

What's Poetry got to do with Healing?

Excerpts from a talk given by Lona Ingwerson C.S. of Laguna Beach, California at Arden Wood, May 3, 2020

So, what's poetry got to do with healing? Good question! Many would say, "Absolutely nothing." I'm going to persuade the "many" that they're wrong. Others would say, "A lot." And I'm counting on them to readily agree with the content herein!

Actually, poetry has a great deal to do with Christian Science healing; its impact is incredibly strong. In a moment of need, poetry is easier to remember than prose. For instance, we have all unwittingly memorized poetry as we have grown in Christian Science, beginning, some of us, with Mary Baker Eddy's poem for little children:

Father-Mother God,
Loving me,—
Guard me when I sleep;
Guide my little feet
Up to Thee.

(*Miscellaneous Writings*, Mary Baker Eddy, 400:14-18)

And you thought you weren't a consumer of poetry?

Or what about turning in a moment of need to the 23rd Psalm or the 91st Psalm or "Shepherd, show me how to go" (*Christian Science Hymnal*, 304:1) or "O Gentle presence, peace and joy and power" (*Hymnal*, 207:1) or "In heavenly Love abiding, no change my heart shall fear" (*Hymnal*, 148:1)? You might say those aren't poems; those are psalms and hymns. But, they're all poems. See how many poems you have memorized for those moments when healing is needed?

Why poems? The poet laureate of the United States, Joy Harjo, said it far better than I can:

...poetry uses language to create a place you can go when human words fail (*The Christian Science Monitor*, April 20, 2020).

Although I'm writing this at the beach in Southern California, and you're reading it wherever you are, in a sense we're all mentally at Arden Wood in San Francisco, and for that reason I'd like to mention two things. One is that this is a party in celebration of Arden Wood's 90th year, and she's a grand lady going strong. We're also well

aware that Arden Wood would not exist without our first responders—our Christian Science nurses. Grateful as we are for the police, the firemen, the National Guard, our gratitude today goes to those who very particularly care for us in our difficult moments. We don't give a lot of thought to these first responders of ours...until we need them, and then they become invaluable.

Therefore, I'd like to devote this talk to our Christian Science nurses who so selflessly serve the Cause of

Christian Science. Can you imagine where any of us would go, what we would do, if we had no family members who supported Christian Science, and we needed care? Thank God for the facilities we can go to when in need and the wonderful Christian Science nurses there to care for us. We Christian Science practitioners meet our clients through the phone and email;

Christian Science nurses are the ones in the trenches, meeting human needs in a heavenly way.

As an example of putting what we feel into prose or poetry, I just told you what I think of Christian Science nurses in prose. Now, let me share a poem called, "She was there for me," by Jan Keeler, C.S.B.:

She was there for me.
In a dark moment, perhaps one of my darkest,
she was there for me.

She, at a crazy hour, left her home
to stand by my side.

Practical? Yes, she had solutions.
Wisdom? Enough to share quietly when I was
ready to hear.

Like Aaron, she was there to uphold
my mental stand
when I was no longer prepared
to do it alone.

Like John the Baptist, she was there.
Expectant, full of praise, and ready
to usher in the healing activity of the Christ.

She was motherhood with its most gentle,
tender touch.



She was fatherhood in strength and confidence.

She was joy.

She took my home under her care
and embraced my child
with such love as though she were her own.

She fed us meals
She fed me truths of God—persistently.

Though trying not to be, I was scared.
She was unimpressed.
She was undaunted by the antics of mortal mind
that had put me in such a mess.
She had seen divine Love overcome
much more than this.

I was not at my best.
Yet, no personal opinions or judgment slung
recklessly from her lips.

Straight from our Leader's revelation of care,
she was there.

Together, we witnessed God's healing presence.
It could have been a he, but this time it was a she.
This Christian Science nurse.
A concept I had supported for others' care.
But this time,
this time—oh, thank you, Father—
she was there for me.

(The Christian Science Journal, May, 1994)

Prose says, "I'm grateful for a Christian Science nurse."
Poetry says it in a very different way: "She was there for me."

Poetry has a way of bringing healing and calm to
a situation. Let me share a story about how a poem
impacted a person's need for healing. We're all quite
familiar with Genesis 1 in which God created man
in His image and likeness. It's powerful, but in poetry....
Well, here's what happened:

The story began at a Wednesday evening testimony
meeting in Golden, Colorado, where I gave a testimony,
citing two lines in an old poem: "Which of these men
do you think of as you, Genesis 1 or Genesis 2?"

Two weeks later, a church member started his testimony,
probably unaware that I was sitting behind him, by saying
that he had been in the church two weeks before and
had heard the stupidest testimony he could imagine—
how a lady had recited a little ditty, a silly little poem,
which he felt lacked metaphysical substance.

In the two weeks intervening, he had taken a business trip
to Atlanta, Georgia. He and his wife had checked into a
hotel for the night when he was suddenly awakened by
paralyzing chest pains. He said they were so severe that
he could not move and could not utter a word, so he was

unable to get his wife's assistance or call a practitioner.
He said for the first time in his life, he felt totally helpless
and very frightened. He struggled to remember a Bible
passage or something from *Science and Health with
Key to the Scriptures*, by Mary Baker Eddy, but he couldn't.
His mind went blank except for the words, "Which of
these men do you think of as you, Genesis 1 or Genesis 2?"
And he realized that was not a trifling little poem. It was
a very strong message because if he was a Genesis 1 man,
he was fine, but if he was a Genesis 2 man, he would not
live through the night. He opted for Genesis 1 and
snapped out of what he realized had been a cardiac arrest.

The poem was written many years ago by a practitioner
named J. Woodruff Smith. A similar one was written
by E.B. Cole. Here's the latest rendition. I can't tell you
where it was first published; it simply showed up in my
files. There may be other derivations of it, but here's the
one I have:

Genesis 1 or Genesis 2

Where did it begin
This idea called you?
In Genesis 1,
Or Genesis 2?
Which one of these concepts
Will prove to be true?
If you know what is what,
Do you know who is who?
In Genesis 1 in the 26th verse
There's a man with never a taint' of a curse.
But in Genesis 2 in verse number seven
There's a dust man conceived...
He'll never see heaven.
So it really comes down
To which one you will claim,
What thou see'st thou be'st...
So what is your name?
There they both stand.
Which one is you?
Is it immortal man one,
Or mortal man two?
If you're immortal man
You know what you're worth.
For according to law
You'll inherit the earth.
But if you're just a mortal
And made out of dust...
Is there anything to you
That's worthy of trust?
No, the thing they call man
In Genesis 2
Is the dream of the dreamer.
It never was you.

So know what you are.
Take your place in the sun,
You're the immortal man
Of Genesis I.
(J. Woodruff Smith, C.S.)

To make my point, in a moment of emergency, it was simply a line from a poem this man remembered, a poem based on the Bible but in words that made an impact.

The next poem, "**Conversation at Nazareth**," brought with it a healing as well, this time of a financial problem. I was giving a talk to teenagers that included this poem. The teens' parents, though uninvited, were listening from another room. One of the dads called the following day to tell me an interesting story. He was well aware of Jesus' admonition:

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;"
(Matthew 5:43, 44).

The following morning, a line from this poem reinforcing those words made a profound difference in his business. He was reading the Sunday paper in his kitchen before church when the phone rang. The caller was a man who owed him a great deal of money. The man was desperate; he owned several restaurants in the area, was out of food, and was expecting large Sunday crowds. The Christian Scientist was a wholesale food merchant who had tried to get this man to pay him back for months but to no avail. Now this man had come begging. The Christian Scientist's first reaction was one of shock that the man would dare ask him for more...until he remembered a line from the poem, "Conversation at Nazareth." It's about a conversation Jesus has with his fellow carpenters about love:

What love is? Well, that's a hard thing to say.
To be a proper craftsman, that is love.
There was a carpenter once, down the village there,
Who loved his work—he was right quick at it;
I heard his plane and hammer go all day.
At evening he'd come out before the door,
And sit awhile with us and talk as free
As any of us here. He used to talk
Of love, often as not. He held that love
Was something different from the common thought.
He used to say love meant perfection: all
One did, or said, or made, it should be perfect.
That's a hard saying.
What became of him?

He left here after a while, and the shop
Stood empty. Then I was away myself
For ten years, but I heard them say he went
As far as Jerusalem. I often think of him.
Perfection! That's a big word—only God
Is perfect as I see it. This man said
We could be perfect too; that is, if we loved,
Tried hard enough, saw God, morning, noon, night.
But loving's hard too. Can you love
A mean man or a thief? A liar's worse.
Can you love those? I used to ask him that.
He'd look at me with those great eyes of his
And say: "Love? Yes, love God, the rest will come.
There'll come a time when they will thieve no more,
Will lie no more; if you keep loving on,
They'll come, they'll come." And when he said
those words,
His eyes would burn, and he'd get up and close
The door, not in a hurry, and would stride,
Quiet in all his movements, down the street—
I think he used to meet his mother there.

(*Christian Science Sentinel*, May 23, 1936)

The need to "keep loving on" impressed the businessman. He found himself telling the man to take all the food he needed. When the man had finished loading his truck, he knocked on the Christian Scientist's kitchen door and handed him not just the money for that day's delivery but for all the back orders for which he had never paid. The lesson? "Keep loving on, they'll come, they'll come." We tend to remember poetry.

So, we have an example of poetry reinforcing a healing of a disease and a healing of supply. What about another issue everyone needs to deal with eventually? Age!

On p. 246 of *Science and Health*, we are told, "Never record ages." I added a bit of poetry to that in a poem entitled "**Happy Un-birthday**:"

I'm to record my birth date on line 3.
Sure.
But I'll tell you where I'm not recording it—
In my consciousness.
I refuse to be trapped into the
Birth,
Maturity,
Decay syndrome,
The adolescent/senile cycle
With a brief space in the middle
To hurry up and be prosperous.
No way.
I am who I am,
Created by God

In His own likeness;
Not approaching nor retiring
But there,
Now,
Always.

(Christian Science Sentinel, July 25, 1977)

Another poem I wrote regarding age is called, “**Your Life Span.**” It’s a poem about David and Goliath. I was thinking one day about the enormous giant, Goliath, as the concept of age...powerful, unavoidable, etc....and then about David, who reminded me of the vibrancy and energy of youth. We all know how that story ends and which one wins. Listen:

The passage of time—
It seems such a Goliath.
It tells me that life is a downhill trip,
That at a given point
Strength, companionship, resources, inspiration,
begin to wane.
The realization of eternity—
It seems such a David.
It tells me that life is an uphill trip,
That as we journey from sense to Soul
Our strength, our resources, our joy...
grow with us.
The time theory has such clout behind it—
Medical research, universal belief, the media.
The eternity premise has only the Word of
God behind it,
Seems helpless as a slingshot against a spear,
A youth...
against a Goliath.
Funny thing about this one—
The end is already written.
The eternity of good, like David, will win.
The Goliath of life in fading matter, will fall.
Don't let those six cubits scare you...
much less the span!

(The Christian Science Journal, May, 1985)

Mrs. Eddy once said:

The added wisdom of age and experience is strength,
not weakness, and we should understand this,
expect it, and know that it is so, then it would appear.
(The Christian Science Journal, August, 1884).

So, we’ve shown you that poetry brings a healing appreciation to our Christian Science nurses and our first responders; it heals physical problems as seen in our Genesis 1 poem; it helps in business situations and in thinking of problems associated with age. Where

else can it reach? What about concerns for our young ones? Whether they’re newborns or mature adults, can poetry help?

We could take the words in prose, spoken so beautifully by the father of the Prodigal Son on his return, “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:24). They are beautiful, but we could supplement them with some parenting concerns depicted in poetry as well.

In dealing with a child of any age who is experiencing a physical problem, Holly Suhi writes to a frightened parent this message from God:

Only a Lamb

In a dream that seemed so real, I heard
my child calling to me to save him.
Frantic and with all my strength
I rushed to the scene, finding him
already beyond my reach.
My heart cried out to my God and his . . .
It was then I woke to hear Christ speak:
"God, Love, is like a Shepherd
who carries His lambs in His arms
all the day long and
all the night long,
who never puts one down
and never lets one down."
"My dear lamb," God said to me,
"I have never asked you to be the Shepherd."
Both lambs were saved.

(The Christian Science Journal, March, 1983).

Those are such poignant words. We can hear them in prose as “God will take care of your kids.” In poetry? “I never asked you to be the Shepherd.” Poetry just gets the message across differently.

And what about the kid who has grown up and away from Christian Science? It’s not an uncommon problem; in fact, the same story of the Prodigal Son addresses it. You all know it. In prose, it’s told this way:

The young man has “wasted his substance in riotous living... And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (Luke 15:12 [to 2nd.], 13, 20)

In poetry, it’s told this way:

Going Home

After all this time, it won't be easy going home.
I'd left him guiltily back then. He'd given
everything I asked without a word.
He'd sent no one to check up on my life.

In no time, I'd gone through the legacy.
Sure, it's tough now making ends meet;
I'd be better off emptying the slops in the old home.
And so I'm heading back.
It's heavy going, the last 100 yards.
I tell myself, "What pride have I to lose?"

Somebody's coming toward me through the sun.
What if it's him, trying to head me off?
(I sent no news, but he must surely know).
I stand still, worthless, steeled to meet
The shame...the accusing finger, the
condemning voice.
The sun is in my eyes;
Blinded, I hear my name.

But what's this? I'm in my father's arms.
He holds me close. There must be some mistake.
His tears mix with mine like warm rain;
He's calling everyone to celebrate.

Why? Why?

I still don't understand. I grope for light.

Now suddenly my mind swims with his vision.
Deep beneath the mess of what I was
I learn his sight, I'm seeing what he sees
Something bright, untouched by hurt,
Unblemished in the sun,
Something I thought had no right to exist
Is growing through the rubble of the wrong;
Chosen, cherished, insuppressible,
Something morning clean, unsung.

Beneath every immoral life

A lily inches up into the spring.

(Godfrey John [I'm not sure where this is printed
but I have it in my collection of poetry, which is why
I printed it intact for you!])

And there are other kids who come back. Our kids all
stayed in Christian Science, and I asked them why. Our
son Marshall's response reminds me a little of the young
man in this next poem when he said, "Where else would
I go?" In prose, you might say, "I left Christian Science,
but I'm coming back." In a poem called "**The Textbook**,"
John Cuno describes the experience:

I keep going back to it: the road home, like a map to
some forgotten place lived in a long time ago. I'd get
lost otherwise. There are no signs on other streets, no
directions, not a clue anywhere. The 3-A's can't tell me
where that town is. No travel agent can. People aren't
much help. They say, "Home? Heaven? I live down
the street. Perfection? I don't know much about that."

I'm going back there now. I'm on the road. And I've got
my little book with the gold-tipped pages tucked away

in my valise. I can't be without it. Each day I get it out
and lose myself on that road, in order to find myself
(the true self that knows only the real).

The little book explains words like "When the morning
stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for
joy" and "What is truth?"

And I have to find that town and that choir and get in
there and start singing again. Singing the truth.

The road brightens; the way becomes clear. Trees clap
their hands. Birds praise God with their beaks and
wings. A voice says, "That's right. Keep going straight
ahead. Don't turn to the left or right. I'll tell you when."

And it does. And suddenly I know I'm there right
now. Just seeing everything the way it really is. Just
knowing that home is the road, and I'm there, singing.

(*The Christian Science Journal*, January, 1979)

I've found, too, what an important role expectancy plays
in the healing process. In prose, Mary Baker Eddy tells us:

When the destination is desirable, expectation
speeds our progress (*Science and Health*, 426:8-9).

In poetry? I need to tell you a story. When our children
were little, we had a custom of asking for a good thought
before they went to sleep. One night, Heidi, our youngest
(preschool), said she didn't have one, which of course
was punishable by death...well, maybe not quite, but she
knew it wasn't a popular road to take! Anyway, soon she
called out with her thought for the night. It was, "I pray
and I pray and the darkness goes away."

I told her I really liked that because she had said, "I pray
and I pray," not "I hope and I pray." And then she had said
with certainty, "the darkness goes away." I told her I really
liked it because it spoke of such doubtless certainty, that
darkness was only the absence of light and that it might
take on all kinds of names as she grew up, some maybe
scary, but that they would never be more than darkness.

As I left her room to say goodnight, she called me
back and said, "If it's good, why don't you send it to the
Sentinel?" "Good idea," said I. "I'll do that." She called
me once more and said, "If they print it, split the check."
I agreed. That was when they paid \$25 for poems.

Anyway, I called it "**On Expectancy**:"

"I pray and I pray,
and the darkness goes away,"
said my child.
A childlike thought—
that darkness flees after prayer.
It says so much of trust,
of faith, of expectancy.

When you pray,
do you know
the darkness will go away?

(Christian Science Sentinel, May 21, 1979)

In prose, we could just say “Expect healing,” but in poetry, we can say it in another way. We all want healing, but sometimes we’re probably all guilty of thinking it just may not happen. I might add that we had a visitor at one of our Wednesday evening meetings who opened her testimony with these words: “As the saying goes, ‘I pray and I pray and the darkness goes away.’” It’s become a saying!

Another little fox that sometimes stands in the way of healing is the fear that we didn’t get something when it was little. We might say, “I wish I’d gotten that dragon when it was a serpent,” bemoaning the idea that the serpent in Genesis got to be the great red dragon by Revelation. In *Science and Health*, we read,

“In the Apocalypse, when nearing its doom, this evil increases and becomes the great red dragon, swollen with sin, inflamed with war against spirituality, and ripe for destruction” (*SH* 565:1-4).

In poetry, it could be said this way:

Dragons for Unreal

Dragons aren't real,
Only easier to see than serpents.
Easier to see through...
Ready for destruction...
Not my destruction...
Theirs!

*(Ideas on Wings and Christian Science Sentinel,
April 30, 1977)*

Another little fox to handle is making the problem more real by digging into it—curiosity. We get engrossed in what it might be, its name, its duration, its whatever. We fish around for how real it is instead of how real it isn’t; we go to Google instead of to God.

In prose, “Don’t waste your time trying to figure out what’s wrong with you.” In a poem I wrote called “**Gone Fishing**,” I discuss what happened after casting my net around to find out what was wrong and why:

I'd gone fishing for healing,
Took great bait along,
Armed myself with books and references,
And threw out the nets.
Nothing.

Then I wondered what I was fishing for—
An explanation of the problem?
How did it attack? What was its name?
When would it go?
Where was it located?

Not a nibble!

So I cast my net on the other side.
Instead of fishing around for what was wrong and why,
I cast on the side of truth, on what was right . . .
and why
And guess what?

We're having fish for dinner.

(The Christian Science Journal, September 1985)

The next poem involves sharing Christian Science. It all began with the story of the sower and the seed, which Jesus shared (Matt. 13:3). I teach middle school teens in Sunday School, and I bought some seed, put it in a box and then took the class outside to plant some of it very carefully. We threw some of it to the wind and the birds, and some of it landed on rocks. Then we went back inside to discuss the lessons learned.

One boy, Evan, seemed concerned and said, “What about the seeds left in the box?” Good question. It seemed to me those would be likened to the people we didn’t invite to the lecture, whom we didn’t share Christian Science with—not, as we might say, those whom we felt wouldn’t be interested, but those whom we simply failed to ask.

The poem that came to me is entitled “**Untapped Potential**.” In prose? “I’m too busy and maybe too embarrassed to introduce Christian Science to anyone, but I do worry that the church doesn’t grow.”

In poetry, it’s like this:

There is seed that falls on fallow ground,
Seed that lands upon the rocks,
But the seed that has the least hope
Is the seed left in the box.

(Christian Science Sentinel, January 4, 1999)

One of my favorite poems is entitled “**A Better Way**” and was written by one of our favorite writers, Louise Knight Wheatley Cook. It, like the last one, emphasizes the concept of sharing your light, and not, as the Bible tells us, putting it under a bushel.

It tells the story of two women, each given a candle. One hides hers away in case she should ever need it “because it was all she had.” The other “steps out into the night” and shares it.

Again, in prose, we can say “share your light,” but with this poem, we have another way of saying it. The poem begins this way:

A woman was given a candle and she hid it away
on the shelf...

How many times have we done that ourselves? We feel inspired but reluctant to share it because, well, it's personal and best kept private.

The poem continues:

A woman was given a candle,
And she hid it away on the shelf.
It is all I have, she murmured,
And hardly enough for myself,
So I must not let any one see it,
But all through the coming night
I'll know it is ready and waiting,
In case I should need the light.

She stole through the empty chambers
To her own little cheerless room.
How dark it has grown! she shivered,
As she groped her way through the gloom.
I wish I could light my candle!
But she tried to be only glad
She had put it away so safely
Because it was all she had.

Another was given a candle,
And she stepped out into the night.

It is all I have, she murmured,
I must make the most of its light.

There are hearts that are breaking,—somewhere,
There are lives that are sad and drear;
I must hurry along with my candle,
To let them know it is here.

O'er valley and hill she wandered,
With that one little flickering flame,
And it brightened many a pathway
That was dark until she came.
It crept into desolate places,
It banished disease and sin,
And hands, outstretched, were waiting
To welcome the stranger in.

...

Two women met in the morning,
As the eastern skies grew red.
One came from her happy journey,
One came from her sleepless bed.
Each held in her hand a candle,
But the eyes of one were sad:
I could not light it, my sister,
Because it was all I had.

The other one made no answer,
But her face, in the sunrise glow,
Looked like the face of an angel,
And she only whispered low:
O Love divine, I thank Thee!
For she saw, now the night was done,
She had lighted a thousand candles
From that poor little flickering one.

A bird sang softly near them,
And it heard the sad one say:
No wonder she looks so happy!
Hers was the better way.
Not mine, said the other, smiling,
As she touched the drooping head;
It was not my way, my sister,
But the Father's way, she said.

(The Christian Science Journal, October 1912)

A striking difference between prose and poetry is the emotion brought into a Bible story such as the incident at Nain. You're familiar with the story as related in Luke.

We're told:

And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. (Luke 7:11-17)

Bernice Waymire captured this story beautifully in a poem titled, “**Incident at Nain,**” by putting it into the words of the young man's best friend, a pallbearer.

I was a pallbearer that yellowed afternoon.
The weight of my dearest friend
was an ache in my whole body.
Grief ran deep. He was so young.

The waves of rampant wailing bore his mother on.
And she a widow. The double loss
seemed doubled in the crying.
We were core of that pulsing throng,
struggling through narrow streets,
dust rising, drying throats,
clotting tears.

Then at the city's gate
 we met a man. A man I can't forget.
 How could I?
 His radiant presence blocked the crowd,
 stopped the crying,
 stopped the crush of passionate grief.
 In that sudden stillness a hen
 called to her chicks: we heard
 the rustle of her wings.
 The sun pushed down 'til all the silent spaces
 were filled with heat.
 The man stepped forward and touched the bier.
 He held us steady in his gaze.
 What did I feel?
 A love so bright it seemed a presence;
 a power so overwhelming we were struck in awe;
 a joy so winning—where had sadness gone?
 To the mother, "Weep not" was all he said.
 Bold words.
 Then turning to my poor friend, wrapped
 for the burial:
 "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise."
 The crowd gasped and fell in fear.
 For he sat up!
 He spoke to us as though there were no time lost
 in dying. He embraced his mother,
 soothed and supported her.
 We looked then
 and saw the Christ.
 This was not yellow sun but
 light so white, so clear
 we saw ourselves mirrored in that purity. Found
 our own radiance, unmarred, joyous, reflecting
 light in Light.
 We saw the truth of Life
 and we sang praises, not to this man
 but to a God so good
 that all the shadows fell away.
 (*Christian Science Sentinel*, January 25, 1993)

Sometimes we question God as to why in our healing work we're not walking on the water. This poem may explain it: we have to get out of the boat first. It reminds us that even though Peter fell in, he did have the courage to get out of the boat when no one else did. And the Christ saved him. The Bible records the moment this way:

And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is

a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? (Matthew 14:25–32)

Poet Richard Howard captured the same moment in his poem, "Radical Steps:"

You can call him what you like—
 impetuous, brash, outspoken—
 but once he recognized the Christ
 and heard that command,
 he did what the others didn't—
 he stepped out onto the water and walked!
 He didn't wonder, he didn't worry, he didn't wait—
 he didn't even look to see if the others were
 behind him—
 he just climbed out and walked.
 Oh, I know! I know what you want to say—
 that on Peter's part the story is a failure
 because he floundered—but, friend,
 because he had his vision fastened on the Christ,
 that Christ caught him—reached through
 shrieking wind
 and waves to uplift him beyond sinking doubt
 and floundering fear.
 That Christly rebuke was not because he had dared
 to trust, but because he had not trusted even more!
 Oh no, my friend, that short trip was a triumph!
 And now, sailor, what about us?
 When the going gets rough,
 and the waves pile up,
 and the wind is contrary,
 and the command is "Come!" which shall we do—
 remain troubled and huddled and crying out,
 or take those radical steps?

(*Ideas on Wings* and *Christian Science Sentinel*,
 May 8, 1976)

The Bible narrative is beautiful, but the poetic version brings it up close and personal, doesn't it?

This next poem is unpublished, as are many of mine. (I have enough rejections to wallpaper a room in my house! Keep trying.) I think we're all familiar with the scene. Jesus is being taken away, and Peter, who had sworn he would never leave Jesus, does. He is scared. He doesn't run away like the other disciples, but he keeps his distance so he won't

be recognized and denies knowing Jesus three times. Jesus, of course, knew he would:

Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee (Matthew 26:34, 35).

I called this poem “**Déjà vu all over again??**”:

When Jesus was being led into the palace
of the high priest,
“...Peter stood at the door without.” (John 18:16)
And outside where the soldiers and servants
made a fire,
“...Simon Peter stood with them and warmed himself.”
(John 18:18)
And when a damsel asked if he were one of
the disciples...
“He saith, I am not.” (John 18:17)
And when asked if Peter had been in the garden
with Jesus...
“Peter denied again. And immediately the
cock crew.” (John 18:27)
And you? When what you believe is challenged,
What will you do?
Hear those angel voices??
Or a distant cockle-doodle-doo??

Continuing with a Bible story put into poetic form, here’s one that may answer the question: Is healing delayed because we are afraid to handle the problem at its most dangerous point...to take it by the tail?

Let’s see what the Bible says. You know the story: Moses needs a sign that he can fulfill his mission, and God gives it to him.

The Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand?
And he said, A rod. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand.
(Exodus 4:1-8)

I was reading that story one day, and it interested me that Moses probably knew that if ever you were to capture a snake, you would try to get it by the back of its neck—never by its tail. The snake could easily sweep around and bite you. Moses had grabbed it at its most dangerous point. That prompted a poem called “**Trial and Triumph:**”

What’s the difference between
a serpent and a rod?
Isn’t it all in the handling?
Fear it,

flee from it,
and you’ve got a serpent.
Take it by the tail,
handle it,
and you’ve got a rod.

(*Christian Science Sentinel*, February 16, 1981)

Here’s more on healing, which Mrs. Eddy did not leave to *trying* to heal but to actually healing. When one of her household employees was given an assignment, she said, “I’ll try.”

That was not what Mrs. Eddy wanted to hear. She quickly responded, “Never say, ‘I will try;’ for it leaves a loophole for error to get in, but say, ‘I will.’ That shuts the door on error” (*We Knew Mary Baker Eddy, Expanded Edition*, Volume 2, p. 344).

That, of course, prompted me to try (just kidding) to write another poem, entitled “**Love Simply Does.**” I went through so many of the things Jesus did and wondered how we all would have felt if he had asked us to simply *try* to follow the example. For instance:

How the world would have drastically changed,
if Jesus had just tried to heal,
or if he’d just said to try to believe,
how would that make you feel?

What would have occurred at the sheep market pool
had he said, “Try to pick up your bed”?
Or if he had just tried to feed the crowd
would they have all been fed?

Did Jesus ask us to try to know
the truth that would make us free?
Did he ask us to leave our nets,
“To try to follow me”?

Love does not try to meet our needs.
As Love, it simply does.
Always has and always will.
Always there, always was.”

(*Christian Science Sentinel*, April 16, 2018)

When we are striving for healing, are we trying to change things from good to bad or to see that they’ve never gone bad? Is the truth that makes us free the truth that we’re free already? I based the following poem, “**The Best way to get out of the woods...**,” on the premise that Jesus said, “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32), which sounded to me as though the truth was that you had always been free:

“The Best way to get out of the woods...,”
is to see that you’ve never been in them.

It's knowing
 without a shadow of doubt
 that you've been the perfect man all along.
 Wasn't that what Jesus was telling us
 when he said,
 "Ye shall know the truth,
 and the truth shall make you free?"
 Wasn't the truth we were to know
 the truth that we were free already—
 that we had never lost our true identity
 as God's own image and likeness—
 that we didn't need to now climb out
 of somewhere we'd never been?

(*The Christian Science Journal*, September 2019)

The next poem was premised on an incident that happened in our Laguna Beach church on a Wednesday evening. A young man, a stranger, came in and seemed absorbed in the service. When it was time for testimonies, he stood, asked for a microphone, and virtually whispered a question: "What if God really is all?" Dumb question or profound question?

I wondered how many seasoned Christian Scientists in that audience had a firm grip on that one, even though it is repeated 153 times in the Bible, 92 times in *Science and Health*, 91 in the hymnal and 182 in other writings of Mary Baker Eddy, for a grand total of 518 times. You'd think we'd get the message, wouldn't you? Yet behind every fear, every doubt, is the suggestion that maybe, just maybe, God really isn't all. I recount that moment in our testimony meeting in a poem entitled, "**What if?:**"

He was a stranger to our church,
 a stranger to Christian Science,
 but he'd stopped at our Reading Room and read ...
 and read ...
 and read ...
 and then came to church.
 Quietly, he took the usher's microphone to ask a
 question.
 In a virtual whisper he said,
 "What if?
 What if God, good, really is All?
 If God is right here, right now, always and ever?
 If God is at my right hand,
 my left hand,
 above and below me?
 What if that really is true?
 Would I, could I, ever be afraid again, if that were
 really the case?
 Could I ever move on or out or away from God?
 What is there left to fear

if God is All—
 if God really is All?"
 he quietly whispered,
 and then sat down.

(*Christian Science Sentinel*, December 31, 2018)

The whole incident reminded me of a story I read in the *Sentinel* a few months ago about a woman who knew nothing of Christian Science and called a practitioner who tried to explain to her that God was All, everywhere, surrounding them. The caller listened awhile and then said, in essence, that she didn't get it. The practitioner quietly said, "You remind me of a little fish swimming in the ocean who asks, 'Where's the water?'"

Many of you know the story of the wildfire in Laguna Beach which took out over 400 homes in our neighborhood, leaving ours, which was in the middle of the fire, untouched. When we had been evacuated and thought we had lost it, and the newspaper reporting the house as "gone" had already gone to print, our son Marshall called and asked if we were OK with losing everything. I said we were. He then asked if losing photos and scrapbooks and things which could never be replaced would be a problem, and I assured him we had our memories.

When the network televisions started reporting around the world that our house had been singularly saved, Marshall called and said that when I told him we had our memories, meaning we didn't need the physical things, he knew then that the house couldn't have burned, and it hadn't. A *Sentinel* poem speaks to this:

After the Healing

When you come forth
 from the fiery furnace
 hair unsinged,
 coat unchanged,
 no smell of fire,
 see and understand—
 You are "hid with Christ in God" forever.
 You were never in the fire.

(Nancy Lavender Bryan, *The Christian Science Journal*, October, 2019)

This, to me, epitomizes healing—the fact that there was never a real problem to be healed. That thought was presented to me by a fellow practitioner in Colorado. She had been serving as a registrar at one of our Christian Science facilities. She collected all the entry information when people checked in: their names, addresses, practitioners, etc. Once in a while someone came in

who did not have a practitioner and they would ask her if she could serve as one, a suggestion which horrified her as she felt she could never take on that kind of responsibility...until one night when she heard a man speaking as if in a dream, saying, "Don't you know you'll never have a real problem which comes to you to be healed?" You won't either, and, by the way, she went into the practice.

This talk opened with "Which of these men do you think of as you, Genesis 1 or Genesis 2?," which seems an appropriate way to have begun, and now it will close with "The Morning Meal," which seems an appropriate way to end. This poem beautifully describes one of Jesus' last appearances with his disciples. The poem was written by Jacqueline Shaw many decades ago, and it is the perfect example of taking a beautiful work of prose—the story of the disciples, seven of them, fishing in the sea of Tiberius, catching no fish, and then seeing the Master on the shore fixing them fish and bread for breakfast—and developing it into a poem. His appearances since the crucifixion had been sporadic, and his disciples were still unsure of what all had gone on when they saw him there. These are the thoughts of the doubting Thomas as their boat landed on the shore to hear what Jesus had to tell them:

The Morning Meal

Yes, it was here. We pulled the boat up there,
And here he had made the fire, just such a morn
As this. I remember his hands moving
To and fro, giving us the bread and the fish;
And the water lapping. It was as clear as now;
It lapped against the boat, half in, half out
Of the water, just as you hear it, lap, lap, lap.
We were tired after the night. I lay on the grass
And ate and watched those hands. He was
talking then;
It might have been the same as before but it wasn't.
I tried to think it was, that it had never been.
That dreadful night, those days when all seemed lost,
And then his coming again, it was all a dream,
But I knew it wasn't, that he wouldn't stay, he'd go;
That when the light got stronger, he would go.
Yes, I heard what he said, I wasn't drowsy,
I was awake, only it was so peaceful there.
Heaven come down to earth? Yes, that was it.
I heard him and I seemed to hear everything else.
As if my thought touched his in some clear radiance.
Do you understand? As if it was all new,

That I'd never heard it before. A bird sang and I saw
A caterpillar crawl across the grass and it was new
And lovely; and still his voice went on. I sat up then, I
Think; he was talking to Peter, talking of love, and I saw
Love, I saw what he meant. I saw that we were to be
Shepherds and fishers too. I looked at him again,
straight up
This time and saw once more those well remembered
eyes; it
Was like sinking in a well of love. And yet it seemed as if
They pierced me through. And I thought: "yes, I can,
I can
Love, I can do what he wants me to; I won't fail." and all
The hate and spite and wariness and bitter sense
of failure
Went. I didn't hate anyone, not the priests,
nor Herod, no,
Not even Judas. I knew the Christ was greater than
them all.
I felt whatever happened I'd not fear, not in the
same way
Ever again. I'd heal, and guide and save, that's what he
Meant; that's what he wanted all of us to do. I saw it, it
Was like a light from heaven, so clear, so bright,
I had to
Close my eyes, and when I'd opened them again,
he'd gone.
Peter and John were standing by the fire, it was
ashes now,
The fish and bread were done. Peter was gazing
out across
The lake, John's head upon his shoulder; the sun's
rays fell
Softly on his face. I never saw so sad a look before, but
Underneath it seemed as if there was a mighty
calm. John
Raised his head and spoke, and Peter smiled
as if a blessing
Broke upon them both. A still clear light was glowing in
John's eyes. I thought, "How like the master
he has grown."
Then Peter said, "Come, gather up the catch.
We must be
Going. We have work to do. Jerusalem awaits us and the
World."

(Jacqueline Shaw)

Let's get busy. 

Arden Wood Contact Information

Rest & Study and Overnight Stays

reservations@ardenwood.org
(800) 767-0003

Arden Wood offers guest rooms for Rest & Study and overnight stays for Christian Scientists in an environment ideal for spiritual renewal, inspiration, and healing in the heart of San Francisco. Come for a visit!

Residential Programs

Diane Speer, Director
dspeer@ardenwood.org
(415) 379-2320

THE RESIDENCES AT ARDEN WOOD

Gracious studio and one-bedroom apartments are available to Christian Scientists in a vibrant and dynamic, inspiring and healing atmosphere. Meals, housekeeping, transportation and a wide range of activities are all included.

SHELTERED CARE

Sheltered Care is for those who need light assistance with personal care and daily activities while maintaining their expression of dominion and independence. There is an expectation of full healing without a time limit on the length of one's stay.

Christian Science Nursing Services

Lesleah De Frisco, Director
ldefrisco@ardenwood.org
(415) 379-2224

Christian Science nurses are available round-the-clock to provide exceptional care in private rooms with comfortable, modern amenities. Patients must work daily with a Journal-listed Christian Science practitioner.

Visiting Christian Science Nursing Service (VCSNS)

Aïcha Langel, Director
vcsns@ardenwood.org
(415) 740-0460

VCSNS provides assistance in the home, workplace or other venue for up to 2 hours per visit. Visiting Christian Science nurses will assess care needs as well as provide care and support to patients, new moms, or anyone who would benefit from a care visit.

Christian Science Nursing Arts Training (CSNA)

Yvonne Renoult, Registrar
yrenoult@ardenwood.org
(415) 379-2222, ext 2220

CSNA training is available to Christian Scientists who wish to pursue the role of Christian Science Nurse, as outlined in the Church Manual By-law (Article VIII, Section 31). Our multi-year program includes classroom work and mentoring from highly skilled, Journal-listed Christian Science nurses. Arden Wood trainees are paid and receive full employee benefits.

Personnel and Support Services

Franklin Harris, Director
fharris@ardenwood.org
(415) 379-2106

General Information

Jocelyne Jam, Marketing Coordinator
info@ardenwood.org
(415) 379-2108



ARDEN WOOD

445 Wawona Street, San Francisco, CA 94116-3058
(415) 681-5500
www.ardenwood.org