

Smithfield



Friends

Newsletter March 2005
Smithfield Monthly Meeting of Friends
108 Smithfield Road Woonsocket, RI 02895

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Clerk: Richard Frechette

Recording Clerk: Connie Bair-Thompson

Pastor: Marnie Miller-Gutsel

Treasurer: Cindy Keene

Ministry & Counsel: Diane Gauthier

Newsletter: Randy Oftedahl

CALENDAR FOR March/April

EVERY SUNDAY

10:30 am: MEETING FOR WORSHIP

Child Care Available

LAST SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH: Unprogrammed Worship and Pot Luck Lunch
Children's First Day School during worship (2nd & last Sundays)

OTHER WORSHIP UNDER THE CARE OF SMITHFIELD MEETING:

SECOND SUNDAY OF MONTH 4:00 PM: Unprogrammed Worship at Uxbridge Meetinghouse, Uxbridge, Mass

Other events

Pot luck lunch will be held this month following worship on the 3rd Sunday, March 20 (rather than the traditional last Sunday). It will include a presentation sponsored by Peace & Social Concerns Committee.

1st Day Worship Schedule

- Mar 13 Unprogrammed worship
- Mar 20 Programmed worship led by Kevin Lee (Kevin is a recorded minister from Westport Monthly Meeting; he has been the long-time leader of Junior Yearly Meeting retreats for NEYM)
- Mar 27 Unprogrammed worship
- Apr 3 Programmed worship led by Susan Furry (Smithfield Meeting member sojourning at Beacon Hill Meeting)
- Apr 10 Unprogrammed worship
- Apr 17 Programmed worship led by Susan Kay (Smithfield Meeting member sojourning at Storrs Meeting)
- Apr 24 Unprogrammed worship
- May 1 Programmed worship led by Liberty Goodwin

Smithfield Meeting Retreat

- May 14-15 (Sat-Sun) at the Craigeville Retreat Center (Cape Cod)
- Partially subsidized by the Lilly Foundation Grant
- Theme – Naming and Nurturing our gifts in community.
- Special registration mailing will be sent out in April
- There may be the opportunity for individual registrations for an additional night's stay (Friday)
- Programs for both children and adults
- **MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW!**

Good Friday Tenebrae Service March 25 @ 7:00 PM

Letter from Marnie

Dear Friends--

Greetings from London--but from an internet cafe and not from the Penn Club. I'd been hoping to be able to send my journal and newsletter from my lap top there, as attachments, but their link isn't working. When will it be fixed?

"When the man gets here." So, no place to plug in the lap top there. And the cost could really add up if I have to compose and send everything from a cafe somewhere. So my communiques will be rather short for the time being.



Anyway--London is still the most fascinating city in the world. I've been using the Friends House Library on weekdays (no internet access there either), where I've found letters from, about, and by Job Scott. He was unimpressed by Friends in these "Northern Climes." Found a spiritual deadness among them; more liveliness among the "other Societies"--i.e. mostly the Methodists and Presbyterians--felt the Quakers thought too well of themselves by half, being above those others, and far more spiritually advanced.

Friends House, London

However, I've found no mention of him yet in official Meeting records--maybe they didn't like what he had to say.

I went to Meeting for Worship at the Westminster MM, in the heart of the theater district, and received a very friendly and enthusiastic reception. Friends were genuinely eager to learn about pastors and the pastoral Friends tradition. One Friend was so impressed with what I said that he suggested I write an article for the London YM periodical The Friend--how flattering!

An extra bonus--among the other visitors were a couple I had known when I was still at Guilford College, back in the 1980's--I'd expected to meet American Friends I knew, but they were a real surprise.

I felt very easy and comfortable in their Meeting for Worship--some good messages, and a sense that Quakers around the world do share something very important.

There are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in everyone.-- (1 Cor. 12:6)

Love,
Marnie

Following Job--Part I

26 February, 2005--Well, I'm here--ruffled, very tired (2 hours of sleeping--or dozing?--on the overnight flight Newark to Birmingham) feeling very fuzzy and semi-disconnected from reality, but after a very expensive (22 plus pounds--about 45 dollars) taxi ride, I'm checked into Woodbrooke. And it looks as if I can't get on to the internet, at least not at the moment, until the more knowledgeable people return on Monday.

27 Feb--And I did get on, having discovered the computer room on my own, But still can't use my lap top--no where to plug in.

Thought I'd arrived into spring--snow drops, crocuses, primroses, cherry trees--all in full bloom. Birds twittering everywhere. This morning--a dusting of snow on the ground--just a reminder it's still February.

Meeting for worship at the Selly Oak Meeting, just up the street. Very little vocal ministry--someone read one of the Queries. Walked back to Woodbrooke with the clerk; he's also Woodbrooke's very opinionated gardner: "Grub it all out! Restore it to the way it was designed to be!" One thing that was grubbed out was one of my favorites--the roses that climbed over a tiny boat house on the pond--gone in favor of a Chinese water garden--the boat house now has a tile roof with turned up Chinese twiddle bits on the corners.

1 March--London, at the Penn Club. Perfect location. Fifteen minutes brisk walk to the library--British Museum just around the corner. Theatre district, Picadilly Circus, Trafalgar Square, art galleries, the Thames--all walkable.

2 March--So I walked. Found my first internet cafe--with a bunch of e-mails waiting. Answered most--piece of cake--except it costs 15 cents a minute on my earthlink account, plus the cafe's charge of 4 dollars an hour. Ouch! Now seeking cheaper alternatives. Penn Club was supposed to have internet hook up for the lap top. But it doesn't work. "When do you think it will be fixed/?" "When the man gets here." "The man" has yet to appear. So as an instrument of communication, the computer is a washout so far.

Afternoon in the Library at Friends House--Found several letters to, from, and about Scott--all, oddly, originated in Ireland. Favorite quote from "himself": "Low lies the life in these Northern CLimes, and Truth has too much fallen in the streets of our poor faded Society; long has the call been continued to them to return; is it strange then that the feet of the Messengers are turned to the Highways and Hedges: My little services be mostly among other Societies [i.e., non Friends--mostly other Protestants, such as Methodists and Presbyterians]. Among Friends he often found that a "listless stupid silence prevails over all, as dead a Form as any in the Land." He attributed this to their thinking too highly of themselves, seeing themselves as "far advanced" beyond the "forms" of the "other Societies." Interestingly, when he died, he was seen as a "saint" by those around him.

4 March--First venture into minutes of the London area Meetings--absolutely no mention of Scott's presence. Oh well--early days. Maybe he hasn't yet told them that their Meetings are full of stupid and listless silence.

5 March--Lovely, nostalgic visit to Hampstead, an 18th century suburb high above London. Hampstead Heath was once infested with bandits, including the notorious Dick Turpin. Now one of London's most famous recreation grounds, mostly infested with joggers. Much of it left in it's "wild" state--there are actually deer. Also views over the whole city. It's one of my favorite places in all of London--people have lived around it, a few on it, for centuries; it has well groomed paths and game fields and a swimming pond--but it's still very strange and mysterious. If it were larger, the Lord of the Rings could have been filmed there--that sort of strange.

My family and I lived on the verges of Hampstead for a semester in the early 1980's; my daughters went to school in an old Edwardian school building in the middle of the village. Many residents are very wealthy--and they have the clout to keep eager developers out--they like it the way it is. And O Joy!--many of my favorites shops were still there--hardware store (then called an ironmongers), tea shop, a classy fruiterer's shop (selling even more exotic and expensive fruit than it did over twenty years ago--some I couldn't even identify). And the wonderful used book shop--shelves so close together, customers have to back up to let other people by, stacks of books on the floor so you can't see what's on the bottom shelf.

And I had a real English tea in the tea shop--tea pot with tea leaves (not bags), with a tiny strainer to keep them out of the cup; a little pitcher of milk, and one of hot water, in case it's too strong. And a real china cup--with flowers painted on it. To go with it, a "savoury"--which seems to have disappeared from everywhere else in England, but is something not sweet that is served with tea to make it a light meal--usually a sandwichy sort of thing--like sardines on toast or some such. Mine was sliced tomatoes covered with grated cheese, stuffed into a very large puff pastry. A lovely day

6 March--Meeting for Worship at Westminster Meeting--for that, see this month's newsletter. Wandered back to the Penn Club via Covent Garden--full of stalls selling overpriced gee-gaws, and the buskers--London's famous street entertainers--a knife thrower, a juggler, and several examples of an "art/entertainment" form also available in Providence at of an "art/entertainment" form also available in Providence at **7 March**--Spent the morning in the internet cafe, sending off e-mails to F/friends and family. Back to the Penn Club to discover the internet connection is now working. "The man" finally came!

7 March--Spent the morning in the internet cafe, sending off e-mails to F/friends and family. Back to the Penn Club to discover the internet connection is now working. "The man" finally came!

And at the Library--first actual mention of Friend Job Scott, who attended the Select Meeting of Ministers and Elders (six men, six women) of the Devonshire House Friends Meeting (the biggest and most influential London Meeting at the time). But all it said was that he was there--so I can't get too excited yet.

Marnie's address while sojourning in England and Ireland is marniemqutsell@yahoo.com.



Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business: February 5, 2005

Note: *Minutes 11-12-13 were approved at the February Meeting, and were published in the February newsletter.*

2005-14 Report from Peace & Social Concerns Committee

Nathan St. Germain and Aaron Frechette have been named co-clerks of the Peace & Social Concerns Committee for 2005. The Committee will meet regularly on the second Sunday of each month at the rise of worship. The Committee invites all to attend.

2005-15 Report from Finance Committee

Kathy Malin has been named clerk of the Finance Committee for 2005. The Committee will meet regularly on the 3rd Sunday of each month. However, the time will vary from month-to-month - sometimes meeting prior to worship, and at other times meeting at the rise of worship. At the January meeting, the Committee determined how it would expend from and account for the Lilly Foundation Grant funds. At its February meeting, the Committee will begin developing the annual budget.

2005-16 Request to Rent the Meetinghouse

In November (Minute 2004-65), Friends had asked the Finance Committee to consider what financial arrangement would be appropriate were we to rent the meetinghouse for a weekly worship service for the Truth Tabernacle Evangelical Church. Kathy Malin reported that the committee has established a rate of \$100 per week, assuming a once-per-week usage. This amount is the same that the meeting requests for the use of the meetinghouse for weddings of persons not of the Meeting. There will be no separate fee for utilities, the usage in warmer months with little or no heating required making up for those months in which the fuel will be drawn down. Kathy also noted that the committee will ask for a security deposit. These are tentative amounts that will be discussed with the representative of the other Church.

Friends asked that the committee establish a formal lease with this group and any other group in the future who would regularly use the meetinghouse.

2005-17 Disposition of the East Blackstone Meetinghouse

The Clerk read selections from minutes from the last several years about the East Blackstone Meetinghouse, which meetinghouse has for many years been officially under Smithfield Meeting's ownership, but which has also for many years been maintained by a local community organization, the East Blackstone Meetinghouse Society. Past minutes speak to our intent to clarify and possibly modify the relationship between the East Blackstone Meetinghouse, the community Group and our Meeting. However, there has not been clearness as to whether the change would involve deeding the property to the community group.

Friends delegate Rhoda Mowry, Richard Frechette, Diane Gauthier and Suzanne Frechette to develop a final disposition plan for presentation to Friends. They are asked to seek appropriate legal assistance, and are empowered to expend a reasonable amount of funds as needed to secure such legal assistance.

2005-18 First Day School

Randy Oftedahl reported that the Religious Education Committee had planned to hold its first meeting in January, but that the heavy snowstorm forced a cancellation of the meeting. The Committee will meet at the rise of first-day worship on February 13, but he is not sure of who will attend.

We recognize that a primary role of our Friends' community should be the spiritual development of our children. And yet the offering of a vibrant First Day School program still eludes us. The commitment of families with children, teachers and program organizers are at various times strong, but rarely do all three surge at the same time. Some children are nourished through a very effective Junior Yearly Meeting retreat program, but that outlet does not serve the needs of all of our children. Some wonder whether we should at least temporarily discontinue first day school and focus attention on providing resources to parents in their role as primary spiritual developers.

We urge as many Friends as possible to attend the Religious Education Committee meeting, and for all to pray this week and thereafter for divine guidance of the Committee.

2005-19 Closing Minute No further business arising, Friends closed with a period of waiting worship, intending to meet again for business on March 6, 2005, God willing.

Respectfully Submitted,

Richard Frechette

Clerk

Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business: March 6, 2005

2005-20 Opening Minute

Smithfield Monthly Meeting met for a regularly scheduled meeting for worship with attention to business at 12:30PM on March 6, 2005. Richard Frechette served as clerk, Connie Bair-Thompson as recording clerk, and there were nine other Friends present. We began with a period of waiting worship.

2005-21 Report from Building and Grounds CommitteeFor Building and Grounds Committee, Suzanne Frechette reported that the committee has not met formally, but that work has begun on certain repairs at the parsonage. As work continues, the committee will inform Friends. Suzanne reported that Harry Bushnell has inspected the boilers and radiators in the parsonage and meetinghouse and discovered that one of the radiators in the parsonage will need to be repaired (or replaced) due to a crack.

2005-22 Response to NEYM concern about Friends' United Meeting's personnel policyThe clerk informed us that a request has come from Yearly Meeting that we give prayerful consideration to how NEYM should respond to the Friends United Meeting personnel policy that has caused great concern on the part on many Friends, including at yearly meeting sessions last summer. Yearly meeting approved a minute of exercise on this issue that is being circulated to individual meetings by yearly meeting Ministry and Counsel committee.

The concern centers on this part of the FUM Board minute 88 GB 52:

We affirm the civil rights of all people to secular employment, housing, education and health care without regard to their sexual orientation. In particular, we condemn violence, whether verbal or physical, against homosexuals, and call for their full protection under the civil rights laws.

We reaffirm our traditional testimonies of peace, simplicity, truth speaking, gender and racial equality, personal integrity, fidelity, chastity and community. We recognize that there is diversity among us on issues of sexuality. For the purpose of our corporate life together, we affirm our traditional testimony that sexual intercourse should be confined to the bonds of marriage, which we understand to be between one man and one woman.

The lifestyle of volunteers under appointment to Quaker Volunteer Witness, regardless of their sexual orientation, should be in accordance with these testimonies.

The clerk asked us if, and if so, how we wish to develop a response to this concern. After some fairly intense discussion about how we could best act in response to this concern, including withholding financial contributions to yearly meeting that go to FUM, the clerk reminded us that we have had previous discussions about homosexuality that have resulted in formal minutes that declared our meeting one that is open to people of all sexual orientation. We feel the need to continue our discernment. We ask our Ministry and Counsel committee to develop and propose a way for our whole meeting to wrestle with the issue of sexual relationships outside of traditional marriage in general, and the FUM policy in particular.

2005-23 Rhode Island State Council of Churches "Collect a Can and a Buck" driveThe Rhode Island State Council of Churches has asked us to participate in the "Collect a Can and a Buck" drive to assist local and statewide food programs. Friends would like to participate in this program and feel that it would be a good way to show ecumenical solidarity.

2005-24 Contribution to Kara Price to attend YouthQuake conference in August, 2005

We received correspondence from Kara Price concerning our prospective contribution to her attendance at the international YouthQuake in August of this year. She recognizes that we have specifically agreed to offer financial support to her, but informs us that all other yearly meeting attendees have decided to pool their funds and that she would prefer to have us contribute to this pool rather than to her in particular. Given the intentions of the Bessie Ewen fund, which we are drawing from, we are not clear to contribute to a general yearly meeting fund. Friends decided that we will send Kara a check for \$800 (matching her other contributions) now, suggesting that she use it to purchase her ticket and we intend to send the balance of our commitment as she raises additional matching funds. We also plan to include a call for funds from individual Friends in our newsletter to be contributed to the yearly meeting fund for all attendees.

2005-25 Discussion at March potluck lunchFriends approved of Peace and Social Concerns committee to sponsoring a speaker to lead a discussion at our next potluck lunch on March 20, 2005.

2005-26 Closing Minute No further business arising, Friends closed with a period of waiting worship, intending to meet again for business on March 3, 2005, God willing.

Respectfully submitted, *Constance Bair-Thompson*
Recording Clerk



Dear Friends:

Yearly Meeting's Ministry & Counsel committee has asked Monthly Meetings to consider this matter following that came up during 2004 yearly meeting sessions. At the March 6 Meeting for Business, Friends decided that we should go through a process of discernment about this, and our own Ministry & Counsel committee is planning to set up a meeting of discernment in April. In the meantime you are encouraged to read the Minute of Exercise on FUM's Personnel Policy Concerns from yearly meeting session, and the History of FUM policy regarding appointment of homosexuals prepared by an FUM staff person, both documents printed in their entirety here.

Richard Frechette, Clerk.

Minute 04-74 from Yearly Meeting Sessions is not an action minute, but one which describes our unity on this concern about the exclusion from leadership roles of non-celibate unmarried couples, whether they be heterosexual, gay or lesbian Friends. Also enclosed is a summary of Friends United Meeting's personnel policy.

04-74. Friends heard the second draft of the Friends United Meetings minute of exercise and asked to include explicit reference to FUM's hiring policy and practices.

Minute of Exercise on FUM's Personnel Policy Concerns

New England Yearly Meeting Friends gathered at our annual sessions reaffirm our belonging to Friends United Meeting, not only as co-founders, and firmly led co-participants in its ministries, but as Friends whose faith has been strengthened and recharged by God's presence in our worship, work, and fellowship with FUM Friends. FUM remains one of the most important places where we meet Friends who challenge our beliefs, and where African, Latin-American, Middle Eastern, and North American Friends meet face to face, growing in love and understanding. Since the 1940s when we were called to re-unite our previously separated Yearly Meetings, and since the early '90s when we developed special bonds of love and mutual ministry with Cuba Yearly Meeting we have learned to live with our differences, and we have come to feel how painful it would be to live in isolation from other Friends.

At the same time that we cherish our membership and participation in FUM, many of us are troubled by FUM's personnel policies and practices, which exclude non-celibate gays and lesbians, and unmarried heterosexual couples from leadership roles. Within NEYM we have struggled for years with same-gender marriage, and while support is not universal, we have watched as Friends' understanding of the truth has grown to include the belief that individuals' sexual orientation is no measure of their ability to express God's love through committed long-term relationships.

In the same vein, over the years we have grown to understand that God's gifts of ministry and leadership are bestowed with no consideration of sexual orientation or marital status. Indeed we have been blessed countless times by the ministry and leadership of those who would not be allowed to serve under the FUM policies.

While some are hurt, and some are angry, we are "all" troubled by the lack of unity on this issue. In the interest of creating a more perfect world, gospel order requires us to seek together for God's will, and for the love, which has been wounded by our differences.

We invite the FUM Board to come again to New England, to work among us, to worship and be hosted by all of us, to see our lives speaking. We make ourselves available to be invited to worship and testify among FUM Friends, and among other yearly and monthly meetings about these concerns.

As we continue discernment within NEYM, we ask the General Board of FUM to consider, as we have at NEYM 2004 Sessions, "Who is your neighbor?" Jesus taught us that love and compassion for the neighbor who does not look like us is more important than the written law.

Friends approved the minute.

New England YM representatives to the Friends United Meeting General Board were charged to carry our concern during the upcoming FUM Board meeting. We direct that this minute of exercise be sent to our monthly meetings and quarterly meetings under the care of the Ministry & Counsel working party on FUM's personnel policy concerns, accompanied by whatever other materials seems necessary for consideration. We expect M&C to bring a minute based on the discernment over the year to the 2005 Sessions.

History of FUM policy regarding appointment of homosexuals.

Until 1988, Friends United Meeting had not been able to openly discuss or reach a decision regarding its position on homosexual relationships. That year, staff made a decision not to appoint a gay man to the Quaker Volunteer Witness program, and to request that the Board adopt a personnel policy that would give staff guidance on the issue. In response, Friends United Meeting received a flood of letters from individuals and meetings, and staff conducted visits in several member yearly meetings to test possible policy options. Ben Richmond prepared a "Working Paper on Appointment of Homosexuals to QVW" to discuss the issues involved and made recommendations for policy. This paper was circulated to the Board prior to the October 1988 meetings, and in the concluding minute on the subject requested that the paper "be saved as a contextual and historical document." After a preliminary discussion within the World Ministries Commission (which oversaw the QVW program), a revised version of the recommendations from that paper was presented to the General Board.

Board minute 88 GB 52 reflects the thorough and tender discussion of the issues involved. Three paragraphs were separately approved:

We affirm the civil rights of all people to secular employment, housing, education and health care without regard to their sexual orientation. In particular, we condemn violence, whether verbal or physical, against homosexuals, and call for their full protection under the civil rights laws.

We reaffirm our traditional testimonies of peace, simplicity, truth speaking, gender and racial equality, personal integrity, fidelity, chastity and community. We recognize that there is diversity among us on issues of sexuality. For the purpose of our corporate life together, we affirm our traditional testimony that sexual intercourse should be confined to the bonds of marriage, which we understand to be between one man and one woman.

The lifestyle of volunteers under appointment to Quaker Volunteer Witness, regardless of their sexual orientation, should be in accordance with these testimonies.

According to the same minute, the General Board also approved adding the following statement: These policies are based on Friends beliefs as interpreted by Friends United Meeting since its beginning.

In March 1991, the General Board Executive Committee approved (91 GBEX 18) circulation of an "Organizational and Personnel Policy Manual." It took the QVW policy and extended it as follows:

Friends United Meeting holds to the traditional Friends testimonies of peace (nonviolence), simplicity, truth speaking, community, gender and racial equality, chastity, and fidelity in marriage. It is expected that the lifestyle of all staff and volunteer appointees of Friends United Meeting will be in accordance with these testimonies.

Friends United Meeting affirms the civil rights of all people. Staff and volunteer appointments are made without regard to sexual orientation. It is expected that sexual intercourse should be confined to marriage, understood to be between one man and one woman.

This wording has been retained in all subsequent editions of the Personnel Manual. The 1988 minute placed the personnel policy within the framework of traditional Friends testimonies and said that the policy applied to the corporate activities of FUM. The wording of the 1991 Personnel Manual explicitly applied the policy to all staff and volunteer appointees of FUM.

-prepared by Ben Richmond, spring 2003

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The Sign of the Cross is Forgiveness

As some of you already know Marnie our pastor here at Smithfield Friends has received a Lily Foundation Grant to support a sabbatical from February to June of this year. In her absence myself with Rhoda Mowry and Ron Belliveau have prepared this for Lenten Meeting and I thank you all for being here this evening. I felt a desire to speak here tonight I guess as a matter of testing the Spirit. About two and a half years ago I was diagnosed with inoperable cancer of the tongue, I was very ill from treatment both chemo, and radiation therapy. I was unable to eat and fed through a tube. I spoke little and could not sing at all. I thought about God a lot, and about healing and how it happens. It was a time for me that I felt vulnerable and helpless but I tell you that God never left me and He manifested himself in all the people that were there with me in my struggle. Healing and forgiveness go hand in hand, to surrender the will to love. The gospels give many examples of Jesus healing, and forgiving sin. Death of the body is something we will all face but our true gift is immortal and imperishable. Looking at the world in the light of eternity is an every day challenge. I can speak again. And speak I will, in the hope that this love for my life in the light, will speak to another heart and mind ready to be healed.

The passages I have chosen tonight are from Luke 22: 47-51, and Matthew 26: 52& 53 While He was still speaking, behold a multitude came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was preceding them; and he approached Jesus to kiss Him. But Jesus said to him Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" And when those who were around him saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord shall we strike with the sword?" And a certain one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus answered and said "Stop no more of this." And He touched his ear and healed him.

Matthew 26: 52&53, Then Jesus said to him "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"

For me the sign of the cross is forgiveness, pure and simple, embracing all without exclusion, justification for all of humanity, exclaimed and expressed in the most passionate plea of Jesus on the cross.. "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" What does God really want me to do? Perfect love casts out fear. Is this perhaps an all or nothing proposition? I need courage rooted in God, when God seems to disappear in my grief, anger and doubt. What I do with my fear is most often to fight or to run away in the face of what I perceive will hurt me. Threatened and afraid I may see, humiliation, suffering, loss, maybe even death. In this passage the weapon of choice was the sword? They needed to kill before they were killed, and striking out was brought about by fear, and their belief in the enemy. However, does Jesus call into question our belief, or our unbelief, when Jesus asks, "Do you think I cannot appeal to my Father?"

The reality was that this was a real threat, Jesus was crucified, tortured, murdered on the cross and their sense of urgency was real because for Jesus it was the end. He died. What was Jesus thinking? Forgiveness or as it is written (Matt 26: v56) "But all this has taken place that the scriptures may be fulfilled" and in (Jn 1: v29) "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" We are back to forgiveness Jesus, the Christ what does He have to do with us. His outstretched arms ready to receive us. Are we ready to enter in, to be healed, forgiven, and to enter into our own divine nature, the gift that Jesus shares with us? Are we ready to cry out Abba Father, to give up our guilt, our condemnation, our fear of God and to begin to love ourselves and so to love others? God loves us more than we could possibly imagine we are His children. In Christ, we are no longer separate from the Father; we are no longer separate from one another. We are able to live in the light of the knowledge that we are all One in Christ.

We live in a world of fear and disconnection. But forgiveness calls us to see one another in a new way. Accepting the person who we think is our adversary, real or imagined. The person who has in some way wronged us but in spite of this we realize we are from the same hallowed ground and sometimes we are able to have compassion, understanding, and mercy for this person. In Christ we are rid of our own guilt and condemnation therefore how can we participate in the condemnation of an other. That the strike on the cheek is an opportunity for Christ to manifest Himself in our own flesh, Christ in us calls us to love our enemies. Do good to those who hate you. The most recited prayer in Christianity begs the Father to forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. If God forgives me and He does, does that mean I have to do the same? If I cannot forgive is this perhaps the sin that cannot be forgiven? The Cross of Christ is of no use and meaningless.

Christ has the power and that power is Love. He is the way to enter into that, which gives life. In the scripture passage in Luke, He does not seek to diminish the servant but rather chooses to make him whole by restoring his ear. Jesus does not seem to see any value in violence as he urges his disciple to put away the sword. It is not difficult to imagine what must have been going through disciples mind. They were coming to arrest the Master, and probably arrest them as well. Jesus shows us another Way past our fear, He heals the man, and He makes him whole. Is there anything else but love for Jesus? Love that is life giving, life sustaining and makes us whole. Christ comes that we may have life. We are alive in the Holy Spirit, for we have the knowledge of the love of God in us that does not divide but rather places us in the same being of all humanity, in the same eternal I Am. May the power of love and forgiveness be with us.

-Diane Gauthier

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