my own abilities. Not only have I come to believe that I know nothing, but I think the spiritual state of unknowing is perhaps the only condition from which it would be safe to venture forth in ministry.

Thus began a fruitful and difficult period of my spiritual life, from which this message to you today arises.

I have come to see this time in my life in terms of the wilderness stories in Scripture, especially the story of the Hebrew people spending forty years in the wilderness after receiving the Law and before entering the Promised Land. The wilderness is a place of trial, as Moses explains in Deuteronomy 8:2 "Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would

keep his commandments.” The Bible repeatedly exhorts us to remember the wilderness. Why? What truths do the wilderness stories contain, which we must not forget?

The Hebrew people spent forty years in the wilderness. Jesus was sent out into the wilderness immediately after his baptism, and spent forty days there. Biblical scholars tell us that both wilderness and the number forty symbolize trial and testing. The wilderness is a place of confusion, wandering, loss of clear purpose, and exposure to great risk. Forty signifies the period of time necessary for a complete cycle of one portion of God’s plan — for retreat, trial, victory and new beginning.

In the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Exodus tells of how Moses brought the people out of slavery in Egypt, through the Red Sea and the Sinai desert, to Mt Sinai where he received the Covenant Law. That Law is set forth in detail in the Book of Leviticus. When the Book of Numbers begins, the camp is getting ready to set out for Canaan, a land of promise and freedom for a community of escaped slaves. They march out in an extremely orderly way, which makes a dramatic contrast with their endless rebellions. On their way to Canaan, they grumble about the food, speak against their leaders, and wish they could return to the comforts of slavery. There are a total of eight serious rebellions in the Book of Numbers, each of which is punished by God through such things as plague and fire. Yet in every case God also provides for the people’s needs in unexpected ways, such as water from the stone and manna from heaven.

When they reach the edge of Canaan, Moses sends spies to investigate the Canaanite defenses. The spies return with a description of the fertility of the land, as well as stories of the fearsome Canaanites and their well-defended towns. In fear, the people decide to return to Egypt. They are afraid of God’s promise, and want to run away from God’s leadership. Therefore, having glimpsed the promised land, God orders the people to turn around and go back into the wilderness and stay there for 38 more years. It is perhaps this moment, more than any other, that drew me to Numbers as a reading of my own experience. I have glimpsed the promise of what God is doing in the next phase of my life. But in so glimpsing, I discovered the depth of my own fear. For two years now, I have been in the wilderness. I ask God for the wisdom to understand the wilderness.

For the early Quaker writer Samuel Bownas, the wilderness is the place between the sinful self and the sanctified self. “For no man can be righteous and wicked at one time; we must first be brought out of the bondage of corruption under spiritual Pharaoh and Egypt, into the wilderness, before we can offer acceptably unto God.” (Bownas p. 6) Bownas says that the stories of the Hebrew people traveling from Egypt to Canaan, and the things that happened to them along the way, show us the path from spiritual death as strangers to God and children of wrath, into a state of grace and life through Jesus Christ, our spiritual Moses. Whatever happens in the wilderness, it is surely necessary as part of how God readies us for service and ministry.

The wilderness story of our lives isn’t necessarily a linear narrative, in which we endure the wilderness for the sake of the future promised land. It can be more like concentric circles — we find a deeper joy and freedom and obedience than we have ever known before when we are brought to the heart of the wilderness. Once we begin to embrace that experience, spiritual maturity consists of knowing ourselves always to be in the wilderness, in need of God, and to find that our greatest pouring out in ministry springs from our deepest sense of neediness.

I have gone deeper and deeper into an awareness of unknowing, of weakness, of brokenness. I cultivated, and indeed appreciated, the fact that I didn’t know anything. Sometimes I’ve felt at peace about it, sometimes not. For a time, I lost all confidence in my ministry, and felt a total dearth of words. My condition was very poor and my vocal ministry was stopped. Bownas describes how to stay faithful in such a condition: “Therefore, if at times thee is very poor and has nothing to say, let not this tempt thee to go beyond thy line; for this poverty and affliction thee is under may by divine purpose be brought upon thee, to prepare thy mind to speak more feelingly and with moving language to others under the like distress and barrenness of soul.” (Bownas p. 68) I kept in silence.

Its not so much that I was waiting out this time of trial. Nor did I relish suffering for its own sake, for therein lies pride. Rather, I sought to know the motions of God in my own emptiness, and to embrace unknowing as not just a path but a destination.

I had a couple of instances over the next few months of glimpsing my former competent and articulate self, but these were fleeting. I knew that God did use me at times, that I could indeed be faithful and useful in ministry. But this was more of a concept or a memory than something I could feel to be true day by day.

In the months after I stopped taking Larium, I became increasingly aware of how the adverse reaction had not lessened. I would experience waves of free-floating anxiety, disturbing dreams, and vague dread. I described myself as “in a muddy place.” I prayed Psalm 91, asking for God’s protection, but I had no idea what my ministry was. I learned how to be present with anxiety, to recognize it, and to not give it more power over me than it deserved.

However I still wrote in my journal that I wanted to “let go of the anxiety in order to get back to my ‘true’ state of being, which is healthy, centered, spiritually grounded and abundant.” I yearned to know the “truth” of my life — am I unbalanced, or is the drug creating that feeling of unbalance, and the truth is that I am OK? I didn’t come to some sense of an answer to that question of “the truth about me” for another year.

I didn’t yet understand that the path of faithfulness lay not in getting back to myself, but in going forward through the brokenness. Yet I felt surprisingly clear that I was supposed to go back to Kenya to work for FUM. It was as if I knew, even then, that the only way through the cloud of unknowing is to head directly into the place of greatest uncertainty.

It’s difficult to choose the way of uncertainty. John Woolman has a vivid description of this condition in his Journal: “I have gone forward, not as one travelling in a road cast up and well prepared, but as a man walking through a miry place in which are stones here and there safe to step on, but so situated that one step being taken, time is necessary to see where to step next.” What a powerful image — balancing on a stone, part-way across the miry bog, searching for another stone safe to step on.

Sometimes I can’t see where to step next. In my anxiety or panic, I feel abandoned by God in the pit. Then I pray Psalm 88: “You have put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. . . . I am shut in so that I cannot escape; my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call on you, O Lord; I spread out my hands to you. Do you work wonders for the dead?” This Psalm is subtitled “a complaint to God.” I would call that an understatement — it is a wrenching cry of despair to a God who seems completely deaf to the suffering of the one who prays. It is a cry of utter hopelessness. There is no hint throughout the psalm that God makes any response to the pleading prayers. The question — do you work wonders for the dead? — is left hanging, and the answer seems to be “no.” There are times when this is the psalm I choose to pray. I rail at God for throwing me into the pit and abandoning me there.

Six months after we interviewed for the Kenya job with FUM, we heard that we would be hired, but they couldn’t say when we would be going. My response to this news was to feel disoriented and unreal. I felt manic about all the other tasks and responsibilities in my life, and couldn’t manage to bring Kenya to the forefront of my awareness. It didn’t feel grounded in God or reality. Kenya became the elephant in the room. There wasn’t anything we needed to be doing to get ready at that point. Other work held our day to day attention. Yet this thing hung over us in a vague and unnamed way. It gave me a constant sense that I don’t know where I am, where I’m going, and what I should be doing. While my anxiety level crept higher and higher, I returned continually to a prayer of gazing at the elephant and trying to make friends with it; learn its contours and be still in its presence.

God is not a sadist who wills our suffering. God desires our faithfulness, and in order to be our most faithful, most deeply true selves, we have to experience the limitations of the self. We have to know that we need God, that without God we can do nothing, in order to be made ready to do all things for God.

This past winter, fear ballooned in me. I felt the upswell of some old fears — that I don’t measure up to “real” ministers, to truly spiritual Friends; that my life lacks a deeper consistency of experience and memory; that God will call me into a ministry that will hurt my children. I indulged those fear more than I should have, but I don’t have deep regrets. I think God was letting me stare into the abyss and search for the bottom, so that I could really become ready to receive help. The hardest thing that happened was that my partner James and I found ourselves in a terrible conflict, not based on anything tangible, but with a devastating erosion of trust. Now rage was added to my emotional constellation of fear, dread and panic. I directed the rage at James, the kids and at myself, and desperately wished to be purged of the anger that was cutting me inside like a knife. My prayers became tortured. I had an image of myself as wounded on a battlefield, with gangrene, needing to amputate without anesthesia.

At the lowest point, I wrote in my journal “I am shattered in a million pieces, which are flying about inside me with no escape. Break me open, Lord!” Then in a spurt of honesty, I added “do I really want that? Or can I pray for a slow leak?” God answered with a passage from Matthew 9:13 “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” I was scraped bare, down to the splintery unprotected wood, yet this is the material the carpenter can use for a new creation.

I finally saw a psychiatrist. It was a liberating experience to feel that she understood my condition, and could help me name it. Yet it also meant a serious challenge to my sense of self. She suggested to me that the Lariam had had a permanent effect on my psychology, as it does in some small number of cases. It had left me with a mental illness that wasn’t going to go away on its own. I had an anxiety and panic disorder. She recommended treatment with medication and psychotherapy. My response to all this was very intense. It gave me hope that I wouldn’t have to continue with the emotional turmoil of the past two years. Yet it evoked deep shame. Should I keep it a secret? If I admit to a mental illness, does that invalidate my

ministry? Would FUM's leadership lose confidence in me if they knew? Does it make me ineligible for service in Kenya? Does it require a denial of my self-assertion and self-understanding? Do I lose the right to believe in myself and expect others to believe in me? Do I lose all credibility? Will anyone ever take me seriously if they know I'm on a psychiatric medication? If I feel better on medication, does that invalidate the emotions of the past? Can people just disregard everything I've said and done over the last two years? If I take medication, will I still be me? Will I lose the emotional intensity that has been blessing as well as burden?

Full of both hope and fear, I chose to begin treatment. I chose to embrace my brokenness. I touched my feet down at the bottom of the pit, and found it was solid after all. I prayed about knowing and unknowing and being fully known. I admitted that I was lost in a tract-less land, and asked God to lead me.

Following God's leadership is an essential practice in the wilderness. In the story of the Hebrew people, God's leadership is made visible in the pillar of cloud that leads them out past the Red Sea. This same cloud stays with them through the whole forty years. It controls when they march and when they stay in camp. The text goes on at length to impress upon us that it was only on a sign from God that they would move, and that they obeyed the cloud no matter what.

So although we talk about them wandering in the wilderness, they weren't strictly lost. Certainly, they didn't know where they were, where they were going, or when. But they were being clearly guided every step of the way. The image of this cloud moving before them is a striking way to imagine what Friends call "way opening" — that sense that the cloud has lifted and beckons us to step forward, even as it seemed to rest heavily upon us and prevent our moving just the day before. We do not choose the time of our calling. We simply follow the cloud as it leads us. Waiting and following are essential lessons of the wilderness.

After the Hebrew people are told they will spend 38 years in the wilderness, until the entire slave generation has died and a new generation has come to maturity, the text simply omits that next 38 years and jumps to the preparations for entering Canaan. We know nothing about what happened to the community as they lingered in the wilderness, as the entire slave generation died away and their children came to adulthood, except that Miryam died and was buried there. I find this incredible period of silent dormancy very powerful. Sometimes the work of faithfulness is simple, silent waiting. It seems that nothing is happening. Like a seed in the ground in winter, like a tree barren of its leaves, we might be tempted to despair that any life is left in us at all. Like the secret latency of pregnancy, something is growing deep inside that has yet to issue forth in ministry. There is no way to rush through a phase of life like this. There is no way to call forth words when God has sealed our lips. There is no way to glimpse what lies ahead. We can only trust that the generation of the promise, as it grows to maturity within our hearts, will burst forth in blossom in the springtime of new energy, and we will find ourselves propelled forward in ministry again.

Sometimes God's blessing is obscured from view by the great expanse of wasteland in the desert. In *The Little Prince*, we find this passage: "The desert is beautiful", the little prince added. And that was true. I have always loved the desert. One sits down on a desert sand dune, sees nothing, hears nothing. Yet through the silence something throbs, and gleams... "What makes the desert beautiful," said the little prince, "is that somewhere it hides a well..."

One of the most important things to take away from a period of wilderness is the certainty that God has been with us all along. The well is always there, somewhere. The cloud goes before me, as my faithful guide. There is a safety in following God. During my times of trial these last two years, I have had one hymn constantly in my head, an incessant refrain: "Great is thy faithfulness, great is thy faithfulness, morning by morning new mercies I see. All I have needed thy hand hath provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me."

We know that God has a plan for our lives, but that knowledge can sometimes just feel like more pressure — we have to work so hard to discern what God wants — if he really wanted it so badly, wouldn't he make it easier for us to understand and follow! A wise pastor in my Yearly Meeting opened the meaning of Psalm 119:105 for me: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." My job is to be faithful one step at a time. The lamp of God's word creates a small pool of light around my feet, illuminating just the next step and allowing me to take it with some degree of confidence. But if I lift my eyes and gaze down the road, I am lucky if I can make out vague shadows. The wisdom comes in realizing that I don't need to see down the road. I trust that God has a road mapped out for me. I give over needing to know the big picture, and focus on my faithful steps today.

In this way, the wilderness experience teaches us to surrender our desire to control, and learn to trust God. Woolman speaks about the danger of "kindling our own fire." It's frightening to abandon our attempt to maintain control over our lives, but there's a liberating truth-telling in admitting we are not in control. I recognize a pattern in myself of clinging to something when I feel God working big changes in my life. I cling out of a desire to control something, anything. When I was pregnant

with our first child, I became fixated on the need to buy a high-quality crib mattress before the birth. I had been put on bedrest, but I violated the bedrest in order to shop for a crib mattress. I absolutely had to have this thing, in order to feel ready for motherhood. Then, of course, when Isaiah was born, he slept in our bed for the first six months, and we didn't even set up the crib. The crib mattress stayed in the closet — I hadn't needed it at all. Since then, I have found it very fruitful to ask myself whether something has become a crib mattress, and whether I can find a way to let go of my clinging.

When we focus on trusting God, letting go can become very simple. To let go of clinging, we only need to release our grip. To fall into the hands of the living God, we only have to leap. In Psalm 56 we hear: "Oh Most High, when I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I am not afraid; what can flesh do to me? ... For you have delivered my soul from death, and my feet from falling, so that I may walk before God in the light of life." The greatest fault of the Hebrew people in the wilderness was to lack trust in God.

Samuel Bownas reminds us "We can't now help ourselves by our own contrivance, and workings in our own wills, but here we must live a life of faith, wholly depending on him that will (if we faint not in our minds) bring us through to the heavenly Canaan." (Bownas p. 7)

And so we come to an even deeper wisdom of spiritual wilderness — in such times, we discover that our faithful obedience to God is both very much our own, and at the same time not of us at all. We must be willing to give over our will. We must be willing to wander in the wilderness. We must make a willful decision to relinquish willfulness and embrace willingness.

After the Hebrew people are told they must spend the rest of their lives in the wilderness, a group of them decide to storm the Canaanite cities without God's approval — they determine to do the very thing that terrified them in the first place. They do it with a perverse determination to be disobedient, to spite God, knowing they are choosing to depart from God's will. They are described as defiant and reckless. They symbolize the danger of willfulness. I've certainly made choices like that!

In contrast to willfulness, willingness consists of surrender and obedience. It requires a reformation of the will, a personal transformation which reorients our inner desires, so that we begin to will the will of God. This is the meaning of the passage that gives the Society of Friends our name: "you are my friends in you do what I command you." It's not simply about choosing to follow Jesus' teachings. It's about abiding in him and him in us, so that our own will is remade.

It's easy to imagine how faithfulness requires surrendering the will to disobey, and trying instead to live by righteous precepts. But this misses the point. Even our will to righteousness is inadequate and will lead us into sin, for it still derives its power from our own ego and not from God. This is what Penington meant when he appealed to Friends to "Give over thine own willing, give over thine own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee and be in thee and breathe in thee and act in thee." We must give over our own desiring, even the desire to be faithful, in order to find the source of true faithfulness, which is both deeply within us, and yet not of us at all.

One of the most profound prayers in all of Scripture, for me, is "I believe, help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). For me, this means that I have enough faith to walk just one step further than I think I can, to take the next believing step, while at the same time confessing that I already reached the furthest extent of my belief with the previous step. I can't do what you're asking of me, God, so having confessed that fact, I'll do it anyway. This is the only way I have ever found courage within me.

Indeed, one of the marks of God's will that I look for in my life is that I find uncharacteristic feelings and urges rising up in me. Where I, by myself, would feel fear, instead there is courage and joy. Where I would feel guilt and shame, instead there is freedom and desire. When I feel my weaknesses and vulnerabilities peeled away from me like the layers of an onion, and discover other motions in their place, I name this as God working in me, equipping me for faithful obedience.

I had agonized about whether, if I take medication for an anxiety disorder, I would still be me, whether I would still have the right to minister, whether I could, in good conscience, go to Kenya on behalf of FUM. Through these last few months of medication and therapy, I have discovered that I am more deeply me, and yet also I am remade into a new creation. I still carry the knowledge of my unworthiness, but it is a sweet knowledge. I still lack confidence in my own abilities, but I rest on the sure confidence that God is more able than I can ask. I will go to Kenya in a spirit of deep obedience. And I'm here today doing a risky thing, speaking from a place of weakness.

This chapter of my life is far from over, but I have felt God rescuing me from the miry place, and Psalm 40 gives voice to my gratitude: "I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit out of

the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. ... I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God.”

One of the great mysteries of Christian spirituality is the paradox of the self. Jesus said “for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”(Luke 18:14b) Paul said “whenever I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor 12: 9-10) We come to know ourselves in the Spirit through paradox or reversal.

Reversal or paradox are not simply matters of exchanging one thing for another within ourselves, such as replacing a sense of our worthiness with a knowledge of our unworthiness. Rather, it is about coming to know ourselves as simultaneously worthy and unworthy. In our foolishness, we find that God chooses what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. In our weakness, we find that God chooses what is weak in the world to shame the strong (1 Cor 1:20-31), for strength abides in weakness and doesn't need to push weakness aside. In our unknowing, we are fully known. There is no logical explanation for these paradoxes — we simply give them voice by praising God.

The Light as early Friends knew it was the agent of this sanctifying paradox of the self. It was a searchlight that revealed our sins. It was the burning of the refiner's fire, purifying our elements for more perfect service as Isaiah describes: “See, I have refined you, but not like silver; I have tested you in the furnace of adversity.” (Isaiah 48:10) As Samuel Bownas puts it: “There must be a state of sanctification known, by the spirit of judgment and burning, before any can be proper objects to be receivers of this inspiring gift...” (Bownas p. 3-4) “Thus it pleases God to suffer his ministers to be proved, that they may come forth as vessels fit for the refiner.” (Bownas p. 69) This “refining” by the spirit of burning is not a comfortable experience! But the only thing we can say in response to finally knowing the work of the Light in this way is “come, and I'll tell you what God has done for my soul.” (Bownas p. 69)

“Then Jesus said to them all ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.’” (Luke 9:23-24) Death is at work in us, but life is in us through Jesus Christ. We are brought low in order to be raised up in Christ. He who loses his life will find it.

The story of the Hebrew people in the wilderness prefigures the death and resurrection of Jesus, the death of the old and the birth of the new. The slave generation will not be able to enter the promised land. They would always be tempted to look back in longing for a life well-ordered by the disordered values of a slave economy. Instead their children, who know nothing but the wilderness, will be the ones to enter Canaan. The overall message in the Book of Numbers is an encouraging one, even though so many of its stories depict rebellion, suffering, and testing. The big picture is that these faithless people are beloved of God, and God never gives up on them. These unworthy people are the ones God will use to bless the world. These people, who are so like me. Moses says to the people at the end of the forty years “Surely the Lord your God has blessed you in all your undertakings; he knows your going through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing.” The message is reassuring and liberating — to live, we only need to die.

And so I return to the scripture which began this message: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed.” (1 Peter 4:12-14) The ordeal is indeed fiery, but it is not surprising, nor strange. We share in Christ's sufferings, and thereby share in Christ's glory. Shout for joy!

The motif of sharing in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus is central to Christian spirituality — it is the meaning of a “born-again” Christian, and of the ritual significance of water baptism as being buried and raised up with Christ. Quaker spirituality embraces this motif as not only a life-changing moment, but more deeply the mark of a changing life in every moment. Every time we feel God's call and know our unworthiness, we are lowered into the tomb. Every time we answer the call with a movement of the heart toward faithfulness, we rise into new life. Quaker spirituality calls us to take up our daily cross. Daily finding ourselves judged and buried. Daily finding ourselves raised up. This, finally, is the “truth about me” that I have been searching for in the wilderness.

On Good Friday this year, as I moved through the Stations of the Cross, I felt the deep meaning of my suffering. I felt called to embrace within me the full cast of characters from the story of the crucifixion — I have within me the beloved disciple, the sorrowing mother, the gambling soldier, the faithful woman, the frightened disciple, the guilty criminal, and the suffering Christ. I have within me the cold of the tomb. And I have within me the resurrection at dawn.