

**Joy: Still a Gift of the Spirit**  
**Talk for Illinois Yearly Meeting Annual Sessions, June 19, 2013**  
**Helene Pollock**  
**pollockhelene@yahoo.com**

OUTLINE

Part I: Joy is here at ILYM, but joy means different things for different people

Part II: Joy in our memories (though some memories have no joy)

Part III: The joy that is part of our experience of God, as individuals

Part IV: The importance of talking about God, even though it may be difficult to find the words

Part V: Where is God -- and where is joy -- in stories of struggle?

A. Alice Walker – her life and her activism

B. Palestinian people who stand together in non-violent resistance, fighting for their rights

Part VI: Finding God in our joy-story here in ILYM

\* \* \* \* \*

## Part I: Joy is here at ILYM, but joy means different things for different people

Joy is here! I see it in the smiles and hugs as you greet each other, the heritage of this beautiful place, the people who radiate contentment as a way of life. I see it in flashes and in things that last.

I come from Philadelphia – a place where you’ve been noticed for your joy. For example, I can think of two particular Friends – people whose jobs take them to many yearly meetings -- who talk about this yearly meeting as special.

Here are a few words of introduction: I come here as a Christian, a former Presbyterian and a native Nebraskan (I visit my mother and stepfather, in their 90s, who live in Western Nebraska). I’ve lived in Philadelphia since 1976, and have been involved in many Quaker activities. My partner of 34 years – Arlene Kelly, current clerk of the Board of the American Friends Service Committee – and I are renovating an old house in an economically-mixed neighborhood. I love gardening and cooking – had a great time in site prep with the kitchen crew! I’m also a cancer survivor.

In preparing this talk, I’ve realized that while joy is all around us it isn’t easy to pin it down, because what stimulates joy is different for different people. You may not necessarily like “raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens, bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens.”<sup>1</sup> So what I’ll be doing is sharing a few stories and situations that might be associated with joy, to help prime the pump and get you thinking about your own joy-story.

Watch this:

[a video of baby laughing hysterically] <http://www.wimp.com/rippingpaper/>

Just let it soak in.

***[pause –a period of silence]***

***[in the silence, as the setting sun illuminates the Meetinghouse, birds are chirping outside, and some bird-calls emerge from the gathered community of Friends – then other animal sounds are heard among us. Children are playing outside. There is a sunset glow on our heads, and a sense of grounded joy in our community].***

---

<sup>1</sup> Lyrics to “My Favorite Things” from the musical *The Sound of Music* by Rogers & Hammerstein

## Part II: Joy in our memories (though some memories have no joy)

Joy emerges from what is natural –the laughing baby, the bird-song.

Joy is associated with the places where each of us has been loved and nurtured.

I think of growing up in a Nebraska town, remembering my sisters (I didn't have brothers)

(think of your siblings for a moment)

Remembering the fun things we did as kids -- the games, the places we used to play -- I remember my family, our neighbors and relatives. I remember the mischief. I think of the good things about our town, and the healthy ways we kids were able to be part of things. I was in 4-H, which I loved. Our town had a 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade, where we kids would decorate our bikes with crepe paper.

There can be power in happy memories. I heard a member of ILYM tell a story about a foster child who stayed with her family for a few years, and later came back as an adult with his own children, because he wanted to share that special place with them -- a place where he had been happy. The memories of those years with her family had been a powerful source of encouragement for him through the years – through many hard times. Even just a few happy years –with their joyful memories – can make a real difference.

But something surprising happened while I was developing this talk. I kept thinking about times that were not joyful. *Why would that be? Why would I keep being drawn to something other than joy, when I was trying to write a talk about joy?*

The truth is: *there are times when joy is simply not part of the picture, when life seems to be anything but "sweetness and light."* If I were to ask for a show of hands of people who, at times, have not been able to access joy, I wonder what would happen? ***[several people raise their hands immediately].***

As we are honest with each other about our ups and downs, we can go deeper. We can be more real as Friends and as a community.

The image that came to me as I was working on this talk, of a time when I couldn't feel any joy, was when I was in high school. In our high school, there was something that I felt I absolutely had to do, and that was join pep club. (I don't know why it is that teenagers feel such a strong sense of just having to do certain things). The memory is of me sitting there on the bench at a game, with the other girls from the pep club, and not being able to cheer. It was not so much a situation of not wanting to cheer but rather not being able to cheer.

Teenage years are an important time in discovering our unique self, and the newly emerging “I” can clash with expectations of parents and the wider world. For me, there was a lot of confusion as my world was getting bigger and life was becoming more complex than it had been in childhood. It was a time when mountains and molehills got all mooshed together. If you asked me what was wrong as I sat there on the pep club bench not cheering, I might have said *“Everything!” – Myself! Parents! Friends! School! The town! The big world out there!* I couldn’t cheer. For me, there was no joy.

If that non-cheering teenager had been able to travel through time and arrive right here, right now, among us here at ILYM, I believe that there could be some healing. Somebody could take the time to listen and help the issues to get sorted out, differentiating between problems that are immediate and others that are more long-term, and perhaps developing a plan with a few small action-steps. That could make a difference.

It would have helped to have had somebody to talk with – somebody who would listen, so that joy can flow again.

### Part III: The joy that comes to us as we encounter God

While listening has helped me through the years, I need something more: people who can join with me in talking about where God is in the story. Over the years it has been deeply comforting for me to hear the story of God's lovingkindness – like the story of the Good Shepherd, Jesus calming the storm, and the way Jesus cared for people on the margins. These stories have been especially meaningful when people have shared how they connect with the struggles of everyday life.

I wish that the non-cheering teenager could have been here to hear Betty Clegg's Plummer Lecture, when Betty said: "As the deer longs for the flowing streams, so longs my soul for Thee, O God."<sup>2</sup> I have had a gut-level longing for God all my life, from as long back as I can remember.

I wish that that despairing teenager had been able to hear Francis Hole's Plummer Lecture, quietly stating that anybody can find a deep connection with "the quiet source of everything," and that "God tastes sweet" – that it's possible to be a people of God who are "content with anything that happens to them, whether they like it or not."<sup>3</sup>

Of course, the deep peace doesn't come easily. Some of us have needed to struggle with intellectual doubts, such as Tom Paxson and Margaret Katrinides, who both shared in their Plummer lectures that their need to be logical made it hard for them to embrace the idea of "a God." But somehow, they each in their own way made a decision to put the doubts aside and live as if God was real. This approach worked for them, as they moved beyond a "concept of God" to a way of life that has given them a strong sense of purpose, through thick and thin.

I've experienced a particular need for a sense of the experience of being loved by God. Having lived my whole life as a committed Christian, just a few years ago I experienced a dramatic spiritual awakening. (This is hard to talk about). It was a shift in consciousness that seemed to come at me out of the blue -- not related to anything I had done. Suddenly, without warning, one night I was beset by the profound sense that my whole universe had changed in a delicious sort of way. The horizon rose to meet the sky, and I found myself rising into the infinity of the stars. I was infused by the heart of the universe, while remaining very much on the ground. It was as if the stars were reaching out and calling my name – as if I were united with the vastness of all the grains of sand on all the beaches that ever were, yet I remained as small and insignificant as the tiniest grain of sand.

This sense of dislocation in time and space was accompanied by an overwhelming sensation of joy, along with a feeling of being loved by Love itself, and thereby in love with everyone and

---

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 42:1

<sup>3</sup> From Frances D. Hole's 1966 Plummer lecture, quoted in Illinois Yearly Meeting Centennial Sampler, 1875-1975.

everything. The Christian Gospel that I had known all my life came to me with fresh intensity. The experience was so very personal that I knew that God had reached out to me alone – touching my heart in the precise way that I, Helene, most needed to be reached. I experience myself being newly christened into the Christian story of a God who takes on personal, human form in the incarnation of Jesus, the enfleshed embodiment of Divine Love. From that point on I plunged into the task of agape-loving. Connecting with people in a way that honors God became the focus of my life.

In the months and years following that special night, fragmented pieces of my life came together under the umbrella of God's love, and I changed a lot. Much of this was due to daily prayer. Of course, I still made many mistakes, but the main change is that I became much more of a risk-taker. I became increasingly aware of God's Truth and able to speak truth to power. So I was more confident in facing challenges in work, in my Meeting and in my friendships. When I was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer, I was at peace, trusting God each step of the way.

Of course, this story is unique to who I am, and I have no doubt that your story of your encounters with God will be equally unique to who you are. There is no reason your patterns should be like mine, because we are different people and God has ways of reaching each of us.

#### Part IV: The importance of talking about God, though it may be difficult to find the words

An experience of God can be tremendously empowering – but it can also leave us vulnerable. It takes a high level of trust to share this aspect of one’s life. Words don’t come easily. ILYM has set a good example through the tradition of the Plummer Lecture, which by its very nature reinforces the fact that our spiritual journeys are different, and that we need to be tender with each other.

Since Quaker faith and practice is experiential, we need to keep finding new words to talk about this aspect of our lives. No doubt there will always be a push-pull between the need to share who God is and our reluctance to do so. Back in 1959 ILYM Friends were asked to write about their faith for *Among Friends*, but few articles were forthcoming because people said they felt unworthy and had little to contribute. The editor responded “depth is only gained by practice,”<sup>4</sup> which continues to be the simple truth, today.

This year’s theme of “joy” offers a potential starting point for sharing who God is for us. Since we all have experiences of joy -- in one form or another -- we can share how God is part of our joy; for example:

- a. As we are open to spontaneous joy – and God’s presence -- in the here and now (for example, in a baby’s laughter or in a birdsong), we can give thanks to God for these blessings. This can inspire spiritually-grounded vocal ministry or explicit expressions of our Quaker faith as we interact informally with each other.
- b. We can give thanks to God for the way God has been working in our life through the years, as we share memories and stories from childhood (See attached queries -- Appendix A).
- c. Joy may not be immediately in our consciousness, because there’s something we need to talk about first. I can see that this is a community where there is an openness to listen and share about all kinds of issues. The members of Ministry and Advancement have made themselves particularly available to talk about what’s going on in Meetings (they are designated by a smiling face on their name tags). Where is God in the story? When that question comes out into the open, we can all go deeper.

---

<sup>4</sup> Helen Jean Nelson, Editor, *Centennial Scrapbook of Illinois Yearly Meeting*

## Part V: Where is God -- and where is joy -- in stories of struggle?

### A. Alice Walker – her life and her activism

I've been interested in the story of Alice Walker, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for the novel *The Color Purple*. The stories that Alice tells are stories of struggle. I have also experienced many struggles in my life, and I have discovered a special kind of joy through these challenges.

Alice's stories are shaped by a strong awareness of her culture and her community, along with a continually evolving sense of who God is in her experience. There is much that I admire in the African American culture, and I find that I am helped and healed by Alice's stories about her heritage. To me, Alice Walker presents us with a challenge to be aware of the traditions of our families and our particular tribes, remembering those who have gone before us by honoring the legacy of our elders.

Alice grew up in the African-American community in rural Georgia, the youngest of eight children in a family of sharecroppers who had been forced off their land. As a child she was a happy little girl until, at the age of eight, she was shot in the right eye with a BB gun by her brother as they were playing cowboys and Indians. She lied to protect him from their parents' anger. Living with a blind, scarred eye (because the family couldn't afford proper medical treatment) she was taunted by the other children. She came to experience herself as an outsider who didn't belong, and she retreated into a shell, writing poetry for solace. Six years later she had an operation; her sight was restored and her appearance returned to normal. She bounced back, participating fully in school activities and excelling both academically and socially. A scholarship made it possible for her to go to college.

Looking back years later she realized that the trauma related to her eye had been a factor in her being chosen to receive the scholarship. Her time of withdrawal into a shell had helped her "really to see people and things, really to notice relationships and to learn to be patient enough to care about how they turned out."<sup>5</sup> There can be a joy in looking back on the struggles and the hard times, giving thanks that some of the hard times are over, and somehow seeing a thread of purpose that has been working for good, in spite of it all.

Like Quakers, Alice has had a vivid sense of Inner Guide throughout her life. As she writes:

In each of us, there is a little voice that knows exactly which way to go. And I learned very early to listen to it, even though it has caused so much grief and havoc. . . . [In college] I was offered a scholarship that would have taken me to Paris, but I turned it

---

<sup>5</sup> In Wikipedia article on Alice Walker, which quotes *World Authors 1995-2000*, 2003. Biography Reference Bank database. Retrieved 2009-04-10



down because I realized that my true responsibility was to go back and try to help people who were exactly like my family. So I listened to the little voice and got on the plane and went to Mississippi.<sup>6</sup>

During college, in the tumultuous 60s, Alice worked for voting rights in Mississippi while she continued to develop her gift of writing. After she graduated from college, when was working at the Welfare Department in New York City, she met Melvyn Levanthal, a Jewish civil rights lawyer. They were married two years later in New York City. As newlyweds they moved to Jackson, Mississippi. Imagine what they faced as the first legally married interracial couple in Mississippi. They had to deal with the likes of the Ku Klux Klan, not only because of who they were but also because of what Mel was doing in dismantling the legal foundation of segregation. This was their young adulthood – a time of risk-taking for justice.

Looking back on your young adulthood, what comes to mind? Is there a way in which these memories help you connect with a sense of joy?

I have a sense of Alice as a person who has taken risks all her life, and I was curious to meet her and see what she is like. So I was grateful to have an opportunity to hear her speak in Philadelphia last month. I experienced her as quiet and well-grounded – almost Quakerly in her manner. She was easy to relate to. I got the strong sense that her point of reference is the stories of the ancestors and the lives of people living on the margins. I liked when she advised the audience “to go freely with powerful uneducated people.”

I can also relate to Alice’s mystical temperament that goes back to her early childhood. She seems to have always experienced a sense of oneness with nature and people around the world. As she joined with the millions of demonstrators world-wide on the eve of the Iraq war, she described herself as being in the same family as the people of Iraq. Why was she opposed to the war? Because bombing them “would have been like bombing ourselves.”<sup>7</sup>

In 2003, when Alice was preparing for an in-your-face challenge to the state of Israel, through the Freedom Flotilla to Gaza, she recalled her years in Mississippi as a young adult, when she had been married to a Jewish man (the couple has since divorced). She wanted to give public recognition to Mel for his commitment, and also to acknowledge two other Jewish activists, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, who

heard our calls for help . . .and came to stand with us. They got as far as the truncheons and bullets of a few ‘good ol’ boys’ of Neshoba County, Mississippi, and were beaten

---

<sup>6</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2013/mar/09/alice-walker-beauty-in-truth-interview-on-june-7>, 2013. Interview with Alice Walker on march 9, 2013, in *The observer*.

<sup>7</sup> "[Global Women Launch Campaign to End Iraq War](#)" (Press release). CodePink: Women for Peace. January 5, 2006. Retrieved 2010-02-12. Source quoted in Wikipedia article on Alice Walker.

and shot to death along with James Chaney, a young black man of formidable courage who died with them.

Then she went on to provide a more personal sense of the Jewish activist she knew best, her former husband Mel:

I once asked my best friend and husband during the era of segregation, who was as staunch a defender of black people's human rights as anyone I'd ever met: How did you find your way to us, to black people, who so needed you? What force shaped your response to the great injustice facing people of color of that time?

I thought he might say it was the speeches, the marches, the example of Martin Luther King, Jr., or of others in the movement who exhibited impactful courage and grace. But no. Thinking back, he recounted an episode from his childhood that had led him, inevitably, to our struggle.

He was a little boy on his way home from yeshiva, the Jewish school he attended after regular school let out. His mother, a bookkeeper, was still at work; he was alone. He was frequently harassed by older boys from regular school, and one day two of these boys snatched his yarmulke (skull cap), and, taunting him, ran off with it, eventually throwing it over a fence.

Two black boys appeared, saw his tears, assessed the situation, and took off after the boys who had taken his yarmulke. Chasing the boys down and catching them, they made them climb the fence, retrieve and dust off the yarmulke, and place it respectfully back on his head.

It is justice and respect that I want the world to dust off and put – without delay, and with tenderness – back on the head of the Palestinian child. It will be imperfect justice and respect because the injustice and disrespect have been so severe. But I believe we are right to try.<sup>8</sup>

There is joy in this kind of trying – trying together with others, whether they are from one's own tribe or another – joining hands and hearts while working for justice.

---

<sup>8</sup> Interview of Alice Walker in [The Guardian](#), June 24, 2011.

B. Palestinian people who stand together, in non-violent resistance, struggling for their rights

My partner Arlene Kelly and I have been able to travel to Palestine three times, in relation to her work as a member of the Steering Committee of the Friends International Center in Ramallah. Our most recent trip was a couple of months ago, when I was particularly struck by the staying power (*satyagraha* or *sumud*) of the Palestinian people as they struggle for their rights, in spite of the increasingly discouraging situation. There is power in the stories of non-violent resistance that the Palestinian people tell. These stories evoke a certain kind of joy – a courage in both triumph and defeat, an unshakeable resolve against all odds.

- I think of the story of the leader of political prisoners, who worked inside the prison to develop an ingenious system of signals, so that somehow the prisoners could all start singing at the same time. They would do it in the middle of the night and at all kinds of unexpected times. The people in the town nearby would hear the singing. No repression would stop them.
  
- I think of the story told by Claire Anastas:

It was during the second Intifada, or uprising, when the conflict was hot. One day in 2002, while it was curfew, I was putting up my laundry on our balcony. I live in Rachel's Tomb area in Bethlehem which is surrounded by a military base. The soldiers stayed and lived there and observed everywhere and everything around us.

While I put up my laundry, a soldier inside a watchtower, in front of my balcony, was shouting and yelling for quite some time. I felt sorry for him and asked myself who made him so angry and what let him shout and yell like that. I didn't understand that he was in fact yelling at me, so I continued [hanging up] my laundry and didn't pay attention to him. Suddenly, the soldier opened a small window and started climbing up. He put out his gun to threaten me. At that moment I realized that the last 15 minutes he had been shouting because of me. I tried to communicate with him to ask what was going on but he refused to speak. He just pointed his gun apparently to force me to go inside or to kill me. It was forbidden for me to stay on my own balcony. I was obliged to go inside but I observed him from my bedroom window until he went inside his tower. So then I returned to doing my laundry again.

Unfortunately, the soldier again climbed out of the window and I moved quickly inside. This happened no less than ten times and in the end I really drove him crazy and made

him loudly scream inside his watchtower. I somehow felt satisfied to struggle with the soldier and finish my laundry.<sup>9</sup>

- I think of the story about the village in Palestine that has been rebuilt over and over -- 50 times – after being demolished by bulldozers and Israeli soldiers.<sup>10</sup>

To connect with what this story is talking about, a person needs to imagine being part of a small town or neighborhood -- which is, actually, the experience of many of us -- where we have a strong sense that the town is our place in the world – our land. Then bulldozers come and destroy it and drive us out because other people believe it is their land. Could we imagine rebuilding our town, brick by brick, and then doing so again and again when the town is destroyed over and over? It is hard to imagine this in the USA because we have the rule of law, and when we purchase property in this country we go through a title search and otherwise have a sense that what we own will remain ours -- except perhaps in rare cases such as when a highway is being built, but even then there are well-defined legal rights for property-owners.

When I stretch myself to try to move beyond my experience and imagine the situation of Palestinians who engage in courageous, non-violent resistance when their homes and villages have been demolished, I draw on the experience of being utterly convinced that I am with others in a cause that is just, and that somehow, some time – even if it is after we are all gone -- justice will prevail. To me, that ethical certainty is connected with a special kind of joy – a joy that I greatly admire whenever I encounter it. And I aspire to it.

---

<sup>9</sup> *Samud: Soul of the Palestinian People*, by Toine van Teeffelen, with Victoria Biggs & the Sumud Story House in Bethlehem. 2011, AEI-Open Windows, [aei@p-ol.com](mailto:aei@p-ol.com)

<sup>10</sup> Story told by Palestinian activist Abir Koptiy. Abir, a feminist and political activist based in Ramallah, was one of the key organizers of the Bab al-Shams protest village. She spoke at Friends Center in Philadelphia on June 7, 2013, focusing on the popular protest movement as well as the call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions.

## Part VI: Finding God in our joy-story, here in ILYM

In leading Adult First Day School classes and FGC-Gathering workshops about early Friends, I have tried to help today's Friends see the connections between their faith and ours, even though our circumstances are very different. God is the same throughout history.

Our heritage as Friends is one of struggle, faith and joy – not unlike the stories of other tribes, other peoples. The early Friends, our spiritual ancestors, had their property confiscated, were separated from their families and thrown into prison. Death was close at hand. Yet nothing could dampen their joy. For example, Elizabeth Stirredge (1634-1706), an early Friend -- see Appendix B – described a great joy that she and other Friends experienced during a meeting for worship in prison.

Looking back over the history of ILYM, we can see many examples of God's activity in the lives of our spiritual elders. God was in their story, as God is in our story today.

- In 1838, well before ILYM was established, Benjamin Lundy, intrepid abolitionist, moved to the McNabb area. He had been working for the abolition of slavery in Philadelphia, but his printing press and all his possessions had been destroyed by a mob, in a fire. He decided to go the Midwest because a man who had been doing similar work in St. Louis had been killed. Lundy bought land with the intention of establishing himself in this area, but he died before many of his projects could be undertaken. On the plaque on his grave in the Clear Creek cemetery, he is described as “a solitary voice crying in the wilderness. Yet amidst all, faithful to his one great purpose . . . the emancipation of the slaves.”

If any of us feels at times like “a solitary voice crying in the wilderness,” we can take heart in the story of our Quaker ancestor, Benjamin Lundy.<sup>11</sup>

How rewarding to be inspired by our spiritual forbearers – for example Levi and Susan Knight, two yearly members who came of age in the early 1800s. Their memorial minute described them as

Cradled in the school of pioneer life – of highest order, morally and religiously – drinking at the same time from the cup of privations, that those of the present time of plenty can scarcely comprehend.”<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Helen Jen Nelson, *150 Years in Review of Clear Creek Families and Friends: Putnam County, Illinois*, p. 5

<sup>12</sup> From *Illinois Yearly Meeting Centennial Sampler, 1875-1975*. Levi (1802-1892) and Susan Knight (1799-1891) of Blue River MM.

While Susan and Levi's specific Quaker beliefs are not spelled out, we do know that they had to deal with a pioneer version of "the school of hard knocks." No doubt many of us have been descended from such folk – not big talkers about their faith, but people who had an ongoing sense of being led by God "through many dangers toils and snares."<sup>13</sup> Like Alice Walker, we can gain strength from the stories of our elders as we increasingly recognize how God ties the whole story together.

The quiet, hard-living faith of past generations can continue to encourage us today. For example, 135 years ago, in 1878, ILYM Friends were urged to cultivate "*a cheerful and loving persistence in those habits of conduct which will allow each day to record a larger and fuller experience of God.*"<sup>14</sup> I can't think of better advice for us, today. As our experience of God deepens each day, so will our joy deepen, as we revisit some inspiring words from Helen Jean Nelson's Plummer Lecture in 1973: to "*make use of the God-given privilege of choice to unite [our] spirit with that of the everlasting God.*"<sup>15</sup>

ILYM has been entrusted with land and property, and that is a connection with past and future generations. We are bound to each generation as we *make the choices that will allow our spirits to unite with that of the everlasting God*, as we thank God for this beautiful land -- for the ever-growing fulfillment of the vision of Clance Wilson – for the joy of stewardship and for the joy of giving, and for the promise of God, who holds the future.

God's promise through this beautiful ILYM land is like God's promise to Abraham the wandering patriarch, and God's promise to Sarah, the gutsy matriarch with twinkling eyes who couldn't help laughing at the craziness of life -- her inner joy rendering her beautiful. This Biblical promise of land was never intended to be for just one tribe. Instead, it was given so that all the families on the earth may be blessed.

So I would like to sing a blessing for you – a prayer for the blessing of Sarah and Abraham. May it be fulfilled in us, from generation to generation.

(sung)

The whole of the earth will be blessed by you  
In God you have made your home.  
The stars will dance as they call your name,  
Your heart always laughing with joy,  
Your heart always laughing with joy.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Words from the hymn "Amazing Grace"

<sup>14</sup> Helen Jean Nelson, Editor, *Centennial Scrapbook of Illinois Yearly Meeting*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> The chorus of "Sarah's Song of Blessing", by feminist songwriter Colleen Fulmer

## APPENDIX A

### Questions to ILYM Friends To help you prepare for the Worship-Sharing groups By Helene Pollock

1. Infancy and childhood
  - a. What does the video of the laughing baby remind you of?
  - b. What are the thoughts that come to you – the associations, the stories?
  - c. Do any stories come to you about the pure innocent joy of a young child?
  - d. Think about where you grew up. What kind of a place was it? How was your joy nurtured, as you were growing up?
  
2. Adolescence and young adulthood
  - a. Remembering how you were as a teenager or young adult, what was your experience like as you tried to be faithful to the inner voice – the authentic you?
  - b. Was there a time in your youth when you were able to follow your Inner Guide? Did you experience a sense of joy as you followed your guide? If so, what was that joy like?
  - c. How has the experience of following your guide impacted your life since then?
  - d. How are we helping young people today to find ways to follow their Inner Guide?
  
3. Mentors
  - a. Who are some people who have inspired or encouraged you through the years? How have they brought you joy?
  - b. In what sense are your mentors powerful? Are any of them “powerful uneducated people” (quote from Alice Walker)?
  
4. Taking a stand
  - a. Has there been a time when you took a stand, stood up for what is right, spoke truth to power – on your own or as part of a group? What was that like? Was joy part of it?
  - b. How does your passion meet the world’s need? Are you currently working for change? Where does joy fit into this picture?
  
5. Connecting with another dimension
  - a. How do you talk about God – if you do?
  - b. Are there ways of talking about God that trouble you?
  - c. If God is part of your joy, what is that like?

**You can sift through these questions as you prepare to answer the worship-sharing queries, beginning with:**

- What brings you joy?
- Describe a joy-bringer: a person, activity, item, place, moment in time, or other . . .

## **Appendix B**

### ***Excerpts from the Journal of Elizabeth Stirredge (1634-1706)***

*The complete journal is available at  
<http://www.hallvworthington.com/Stirredge.html>*

My soul honors and magnifies the name and power of the Lord my God for keeping me faithful to his testimony and giving me strength to do his will. And he made good his promise that if I could believe, I should return in peace and my reward should be with me. So the Lord blessed my going forth, his presence was with me in my journey, preserved my family well, and my coming home was with joy and peace in my bosom, everlasting praises, glory, and honor be given unto Him that sits on the throne and to the Lamb forevermore.

I gave way to the reasoner many times until my sorrow has been so great that I have not known which way to turn, and it dimmed my sight and hurt my life, and plunged my soul into trouble. But it pleased the Lord to appear in a needful hour and turn back the enemy of my soul's peace and show me that he would choose the weak and them who were nothing in their own eyes and could do nothing, no, not so much as utter a word but what the Lord gives them.

. . . .

It . . . lives with me to leave a relation of our suffering, trials, and imprisonment in the year 1683. If it may fall to any of your lots to suffer for truth's testimony or for the answer of a good conscience in any case whatever. . . I have this testimony to bear for the living God and his everlasting mercies.

The God of heaven and earth was with us at our down-lying and up-rising. And while we slept, he kept us and when we were awake, he was present with us. The right hand of his power upheld us and his good Spirit sustained us and made hard things easy to us and bitter things sweet.

The manner of our going to prison and by whom we were persecuted was Robert Cross, priest of the parish of Chew-magna in the county of Somerset, where we moved some time before and where we then dwelled. He was a great persecutor twenty years before, but having left it for some years, he began afresh with us, his rage being renewed against Friends for their faithfulness to the Lord and his blessed truth. He was greatly offended, but against me in particular, to that degree, that he said that if he could but live to see me ruined, and my husband for my sake, he cared not if he died the next day.



That which enraged him against me was this. Being with a neighbor who lay very weak on her death bed with several of the priest's congregation being present, I had to testify of a day of mortality to them, which accordingly fell out to three or four in two weeks time and was taken notice of. When the priest was told of it, he was enraged and made use of several instruments for carrying on his cruel work.

***[Eventually Elizabeth and several others were arrested, and after a trial they were sentenced to prison]***

. and John Helliard caused his man to make our mittimus [a warrant of commitment to prison], and he committed us to Ivelchester jail where we were cruelly used, as is after related. . . .

Our keeper, Giles Bale, and his wife, put us in the common jail with three felons who were condemned to be hanged and would not allow us straw to lie upon though we would have paid for it. Living some distance from the prison, they locked us up and carried away the key with them to prevent the under-keeper from showing us any favor. And the head keeper's wife said, "There let them be, like a company of rogues together. If I had a worse place, I would put them in it." (This keeper and his wife died soon after, and their family came to ruin.)

It was a most dismal place, where we had neither stock nor stone to sit upon nor any resting place to lean against, but the black stone wall, covered over with soot, and the damp cold ground to lie upon. But before we lay down, three of our Friends, who were prisoners in the room adjoining to that we were in, passed to us through the grates four dust or chaff pillows two blankets, and some straw. So we lay down like a flock of sheep in a pen in a very cold winter, the like of which I do not remember, where most of us took our rest very sweetly.

But when I had laid down, the consideration came into my heart, "*Lord you know why we are exposed to this hardship. It is because we cannot betray our testimony nor wrong our conscience nor deal treacherously with our own souls. And seeing it is so, Lord, be our comfort in this needful time, for it is your presence that makes hard things easy and bitter things sweet. And you have sweetened the waters of a bitter cup. Oh! You Physician of value, who can strengthen both soul and body, be with us this night, and all the nights and days that we have to live in this world.*"

Then the Lord was pleased to open my heart unto him and to fill it with his mercy and comfortable presence, so much that I could have sung aloud of the goodness of the Lord and of his mercies and blessings bestowed upon us. But looking over my fellow prisoners and seeing them so sound asleep, I did not open my mouth for fear of awakening them.

In the morning many people came to the prison door to see how many of us were dead with our hard fare. Some of them were sure, as they said, that I was dead, for I looked as if I would

not live until the morning. Finding us all alive and well, they confessed and said, "Surely you are the people of God, if there are any."

It being the First-day, we had a meeting in the prison and many Friends came there, where we had a very good meeting **and the presence of the Lord was with us and filled our hearts with joy and gladness**<sup>17</sup>, so much that I was constrained to praise the name of the Lord and magnify his power and to testify in the hearing of many people that we were so far from repenting our coming there, that we had great cause to give glory, honor and praises to the Lord God of heaven and earth, because he had found us worthy to suffer for his name and truth [Acts 5:41]. For his presence was with us and sanctified our afflictions, and made the prison like a palace to us, and we would not change our state for all the glory of the world if it were proffered unto us.

Great was the goodness and mercy of the Lord towards us from day to day so that I have sometimes said, "Surely the Lord is honoring his people and weaning them from this world." It seemed to me as if I had no habitation but the prison.

Then was the time for the Lord to reveal his secrets unto his children whom he had tried and proved in such things. It was faithfulness that rendered the servant acceptable in his master's sight and caused him to say, "Well done you good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in a little, be ruler over much." [Mt. 5:21] I cannot believe that he who is not true in a little will ever be made ruler over much. Therefore keep to truth in all things and to the plain language, and teach your children so to do.

In that time of great affliction and suffering and parting of many, wife from husband and husband from wife, and both from tender children, the Lord was pleased to reveal his secrets to his children.

....

This was part of the exercise during the time of my confinement with my husband and many more of the servants of the most high God in Ivelchester jail.

When I came out of the prison to go to the sessions held at Brewton, I assuredly believed that the time was near that the prison should not enclose us any longer, though it was altogether unlikely, for our persecutors were exceedingly wicked against us. Although the priest was taken off in a remarkable manner, many remained who were very cruel and acted unjustly against us.

...

Now, my children, the end of my leaving this to you and all upon record is that future ages may know that the great God of heaven and earth, who brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt's bondage, who made the water stand on heaps and brought his children through on dry

---

<sup>17</sup> Emphasis [**bold**] added by Helene Pollock

land, and overturned Pharaoh and all his host, is our God in whom we believe, and his power is not lessened that he cannot save nor [is] his arm shortened that it cannot deliver at this day as in former days, praises to his name forever.

This, my dear children, you know is certainly true, and you should keep in remembrance these and all other mercies that the Lord our God has bestowed upon us ever since he gathered us to be a people, which is eight and thirty years ago.

I was in the nineteenth year of my age when John Camm and John Audland came first to Bristol in the power of the great God of heaven and earth. And I am a living witness that his presence was with them and made their ministry so dreadful that it pierced the hearts of many. Oh, the terror that seized my heart at the sound of John Audland's voice and the sight of him, before I rightly understood what he said. But before the meeting was over, the Spirit of the Lord moved in my heart and I came to see my deplorable state, which made me cry to God for mercy, a day never to be forgotten by me.

And now I have arrived at the fifty seventh year of age. Oh! The many deliverances, both inward and outward, which I have been made a living witness of. The decrees that have been sealed against us, the threats of ruin and destruction which have been sounded in our ears, how have we been as it were killed all the day long and counted as sheep for the slaughter.

And yet, behold, we are alive to this day to praise the Lord. How have the enemies roared, both inwardly and outwardly, and come with open mouth to devour at once! And how has our God helped us! The great God of heaven and earth has been our strength in a needful time and has sustained his people and borne up our heads above the waters, that they have not drowned nor overturned us to this day, everlasting honor be given unto the Lord forever.

But he has overturned our enemies and broken their bands asunder, and he has made them to bow under his dreadful power and has taken many off in his displeasure. What shall I say in the behalf of all his wondrous works that my eyes have seen, but more especially the inward work of regeneration! My tongue is not able to demonstrate the tenth part that the Lord has been pleased to bring me through. Oh! What shall I say at the remembrance of them which at this time is with life come up before me? I can but bow before the Lord and prize his mercies forevermore.

Dear children, keep faithful to the Lord and his blessed truth in which you have been trained up, and your eyes shall see for yourselves, as mine have for myself. Be faithful to the Spirit of Christ Jesus in your own bosoms and do not overlook little things, for they that are not faithful in a little shall never be made rulers over much.

Do not exercise yourselves in any matter too high for you, but mind the Spirit of Truth in your own hearts and hearken diligently to the voice of the Lord, that your souls may live. Keep the Lord always in your remembrance, that you sin not against him.

Remember to keep to the daily cross which will crucify all the motions of the flesh and keep you alive to God and near unto him. In so doing, you will know his counsel.

And seek the kingdom of heaven and the righteousness thereof, above all things in this world, and other things shall be added unto you. For I will assure you that this is the way that my soul has travailed in and has found favor with God.

--Elizabeth Stirredge

\* \* \* \* \*

*The following was written by the editor of the Journal:*

[These papers of Elizabeth Stirredge were] put into my hand to peruse, as falling mostly within the compass of my knowledge, especially that part in relation to her imprisonment at Ivelchester, since I was then a prisoner there for the testimony of truth in the time of the great imprisonment for attending meetings in the year 1683. She was taken at meeting at Chew-magna with nearly thirty more and sent to prison by that wicked persecutor and under-sheriff of the county, John Helliard of Bristol, at the instigation of the priest of the parish, both of whom were soon after cut off by death. The priest, named Cross, died immediately, in a very remarkable manner, as is later detailed. Helliard was also struck with great terror and horror of mind for the violence he had committed to the people of God in that city.

*John Whiting*

London, the 21st of the Second month, 1711