

The Beacon

June 2009

The Metropolitan Community Church of San José



That Angry, Pissy God they Have

by Sharon C.

I was talking with Rev. Mike today when it came out of my mouth. “I love your church. I love the nice people there. I grew up singing, and really believing, ‘Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.’ I think of that loving Jesus, and I think about how I understand God, sometimes male and sometimes female. And I have to tell you, part of what holds me back where church is concerned is that sort of angry, pissy God that some folks put out there.”

I’m glad that Rev. Mike thought the phrase was funny, I must admit. I’m doubly glad he asked me to write this reflection, because it gave me the opportunity to really think about how many of us, LGBTQ and straight alike, have been spiritually harmed by the somewhat petulant image of God that seems to pervade the media. God sure seems to punish a lot of folks for the so-called “abominations” of a few, to hear some ministries tell it.

I keenly remember when my crisis of faith began. I was around 18, and had not yet moved out of my folks’ home and into my first apartment. I attended a church that I loved, and where I was very active. When the word got out that I did musical theatre, I became the alto who anchored a quartet with three other teenage girls. When I won my first speech team trophy, I was asked to deliver a talk for Thanksgiving. I was in the youth group and even studied the Bible in its historic context for fun. I was a true believer, and I loved it.

But then came the night that Youth Group’s activity was cancelled so that we could all go over to the main sanctuary and watch a video with the whole congregation - a presentation from James Dobson’s “Focus on the Family.” I remember looking around me in horror as the audience nodded and expressed agreement with statements like “Real Christians don’t listen to secular music” and “Real Christians don’t spend time with non-believers ... or homosexuals.”

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Wavy Gravy: Transsexual Role Model

by Lannie Rose



That clown Wavy Gravy made me a transsexual. Well, he didn’t actually make me a transsexual, but he inspired me to be one. More accurately, this icon of the sixties hippie movement provided a model that

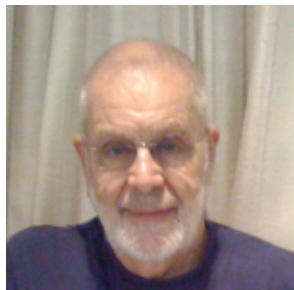
helped me understand my transsexuality.

As I began living more and more of my life as a woman, and feeling very, very good about it, I wondered, how could this be? Could it possibly be true that I was a real woman, in spite of my male body? I had been getting nowhere contemplating, Am I fundamentally a woman at my core, and what exactly does that mean? Indeed, those questions may simply be unanswerable.

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Deepening My Spirituality Through Reiki

by Judd Ingram



I became a member of MCC San Jose after a long life as a member of the Catholic Church.

As a longtime Catholic, and one who also worked for Catholic Social Services, I

became uncomfortable with the lack of progress in the relationship between the Church and the GLBTQ community. For a period of time I did not attend any church, but then my wife suggested that we attend a service at MCC.

After attending MCCSJ for an Easter service, I found that it was where I wished to continue my personal spiritual practices.

I previously had been exposed to Reiki by my wife who had been trained in it. At first I thought that it was just another activity to use up time, and of little value.

After a while, I decided to investigate what was involved, and I signed up to take the level one Reiki training. During the training I learned that Reiki involved healing through universal energy, which could involve the prayerful laying on of hands or could involve healing from a distance. To grow with Reiki required that I establish a routine of practice for my own

spiritual growth. This became a challenge for me, and I sought to learn all that I could.

As I became more involved in giving Reiki to myself and others, I realized that my attention was being directed more towards my own spirituality. As time passed, I studied more.

Through my training, I advanced to a level at which I was able to volunteer to provide Reiki to patients in Hospice at the VA Hospital. This has affected me spiritually. Being with patients who were about to die really makes you aware of the presence of God. These were patients who weren't going to be helped by medicine or anything else - the only answer for them was God. I knew that God was with them as they died. I could see it in the peaceful and easy way that they made their transition.

The word "Reiki" means spiritual or universal energy. It was Jesus who said that we should all lay our hands on others, especially those who may be in need of assistance. I believe that Reiki is one way that we may be of help.

At MCC San Jose, Reiki is available to both those who would like a treatment during the Sunday service and on selected Monday evenings at the Church. Additionally individuals may participate in classes when offered. For more information, please visit our Reiki web page.



My Spiritual Journey with AIDS

by Karl Vidt

I See You . . .

I am grateful to you AIDS

You have deconstructed

Everything I made.

And allowed it all

To reassemble in a new creation

Still all that I was

But a new creation

All that I will become

Yet, all that I am.

- Karl J. Vidt, October 2008

On March 6, 1989, I tested positive for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. I expected the test to confirm that I did not have the virus. I thought that I had escaped. But the virus had been lying dormant in my body all along. I was in deep shock.

This started a chain of events in my life that was beyond my control. In 1993 I was diagnosed with CMV Retinitis, which affected my eyesight. Eventually I was sick enough to need to go on disability. Then I lost my eyesight - I was blind. As I struggled my way through all of this change, I kept asking, "Why am I still here? I should have died by now." The answer every time was "You aren't done yet." But what did that mean? I wanted real answers!

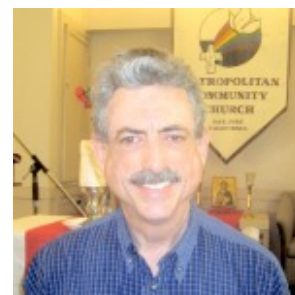
The answers didn't come right away. First I had to come to terms with having AIDS. I had to know within my being that I could accept and make peace with what had come my way.

As that acceptance grew, new doors began to open for me. I began working as Church Administrator at MCCSJ. I became involved with the Disability Advisory Commission with the City of San Jose. I became a Reiki practitioner. And I joined the Santa Clara County HIV Planning Council. In each of these roles I have had the chance to make a difference in countless people's lives.

I could never have imagined doing any of this before. And I never would have done any of this had I not allowed the doors to open. What many would call great tragedy, pain, and suffering became the catalyst to a whole new way of living. This has brought me to the knowledge of who I really am, to the realization that life is lived from the inside out, and to the awareness of God's continuous presence shining within my being.

I now believe that all things that come our way, whether good or bad, are an opportunity to move into the beauty of our true essence - a chance for us to allow God to make a difference in our lives. If we just allow God to work in every situation in which we find ourselves, we will find the abundance of blessings God has for us.

MCC San José hosts a support group for people living with HIV and AIDS. For more information, please visit our website at mccsj.org



That Angry, Pissy God They Have (continued from page 1)

Now, aside from never once having seen “Thou shalt not groove on the tunes of David Bowie” anywhere in scripture, I could kind of get the point there. There is some pretty unpleasant and demeaning music out there, and I choose not to listen to it. At the same time, there is some pretty amazing music out in the world, and I couldn’t see the point in limiting myself to one section of Tower Records.

That wasn’t the crisis moment, though. It was when I was told that, as a “real Christian,” I could no longer love the man who is still my best friend in the world: a gay atheist.

After much struggle over this, I decided that I would rather keep my friendship with Robert than be a “real Christian,” and I walked away.

In the almost 30 years since then, I began to study anthropology and found that God could wear a lot of faces - and sometimes the one from which I drew the most comfort was female. I was a practicing Wiccan for many years, in fact, although even that eventually went by the wayside.

Through all of this, I never stopped believing that the teachings of the radical Rabbi Yeshua - the man characterized by the very secular Jackson Browne as “the rebel Jesus” - were a good and valid message. However, I really began to doubt that he would recognize his teachings in the mouthpieces of this petulant God that were all around me. It just drove me even further away. I didn’t want anything to do with that god, who seemed more like a jack-booted fascist than the Prince of Peace.

So, how did I wind up at MCC at all? Well, like so many people, I campaigned against Prop 8. My husband and I both support marriage equality, and voted against the measure. We had a lawn sign, which one neighbor came over to rather strenuously demand that we remove (we didn’t). I talked to people at the mall, handing out stickers and leaflets from our little stand. I wrote on various websites about the dishonesty of the Prop 8 campaign. I believed in the general goodness of human nature and that there was no way this discriminatory initiative could pass.

I had not reckoned on the people behind that angry God. Like so many, my tears of joy at President Obama’s election were tempered with tears of shock and sorrow as rights were stripped away from law-abiding gay men and women just because someone had decided that they were, for lack of a better word, icky.

I was really over those “real Christians” at that point, as I’m sure you can imagine.

In January of this year, I decided to participate in the Worldwide Equality Rally in San Jose. I met up with some nice folks in the park and we all walked to City Hall Plaza. That was the first time I heard Rev. Mike speak, invoking “God of the redwoods, God of the ocean, and God of warm, sunny days.”

I remember thinking that day, “This man is talking about the God I remember.”

When I got home, I even told my husband that I had heard a man speak that morning who could almost get me back to church because his words had moved me very much.

Then, on March 4, 2009, I went to the San Jose Eve of Justice Vigil. There was Rev. Mike, and so I went over and introduced myself, even telling him what I had said to my husband. Rev. Mike wanted to know how he had fallen short of bringing me back ... and then hugged me while I sobbed about how I left church because I was told I couldn’t love my best friend because he was gay.

I visited MCC for the first time that Sunday, when Rev. Mike spoke about “Snakes on a Plane” and how to deal with venom in the world. I spent the whole time sobbing; I was too embarrassed to stay for social hour.

The tears were cleansing, helping to take away some of the venom left in my heart by the people of that angry God. Here, I thought, is the house where Jackson Browne’s rebel Jesus could be found; a house where anyone could come to feel loved, accepted and encouraged instead of being told how “icky” they are. What a loving, wonderful place.

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That Angry, Pissy God They Have (continued from page 4)

My pain over that “angry, pissy God?” It’s still pretty big, but I also have to figure that I’m not the only one who struggles with being spiritually and socially harmed by folks who believe absolutely in what someone told them their Bible says - without having read it very thoughtfully. I know I have a long way to go with the healing. I have a lot to work through with my anger at the people who made that angry God in their image. At the same time, I know two things to be true for me regardless:

1 John 2:9:

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness.

And, in the words of Jackson Browne:

In this life of hardship and of earthly toil
We have need for anything that frees us
So I bid you pleasure
And I bid you cheer
From a heathen and a pagan
On the side of the rebel Jesus.

This reflection was originally published as part of MCC San José’s weekly reflection series. You can subscribe to our weekly reflection series or find this reflection and previous weekly reflections at mccsj.org

Meditation with Cats (continued from Page 8)

The cats, of course, would prefer that I engage in contemplative prayer on the sofa. It’s easier for them to jump onto, and it puts me in a much better position for them to climb into my lap for a bit of meditation of their own. The chair where I meditate doesn’t really have room for them, and it doesn’t position me well for the cats to sit on my lap.

This doesn’t mean that the cats don’t try to get in on the act. Brushing against my legs while I’m meditating is only the start. If they’re feeling more aggressive, they may jump up onto the chair back or arms and circle me while doing elaborate sniffing routines to make sure that I’m the same person that I was before I started meditating. Or they may simply rear up on their hind legs, put their front paws gently on my knees, and stare deeply into my eyes, as if to communicate that petting them would surely be a better use of my time than contemplating the mysteries of the Holy Spirit.

I could send the cats into exile, I suppose. I could close them off in another room during my thirty minutes of meditation. But even without cats, there are many distractions when one chooses to meditate. The phone calls one needs to make, the letter one needs to write, the countless projects that await one’s attention

when meditation is done — these thoughts flit around the edge of one’s consciousness, just as persistent as any cats could ever be.

The point of contemplative meditation is not to eliminate these distractions, but to acknowledge them and then gently return one’s focus to the subject of the meditation. The main reason that I engage in this form meditation is to receive the insights and inspiration that come after spending an extended period of time contemplating the holy. But sometimes it may be just as important to practice the art of repeatedly returning one’s focus to the divine while living in a world filled with distractions.

So, today again I will take the time to sit quietly in my chair, gently acknowledging distracting thoughts and inquisitive cats. Strengthened by new insights, new inspiration and a deeper connection with God, I will arise to take care of the other business of the day: those phone calls I need to make, that letter I need to write, and those countless other projects that await my attention. And, of course, I will not forget to take the time to pet the cats.

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Wavy Gravy: Transsexual Role Model (continued from Page 1)

I decided the more relevant question was, “Is living my life as a woman what I need to do in order to be happy?” Or, twisting it around slightly, “If I choose to live as a woman, will it increase my ability to build a happy life?” Based on my experience spending time as a woman, I could answer that question with a confident, “Yes!” But in my gut, I was still worried. Could I be a woman just because I wanted to be? Was it reasonable to ask the world to accept and respect me as a woman just because I said I was?

That’s when Wavy Gravy hit me. Well he didn’t actually hit me, but if he had, it would have been with a big floppy bladder that went “Pffffffttt!” and it would have been very funny. What actually hit me was the fact that Wavy Gravy lives his life as a clown. Now he certainly was not born a biological clown, so he must have transitioned to it. Apparently he decided, somewhere along the line, that presenting himself as a clown was the best way to express his true self. It allowed him to do things he could not do - or do as effectively - as a mere man. He was able to live a happy, productive, meaningful life only as a clown. So that’s what he did. He did it so sincerely, lovingly, and thoroughly that the world accepted and respected him as a clown. I am sure it was not an easy journey, but

he undertook it enthusiastically. I wondered if he even considered the choice or if he simply needed to be a clown.

Wavy was a familiar face in the peace movement that stopped the Vietnam War. He formed the Seva foundation to bring much-needed medical care to third-world countries. Later, he ran Camp Winnarainbow, teaching performing and circus arts to kids of all ages and economic backgrounds. Being a clown was not what Wavy Gravy was all about. It was just what he was.

So there you have it. If Wavy Gravy could be a clown, surely I could be a woman. And if I did it sincerely, lovingly, and respectfully, then I was confident that the world would accept me, too.

This reflection is an excerpt from Lannie Rose’s book “Lannie! My Journey from Man to Woman” ©2007 by Elaine Rhodes. It is used here by permission of the author. If you are interested in learning more about Lannie’s work, please visit www.lannierose.com

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A "No on Eight Protest" outside of MCC San Jose. Photo by Jo-Lynn Jnana Otto

About this Newsletter

The Beacon is a publication of the Metropolitan Community Church of San José. We are a small and thriving church located in downtown San Jose. We welcome everyone, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

This edition of the Beacon is a collection of articles that were originally published as part of our weekly reflections series. You can subscribe to our weekly reflections e-Newsletter or read previous reflections by visiting our website at www.mccsj.org.

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Meditation with Cats

by Rev. Michael Patrick Ellard



Prayer takes many forms, all of them beautiful. One of my favorite forms of prayer is contemplative meditation, a time of silently reflecting on a specific subject.

On any given day, the topic of my contemplation may be a Bible passage or a theological concept such as healing, wholeness or joy. Most frequently, I simply focus on God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit. Whichever focus I choose, one thing is always the same. While many forms of prayer involve speaking, contemplative prayer involves listening.

This is not to say that contemplative prayer is always easy, particularly if you have cats.

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The Closet is a Spiritual Tomb

by Rev. Sky Anderson

“The Closet is a Spiritual Tomb!”

The first time I heard these words I was at our General Conference in Los Angeles. It was the early 1970s, and a young preacher by the name of Howard Wells had gotten up to speak. Over a thousand people were in the auditorium that day and when he spoke you could hear a pin drop.

Here was a man who had left his former denomination with all its prestige and had come to what was then a fledgling, dynamic ministry called the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC). He began to preach the Gospel in a new and dynamic way to those of us who were considered to be the lepers of this society.

Why? Because as the Rev. Wells, almost in tears, proclaimed, “The Closet is a Spiritual Tomb!” He said, “I can no longer live my life in Christ the way the world tells us we must, hiding who I am as a human being in order to belong in the institutional church. I am a man of God who happens to be Gay!” Living a lie is destructive to the human spirit - to the soul - because what we are saying to the world, but more importantly, to ourselves, is that who we are is not good enough! When we do this, we accept a life of shame and denigration and we can have no true peace. Those gathered for this worship service came to their feet, most in tears, cheering and shouting out a profound “Halleluia!” People from many faiths were united as one, free at last!

Almost all of the 1,000-plus people gathered there on this day were gay men and lesbians (bi and transgender were not yet part of the dialogue). Most were people who had been shut out from their churches just because of their sexual orientation. Most of us had once bought into the condemnation and hostility of the institutional religions whose hatred and/or fear-filled language and actions had driven us from the arms of God. They had convinced us that God no longer wanted anything to do with us, costing us so much pain: loss of family, jobs, self-worth, hope and, all too often... our lives.

But now I pray that you will join us in saying, as we did on that day, “Never Again! By the grace of God I am who I am! I know I am loved, I am loving, and I, too, am a holy child of God!”

Come out! Come out! wherever you are!

Take that first step and come join our Coming Out Support Group! Our policy is that everything said in the group is confidential as is your name and presence with us. The candle burning in the window is for you!

Come join us!

For more information about MCC San José's Coming Out Support Group, please visit our website at mccsj.org

