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Open Door: A Prophetic Discipleship Community Honoring The Black Jesus, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr.

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January 2019

When a Person Is an IT

By Murphy Davis

*Arise, shine like the sun
For your light has come
And the glory of the Holy One
Is risen and shining on you.
— Isaiah 60:1*

The great former slave-abolitionist-journalist-leader Frederick Douglass travelled all over the United States and England before the Civil War speaking eloquently to large audiences about slavery and the abolitionist cause. He often told his audiences about how the Constitution of the United States defined the African slave as a “thing.” Not a human being, not a man, woman or child — a thing. Then he would step back from the podium, fix his eyes on the people before him, draw up his considerable frame, fling his arms wide and thunder, “Behold the THING!”

I cannot imagine but that it left many who heard him shaken. The very idea that this distinguished, handsome, articulate man — a formidable human being — was described as a thing: an object to be purchased, a piece of property to be worked, moved around, beaten, used as a breeder, killed or sold at will or on a whim.

What made the difference for many who attended Douglass’ lectures was that they encountered a living, breathing human being who had been a slave. They heard him, they saw him, they heard his story; and they were moved to understand that he was *not* a thing. He was a person to whom they could relate and whom they could even admire. When the members of his audience had no personal experience of knowing those of African descent who were slaves, they could perhaps dismiss them to the way others spoke of them: commodities, possessions, “my house n****r” or “my field n****r.” If people at all, the slaves were people without feelings or thoughts of their own. But here before them was this man — tall, striking in appearance, self-educated and brilliant. No more could the audience dismiss him as anything less than a full human being — like themselves!

Perhaps at first thought we would think that this is not such a big deal. Of *course* those in chattel slavery were human beings. But the system did not allow for that. Slaves were indeed defined as things.

Perhaps Paul Tillich coined the term first (I have not been able to confirm this), but Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. either learned the term from Tillich or coined the term “thingification” to make this point: “If you use something [or someone] as a means to an end, at that moment you make it a thing and you depersonalize it. The fact is that the Negro was a slave in this country for 244 years [and] in that act, that was a willful thing that was done, the Negro was brought here in chains treated in a very inhuman fashion. This led to the thingification of the Negro. So [s/he] was not looked upon as a person. [S/he] was not looked upon as a human being with the



Jen Bloomer

same status and worth as other human beings.” (Unpublished interview with Sander Vanocur, 1968)

Of course chattel slavery was said to be “abolished” by the 13th Amendment to the Constitution; but as, thankfully, more people are aware today, chattel slavery was actually cleared away to be replaced by penal slavery. With this “adjustment” to the American system of racial slavery, the “things” that were chattel slaves became the “things” that were imprisoned in what has become a massive system of imprisonment that identifies us in the USA as the world’s leading jailer. These varying forms of oppression have continued to define us as a people who continue to objectify one another because, though we have adjusted the system, we have never repented of the basic systems of oppression or sought to make the changes required to stop our long-established habit of dehumanizing the “other.” Why, other than greed, have we needed to maintain these hateful patterns that erupt so often in violence?

Throughout our sordid white history, American culture has been taught and has become accustomed to broad systems of dehumanization. How could we tolerate the systems of mass imprisonment unless we saw its victims as “other,” as “less than,” or as “things”: criminals, thugs, subhuman, etc.? Having practiced our tolerance of dehumanizing systems for so long, we have gone deeper into the rabbit hole with national leadership that has ripped children from desperate parents seeking to escape poverty and violence in Central America. And the children have become valuable commodities that have earned billions of dollars in profits for corporations that warehouse the children. As of Christmas Eve, two children had died in custody of the corporate vultures. There is no way to account for the physical and psychic damage

When a Person Is an IT *continued on page 6*

Black Jesus Visits Martin Luther King Jr.

By Nibs Stroupe

Martin Luther King Jr. would have been 90 years old on his birthday this month, had he not been cut down at the young age of 39 in Memphis. He had traveled there to support the economic strike by the garbage workers to seek living wages and better working conditions. In his last sermon the night before he was assassinated, he indicated that longevity wasn’t everything, and in his best sermon, “Drum Major for Justice,” he indicated what he wanted said at his funeral. He wanted his eulogy to include that he was a drum major for justice, that he was a drum major for peace, that he was a drum major for righteousness.

How did he get there? How did he go from a middle-class Black life to the most dangerous man in America, as FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover once called him? He got there because he was visited by Black Jesus many times, and most of the time he received the visitation and appropriated it for his life. In honor of his 90th birthday, I want to look at three of those visitations, where Black Jesus helped to move Dr. King more toward the margins. Dr. King was not at the center of American life because he was an African-American man, and the purpose of American life is to keep white males at the center and all others as far from the center as possible. But he did need movement even further toward the margins.

The first visitation from Black Jesus that I want to mention came two months after Dr. King had been elected to be the head of the Montgomery Improvement Association to lead the Montgomery bus boycott started by Rosa Parks on December 1, 1955. King was reluctant to become the leader, but since he was one of the newest Black pastors in town, he was chosen. Joann Robinson and other women motivated the boycott, and the movement had begun. On January 27, 1956, the boycott was on, and despite heavy pressure and repression, it was holding. Dr. King was just about to fall asleep that night, when the phone rang. When he answered, the voice on the phone said: “Listen, [n-word], we’ve taken all we want from you; before next week you’ll be sorry you ever came to Montgomery.”

He could not go back to sleep, worrying for his wife and 10-month-old daughter. He got up and put on a pot of coffee, and he was greatly discouraged, thinking about how to step down from leadership of the boycott without seeming like a coward. He sat at the kitchen table and bowed his head and prayed to God that he was worn out, indicating that he had nothing left. At that moment, Black Jesus appeared to him and gave him courage to step out toward the margins just a

Black Jesus *continued on page 7*

Amazing Grace

By Catherine Meeks

On Sunday before Labor Day, I boarded a flight to San Pedro Sula, Honduras, with a mixed sense of expectation and dread. I wondered what made me agree to go to this land where I did not know the language or the culture to attempt to do dismantling racism and racial healing work. Though my work is going very well in the United States, I had second thoughts about accepting the invitation from the Bishop of Honduras, The Right Reverend Lloyd Allen. Bishop Allen had been imploring leaders in the Episcopal Church to help him offer dismantling racism training for his clergy and lay leaders for 16 years. His request had not been answered until I said yes.

The word has spread to Latin America about the approach I have developed for doing dismantling racism work that is built on the foundation of spiritual formation. This approach transformed the work in the Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta and helped to lead to the formation of the partnership between the Diocese of Atlanta and the Episcopal Presiding Bishop. The Center for Racial Healing, formed as a result of that partnership, is designed to be a resource for the wider church. This is a challenge that I have embraced as courageously as possible, but as I sat in the airport gate waiting to depart for Honduras, I wondered if I had gone too far.

But I can imagine that Jesus was saying, "Oh you of little faith, just wait to see what God has in store for you when you get there." Well, the first thing that was waiting for me was the injury of my right leg as I got into a vehicle that was too high for me to board without a step stool, but I did not realize that

I was injured until the next day. On Monday, I was barely able to walk by the end of the day and on Tuesday morning, four men had to carry me in a chair to the car because I could barely take a step. Thankfully, one of my Honduran brothers was able to bring his mother's wheelchair for me to use for the rest of the time that I was there. I was not able to lie down in the bed at night, which forced me to sleep sitting up for two nights.

I had felt that the only way to do any good at all in Honduras was to go with a great sense of humility and to be careful to be a student as well as attempting to be a teacher; but this state of affairs was not what I had in mind. However, humility comes fairly easily when you cannot walk and someone



Susan MacMurduy

has to help you to the toilet, bring you food and push you around in a wheelchair. I was supposed to be the leader of the four-day event that we were convening. I have never been in such bad shape in my life at a time when I was trying to lead a workshop. My understanding of the concept of the wounded healer became much deeper for me during that week.

My heart was made joyous from seeing how much my sisters and brothers in the room empathized with me. Everyone tried to be helpful. I was pitiful. But I went to the sessions each day in spite of the pain and inconvenience and did the work that I went there to do. My translators were wonderful and we worked well together. There were three others from the United States and one person from Panama who made up our team and we also worked well together. Sometimes I even managed to smile a little. God just kept on being faithful.

There were forty Honduran clergy and lay persons in the audience, and they had never done any work such as this before on issues of oppression and liberation in their Diocese. They were willing to be vulnerable, and that willingness quickly led them into sharing their stories with one another. They talked about the layers of discrimination in their country, and by the end of the workshop there were many who shared their own role in helping to keep oppression alive in their land. There were tear-laced confessions and many declarations about small steps to take going forward that would begin to thwart the racist structures in their country. The final morning session of sharing how they imagined the way forward was one of the most powerful events that I have witnessed in all my years of working to dismantle racism. They formed a commission of eight persons who will take on the role of continuing the work and helping to share it with others in the region as they go forward.

Finally, on Wednesday I went to see a physician and got shots and medicine that helped me be able to walk to my seat at the presenters' table on Thursday morning. The room erupted in applause. All of my sisters and brothers in that room were so happy for me and so relieved to see that I was better. What a gift of amazing grace. What a lesson in humility. What a glorious time for all of us.

We learned so much from one another; we saw Beloved Community being expressed. I am so glad that God had such a good plan. Thanks be to God. ✚

Catherine Meeks is the Founding Executive Director of the Absalom Jones Episcopal Center for Racial Healing, and the retired Clara Carter Acree Distinguished Professor of Socio-cultural Studies and Sociology from Wesleyan College. She has published six books and is editor of Living Into God's Dream: Dismantling Racism in America (2016), which focuses on racial healing and reconciliation. She writes for the Huffington Post and is a regular contributor to Hospitality. She is involved with prison work, visits on death row and works for the abolition of the death penalty. (kayma53@att.net)

ODC/Needs:

- ☐ Coffee
- ☐ Granola bars
- ☐ Socks (especially large)
- ☐ 2% milk: gallon size for coffee, pint size for children. Please send boxes that do not need refrigeration before opening.
- ☐ The Hardwick Prison Trip: hosts, drivers, cars and vans in Atlanta area.
- ☐ If you'd like to help us gather materials, please see our Amazon wish-list: <http://www.amazon.com/registry/wishlist/1Q9TWJ0HZPJAX>. Should you gift us in this way (thank you to you have done so) please let us know who you are!

Murphy, David and Ed thank you for all you are/do/give/support, for we have another world in view.

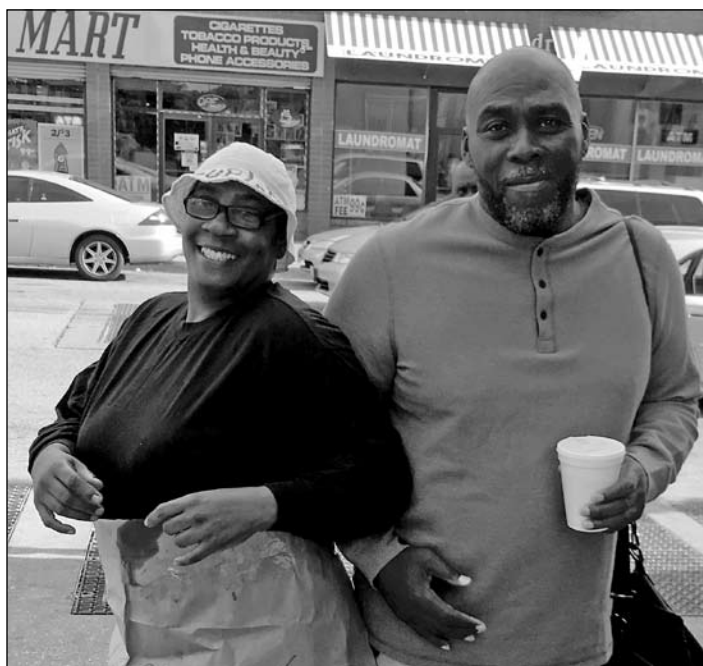
HOSPITALITY

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Eduard Loring

Volunteers Erica and Preston Prettyman at the Welcome Table Breakfast.

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Please join us on **Facebook** for the continuing journey of the **Open Door Community in Baltimore**. Thank you. David, Eduard and Murphy.

“God’s Terrible Mistake” ... Or Ours?

By Wes Howard-Brook

I so love the wisdom, insight and prophetic zeal one finds in the pages of *Hospitality*. Yet, recently, one of dear Eduard’s pieces generated a deep anger within me. I asked Eduard if I could write a reply and he graciously offered me this opportunity.

Eduard’s piece is entitled, “God’s Terrible Mistake and Palestinian Suffering.” I have deep compassion for the Palestinian people and offer no defense of the Israeli government’s treatment of our Palestinian siblings. But the suffering these people face is neither the fault of God nor of “Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah” as Eduard claims. To say so is, in no uncertain terms, deeply anti-Jewish and an unnecessary cause of pain and division between those who claim Jesus as our Savior and our Jewish siblings who claim YHWH alone as their God.

Eduard often extols the “Black Jesus” in the face of the “white Christ” of evangelical white supremacy. I appreciate and understand that, arising as it does from the long experience of Southern living that is foreign to my own journey. I did not grow up in the South, but in a nearly all-Jewish part of Los Angeles, where “Christians” were an enemy to be feared. Through my own journey, I have come to claim and seek to follow the Way embodied and revealed by the *Jewish* Jesus. The Jewish Jesus I know and love grappled, like Jacob, with the tradition into which he was born. That tradition, found in Scripture, in the practices of the Temple elites in Jerusalem, and in alternative forms (such as that of the Pharisees or the Qumran community), has always been a double-edged sword. I’ve written about the two sides of that sword as “religion of creation” (the side Jesus claimed) and the “religion of empire” (the side Jesus rejected). Just as we born in the U.S. carry the traditions of both the warmakers and the peacemakers, the voices of welcome and the voices of exclusion, so Jesus was born into a rich, conflicted set of stories and prac-

tices that offered mutually exclusive paths of faithfulness.

The Exodus story upon which Eduard’s piece was based expresses YHWH’s call for the enslaved people to “come out” of Egypt and find a peaceful home in a new land. Neither Exodus nor Genesis (in which we find the litany of ancestors named above from Eduard’s piece) call for “holy war” or human violence of any kind against “Canaanites.” Rather, both books envision the same type of cohabitation in the land of promise as one hears proclaimed in the Jewish Emma Lazarus’s poem on the Statue of Liberty: There is room on these shores for *all* who seek escape from oppression and a place of peace. This peaceful and just program is reinforced by the legal provision in Leviticus 19:33-34:

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am YHWH your God.

In the traditions of Genesis and Exodus, YHWH offers the Israelites a space in a land full of abundance, where there is plenty for all. Of course, this is not the only story in the Hebrew Bible about how the Israelites are to come into the new land. The book of Joshua *does* call for *charem*, “holy war.” Where Moses’ Exodus vision is of a burning bush that reveals the Voice of YHWH, Joshua’s parallel vision is of a sword-wielding man who claims to be “the commander of the army of YHWH.” (Joshua 6:13-15) In other words, the authors of Joshua, certainly writing centuries *after* the book of Exodus was written, appropriated the mystical vision of the Creator, the “One who Is” (YHWH) for its holy-warmaking vision.

As people who claim the Way of Jesus, we must reject the vision in the book of Joshua, just as we reject the history of U.S. warmaking in the name of God against indigenous peoples and others who are “in our way.” But at the same time, we must honor and respect the Hebrew Scriptures that

were the Word that Jesus knew and embraced. And we must honor and respect the people of Jesus who, like immigrants from Latin America seeking entry into the U.S. today, were seeking not to dominate others in the new land of their hope, but simply to live “under the vine and fig tree” in peace.

In the end, no particular land “belongs” to any particular people. We are all — ALL — migrants. WE all have ancestors who claimed a home on a piece of the planet that was, at one time, a “new” land for them. The question ought not to be whether we can claim a place as “ours,” but whether we claim it as *exclusively* ours. The “religion of creation” stories in the Bible — both in the Hebrew texts and in the New Testament — invite us not to holy *war*, but to holy *habitation*. Abraham negotiated peacefully with the local Hittites for a burial place for Sarah. When troubles arise with locals over access to water, Isaac simply moves on rather than fight. (Gen 26:15-23) Similarly, when troubles arise between the Judeans and Romans, Jesus counsels his people to “run for the hills” rather than fight over “the holy city.” (e.g., Mark 13:14)

The ancient traditions claimed by the Jewish Jesus are not anti-*Jewish*, but anti-*empire*. May our own work in seeking divine justice, like that of our Lord and Savior, distinguish between biblical wheat and chaff, between the good wine and the vinegar of God’s Word (cf. John 2:10 and 19:29), knowing that both wheat and weeds will grow together until the time of God’s final harvest. (Matt 13:24-30) ✠

Wes Howard-Brook teaches Bible and theology at Seattle University and shares with his wife, Sue Ferguson Johnson, the ministry “Abide in Me” (abideinme.net). His books include Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now (with Anthony Gwyther), Becoming Children of God: John’s Gospel and Radical Discipleship, and ‘Come Out My People’: God’s Call Out of Empire From the Beginning to the End.

I Love My Life

By Eduard Loring

I go out to walk in the early morning. My neighborhood is a listening post and a seeing site. How could I be who I am and do what I do without this multitude of teachers?

Once, sitting on death row in Georgia with a man now dead by the likes of Governor Brian Kemp, Jubal turned to me and said, “What you see when you get up shapes how you see the world.” He continued, “I see cell blocks, smell the fear of death, see small acts of kindness, see violence, eat vulgar food, see men crying into their pillows, and humiliated guards humiliating.” Reminded me of the great lesson Don Beisswenger taught me in the days of our youth: “Life is just a question of hermeneutics.” That is, before you read your Bible or read/watch/ listen to the news you have a point of view. Where did that point of view come from?

I love my life. The life I see on my walks is majestic — the winter trees and billowing white clouds shoved by the icy wind. If not truth, for certain the reality that I hunger and thirst to engage opens skyward. This morning I walked out into the day the One of Love and Justice was bringing to full light. Advent Light. I turned into the alley a block from our home and walked toward the drug treatment center, which is a lively spot from five a.m. to ten a.m. In the parking lot was a small car with a man, woman and a little blond-headed boy who looked like I did at six years of age. Suddenly the man

began to rage. He jumped out of the car moving toward the door for drug treatment, spun around and screamed, “You bitch. You bitch.” She revved the engine, jerked the clutch. Stopped. “All I asked was for a ride to Chesterfield.” He continued yelling and cursing. She opened the car door. He continued, “You told me to get out of the goddamn car,” as



David Payne

he stepped back into the car. My eyes were fixed on the boy. Here he is at a border and he will not get asylum. His face was sandstone. I tried to make eye contact. I failed. She hit the gas. Tires squealed. Off they went to nowhere in a land of “I don’t give a damn.”

Walking on down the alley, children passed me heading to school. Some spoke. Most did not. Surely a caring parent

teaches their child not to speak to strangers in this city. I, old and white. They, young and Black. When I was a little baby boy, Lusha would hold me in her arms and rock me with a coo. The underarm cinnamon smell I identified with Black working women as a Jim Crow kid. The little white boy in the back of the hell-hound car has no Lusha. He has little life, in all likelihood. Lusha left Bamberg as part of the Great Migration. She moved to New York and had a child she named Eduard. He died when he was six years old. Tabatha Holley, Black Woman par excellence, is Murphy’s and my God-daughter by adoption. She is a student at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Tabatha is 22 years old. She came to spend Thanksgiving with us. Yes, there is hope. Black women are a primary resource for hope in the dying of these days. So is Erica “The Soup Lady” at our Welcome Table at Upton Underground Railroad Station. The little white boy in the back of the car? Soft stone face as his parents rage at each other. Let us pray.

On I walked. Stilled. What in the hell is going on in the United States of America? In the Ukraine? The Philippines? Sandtown? My neighborhood? I am thankful for what I saw. I am thankful for the streets who teach me every day what life from the bottom up is about: joyful, friendships, cruel and suffering and racist and most of all poor, poor, poor. Often as I watch “Democracy Now” I pray, “Oh God, forgive me.” So I said as I walked away from the parking lot of the drug treatment center. ✠

Eduard Nuessner Loring is an Activist/Advocate/Ally at the Open Door Community in Baltimore. (eduardloring@opendoorcommunity.org)

Berta

By Joyce Hollyday

We stood in the church sanctuary, surrounded by piles of bright tissue-paper flowers, festive streamers and banners of the paper cut-outs known in Mexico as *papeles picados* — all joyfully fashioned the week before by those of us who meet every Thursday as *Mujeres Unidas en Fe* (Women United in Faith). We went to work decorating, bringing to life a colorful *ofrenda* (altar) for our November 2 *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) celebration.

When we were finished, Berta added a plate of fruit, explaining that she loved the shiny color of the tangerines and the sweet aroma of the guavas. She seemed especially tired that day. But we had no idea that she would hold the place of honor at the heart of our *ofrenda*. Nothing could have prepared us for that shock. Only 38 years old, the mother of a 12-year-old daughter, Berta passed away three days later.

When we gathered again, Carmen and Rosalinda knelt in front of the *ofrenda*, clutching their rosaries, leading the rest of us in prayer. Berta grinned out at us from a photograph surrounded by flowers, candles and her favorite foods, offered in the Mexican tradition of honoring the dead. Heaped on plates and in bowls were tamales, snap peas, pink wafer cookies and *chicharrones* — wheels of fried pork rinds — doused with the blazing hot sauce *valentina*.

I smiled when I saw the food. Berta had a mischievous sense of humor, and she and I had two running jokes between



Rebecca Heskamp

Left: Berta's ofrenda for Día de los Muertos.

Below: Berta



Mary Fliss

us. She never thought I ate enough of her food at our weekly *Mujeres* lunches. When she urged me to eat more, I would ask, "*Picoso?*" ("Is it spicy?"). "No, no!" she would laugh, as I took a bite of her *mole* or *carnitas* that filled my mouth with fire and my eyes with tears.

We also teased each other about our language struggles.

Berta laughed and laughed at my futile attempts to get my tongue to roll the Spanish double-r. And it seems I have the absolute worst name for Spanish speakers, whose words are all phonetic, rendering Joyce Hollyday as "Hoy-say O-ye-die." With practice, Berta conquered the strange hard "J" sound that doesn't exist in Spanish, but she insisted on pronouncing my first name with two syllables.

Gathered around the *ofrenda*, we wept our way through the praying of the rosary, and then we shared our Berta stories. She adored her daughter María and held every baby she ever encountered. She loved our summer afternoons with all the kids in the community swimming pool. When friend Becca and I returned from our trip to the Arizona-Mexico border with hand-painted Mexican Christmas ornaments for everyone, Berta looked over each candle, angel, bell and bird, then grinned at me and said, "Can I have two?"

She had a hard life, plagued with physical difficulties, but we never heard her complain. She asked every Thursday for prayers for all the people suffering from illness. The common mantra about our dear friend after her death was, "She was small in stature but big of heart."

The most renowned of our Berta stories happened at the end of our second annual Lunch with the Law — a bold idea by the *mujeres* to host a feast for our county sheriff and his deputies, our chief of police and other local law enforcement officials, in the hopes of getting to know them and avoid ever being deported. The discussion over lunch centered on the struggles that the *mujeres* and other undocumented immigrants have because they are not allowed to get driver's licenses in North Carolina. Berta stood as tall as she could and held up the picture she had just taken on her phone of the chief of police, declaring to him, "If you ever try to give me a ticket

Berta continued on page 8

Don Beisswenger, ¡Presente!

By Andrew Krinks

Don Beisswenger died November 26, 2018. This remembrance was shared at a memorial in his honor at Wightman Chapel, Scarritt Bennett Center, Nashville, Tennessee, on December 16, 2018.

When you hear the name of our dear family member and friend, I invite you to respond, "*¡Presente!*"

Don Beisswenger. *¡Presente!*

Don Beisswenger. *¡Presente!*

For 88 full years in body and spirit, now in spirit alone: Don Beisswenger. *¡Presente!*

It is difficult to come to terms with a world without Don Beisswenger in it. When my wife, Lindsey, and I began engaging issues of homelessness and affordable housing as college students back in 2007, Don was there. Indeed, our earliest memories of social movement and justice work in Nashville are of Don's *presence* at what seemed like every last community meeting, direct action and vigil that we ever went to. Even in retirement, Don showed up like no one else. His steady presence — his solidarity — was a reassurance, an affirmation, a blessing on each gathering he attended, on every effort he supported. One might not suspect it from that quiet, grinning demeanor, those sweater vests and cardigans, but Don bore witness for a living, and sometimes at great cost.

The path that Lindsey and I — and so many others — have been walking for so many years now? Don helped pave it — and, I suspect, in more ways than we'll ever know. Our way into our work with unhoused neighbors in Nashville

started with the Nashville Homeless Power Project, which emerged out of the sacred space of the Living Room, where Don invited unhoused and housed — "homeless" and "homies" — to share life together. And that's only part of the story. From building citywide faith-based organizing coalitions, to supporting incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people; from disrupting white supremacy in Chicago, to building socially engaged theological education for generations of ministers and activists in the South; from accompanying industrial workers and exploited peoples, to tending flowers in his garden; from crossing lines and sitting in cages, to creating space for contemplative prayer, Don's life work made ours possible in manifold ways. It is one of our life's great honors to even try to follow in his footsteps.

In 2012, I interviewed Don for a cover story in *The Contributor* street newspaper where I used to work. We titled it "Listening to the Cry," an apt description of Don's lifelong witness. "I think listening is a form of love," he told me. "And I think it is probably the key form of love. I think God is a big ear," he said, making himself laugh, as he often did. Wherever serious theological wisdom meets equally serious wit, there's Don.

Later that same year, as a student at Vanderbilt Divinity School, Don served as my Field Ed supervisor. I have come to realize that this was no small gift considering the fact that Don helped develop field education there as we know it before passing the torch to Viki, Trudy and others. Every other week, I came to Don's house, where he greeted me with a smile, a hug and a joke. After a good laugh, we shared



Andrew Krinks

Don Beisswenger with Lindsey and Andrew Krinks.

silence. And after silence, he listened — to the challenges, the questions, the joys of my work with unhoused people — and I was heard.

I spent those afternoons with Don during a time when I didn't know where my life would or should go next. His listening and affirming presence made for steady ground to stand on, and gave me the confidence to trust that whatever I do, so long as I am willing and open to the Spirit, I will find myself in good hands, and in the midst of good work. He hasn't been wrong about that yet. The same is true for Lindsey: In addition to her street outreach and organizing, when she was first discerning her calling to street chaplaincy, Don was there to affirm it. He, too, had spent years as a minister accompanying people in the trenches of their lives beyond

Don Beisswenger continued on page 8

Voices & Views from Iraqi Kurdistan

By Weldon Nisly

Dear CPT family and friends,

Today, Monday, October 29, I am in Amman, Jordan with Mona and Jasmine, two Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) Palestine friends, enjoying a quiet transitional day between my CPT home in Kurdistan and family home in Seattle. Yesterday I left Sulaimani and the CPT Iraqi Kurdistan team. Tonight I fly from Amman to Frankfurt to Washington Dulles to Seattle, and arrive home on Tuesday night. I am very eager to be home with Marg and our children and grandchildren! I also look forward to being with our Seattle Mennonite Church community as we celebrate SMC's 50th anniversary this weekend.

I hoped to share more "Voices & Views from Iraqi Kurdistan" with you. But I have not had much time or energy to listen deeply and reflect on what I have heard and seen during six weeks with the CPT Iraqi Kurdistan (IK) team this fall. My time with the CPT IK team immediately followed five weeks on the CPT Palestine team. My brain and body have become a little weary and on overload recently. However, I am very grateful for this time on two amazing teams working with exceptional Palestinian and Kurdish partners and people living in challenging times and places. Today in Amman, after an unusually long night's sleep, I am enjoying a quiet, cool, sunny day. It is just what I needed to help me listen and reflect on what I have heard and seen so that I can share their voices and views with you my beloved community.

A lesson that I have heard and seen over my lifetime is overwhelmingly confirmed in CPT life. We and the world are One. We are all connected. Our common humanity transcends our differences. Diversity of language, culture, tradition, religion, nation, tribe, food and habits helps us know how connected we are as humans rather than being the basis for division and domination. We are all created by God in God's image and likeness in love and for love for all the world. Fear, hatred, enmity, domination, division are choices that deny our humanity, creation and God.

A Kurdish voice forever seared on my heart and mind is a young woman screaming from the top of a mountain, "Why!? What have we done? We are human too, just like you!" She was crying out to a British TV journalist. In truth, she was crying out to all humanity and to our humanity. Her despairing cry was wailed from high up on the muddy road of a snow-covered mountain between Iraq and Iran in the bitter 1988 winter of the Anfal genocide against Kurds. An endless line of humans climbed the mountain, fleeing from the terror, torture and trauma of war. We saw and heard her cry for humanity confronting Iraq's genocidal war against Kurds on a BBC documentary in the Amna Suraka Museum in Sulaimani. Kurds have turned one of Saddam's torture prisons and military bases into The National Museum of Amna Suraka — Not to Be Forgotten. It is a monument of monumental remembering. Remembering the human cruelty inflicted on them. Also remembering that we are all human and must never treat other humans with such dehumanizing cruelty. It is a place for remembering not only the inhuman suffering by Kurds, it is a place for remembering the hope of their human resiliency and inspiration of Kurdish cultural creativity.

Amna Suraka is one of the hardest and most hopeful places I have ever encountered. We took our CPT delegation there to see how hellish cruelty has been turned into hopeful creativity. A prison of persecution is transformed into a place promoting peace. Not. To. Be. Forgotten.

I have many photos of Amna Suraka; for an online photo tour see this website: dontstopliving.net/saddam-husseins-house-of-horrors-my-trip-to-amna-suraka-red-security-complex-sulaymaniyah-kurdistan-iraq/.

Amna Suraka is a reminder to all who dismiss it as long ago and far away that we inflict the same cruelties and face the same choices today. We inflict hell on other humans or we offer hope for all humanity. We hear the cry, "We are human too, just like you!" Or we are cold-hearted, hard-headed participants in inhumanity. There is no neutrality. To be human is to recognize our own humanity, which is to recognize the humanity of all other people.

Nowhere is the need to hear this cry, "We are human too, just like you!" more urgent than in the U.S., our dysfunctional democracy and delusional (dis)United States of America. The constant, cruel cacophony of fear and hatred is (mis)led by the house of whiteness and is the vehement and violent rejection of this woman's cry to and for all humanity. In this election season we do well to acknowledge the paradox that voting will not save us, yet voting is a voice and view for or against humanity — our own and others'. Building walls and waging wars on those we call "other" or "enemy" at home and around the world are all ways of waging war on humanity. It is the reason for this Kurdish woman's cry and a rejection of her plea. Do we hear and see this woman? Or do we fear and fight those who are not *us* by hating and harming them?

We heard and saw again the same choices and realities faced by our Kurdish friends. Dunya Rasheed, a 19-year-old student from a village in the mountains was killed by

and Iranian bombardment. We were impressed by the mayor as a political leader who didn't sound like a partisan party politician, but manifested great care and competence and was highly respected in the region.

Our IK team is in transition as we seek new Kurdish teammates. Kasia is our only full-time team member. Julie is cutting back from full-time to half-time. Rebecca, from Australia, is beginning half-time in January. I am switching from reservist (four months) to half-time (five months) on a team next year. Mohammed is still serving in a half-time role as a consultant teammate, bringing years of experience with CPT and with our partners as well as being fluent in Kurdish, Arabic and English. Our CPT IK Project Support



Weldon Nisly

Coordinator, Lukasz, will be on the team for November. Long-time CPTer Kathy Kern is also on the IK team for November, her first time in Kurdistan.

We do find time to celebrate and enjoy being together as teammates. On Saturday evening, we all went to the Khanem restaurant, our favorite Kurdish café, owned by a woman. It was a welcome dinner for Kathy and a goodbye dinner for me. The previous Saturday, we went with Runak to meet her parents who run a pistachio farm 45 minutes from Sulaimani. We saw pistachio

trees loaded with nuts ready to harvest, and ate more than our share picked right off the tree. And, of course, we enjoyed a fabulous feast prepared by Runak's mother! They are Iranian Kurds, so we tasted some delicious Iranian food for the first time.

For still more Voices & Views from Kurdish people and places, here are a couple of links to check out.

An Open Letter from CPT to White Helmets in Afrin, Syria: <https://cpt.org/cptnet/2018/09/29/kurdistan-urgent-action-ask-white-helmets-director-investigate-collaboration>.

Nadia Murad's statement on being co-recipient of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize: <https://nadiasinitiative.org/statements/2018/10/5/my-statement-on-winning-the-2018-nobel-peace-prize>. ♦

After 40 years of Mennonite Church ministry that included community, pastoral and peace ministries, Weldon Nisly currently devotes himself to Contemplative JustPeace building and work with Christian Peacemaker Teams. He is a Benedictine Oblate. His life is devoted to the abolition of war: (nisllyweldon@gmail.com)



Top Right: Mayor Hassan in his office in Sedakan.

Above: Runak, Kasia, Weldon, Kak Aso, Mohammed, Runak's father and mother at table together.

a weapon of war while she helped her family harvest nuts for the winter. Here is a link to a CPT IK post and petition to call for Turkey to stop bombing Kurds and a link to a Facebook post and video of our delegation's visit to Dunya's home: <https://cpt.org/cptnet/2018/10/08/iraqi-kurdistan-urgent-action-endturkishbombing-sign-petition>, <https://www.facebook.com/cpt.ik/videos/2086280998367695/> (Check the "Turkey is Bombing Families" in the Videos section.)

Karokh Abdullah is a Kurdish political candidate from the Change Party who was assaulted by security officials from a leading party who tried to prevent him from voting. He showed up at our CPT house one afternoon to share his story with us, declaring, "I want to vote. I will never give up." Here is a link to Kak Karokh's story: <https://cptik.org/news-1/2018/10/14/i-want-to-vote-i-will-never-give-up>.

My last trip for this stint was to the town of Sedakan in the far northern mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan to meet with the mayor of a region being bombarded by both Turkey and Iran. Our Kurdish friends Runak and Kak Aso took Kasia and me on this two-day trip to meet Mayor Hassan. We were grateful to find a political leader who cares about the people, not only the people in his town, but the Kurdish people across that mountain region whose lives are threatened by Turkish

When a Person Is an IT *continued from page 1*

done to the children by this grotesque drama. If we stopped to realize the simple fact of the humanity of those who are surveilled, harassed, accused, deported, convicted and put away — if we acknowledged the pain and crisis created by broken families and people separated from their children, parents and communities, we would have to intervene in the system. We would be morally responsible for changing what is going on.

And the simple fact is that when we dehumanize others we forfeit our own humanity. We become numb to our own hearts and minds; we can no longer understand, as Rabbi Heschel said, “We are not all guilty, but we are all responsible.” We become passive spectators and eventually incapable of engaging with our own reality.

I am writing this during the season of Advent: the liturgical season in which the prophets, psalmists and gospel writers shout at us to *Wake Up!* to engage and dismantle our illusions. Advent spirituality (which is a spirituality best seen as a year-round discipline), acknowledges that we tend to drift through life asleep at the wheel. Things go along and we rarely stop to take stock and take a serious look at what is going on around us. And so the Word comes to us in not-so-gentle ways: Stop! Look! Listen! Pay Attention! The Word is becoming flesh right under your nose. But if you don’t stop and take note, you will miss it. This is no THING — this is the Human One. This is the glory of God in human flesh.

This is a story that defies our capacity for thingification. If we believe this story, if it is important to us, we cannot dehumanize our sisters and brothers. Neither can we tolerate the hucksters who would dismiss desperate refugees as criminals, thugs, rapists, non-persons. We will see them as women, children and men with names and with their own stories, who are fleeing desperate situations and seeking what every child of God wants: safety for themselves and their families, security, shelter, food and health care — a decent life.

Neither can we tolerate those who refer to our Muslim neighbors and those from “sh*t hole countries” as “towel heads,” “sand n*gg*s,” “dune coons.” It was the same during the Vietnam war when people referred to the Vietnamese people as “gooks” and “slants.” Dehumanization is a key modus operandi of violent and oppressive regimes. But we are defiling what it means to be a human being created in the image and likeness of God when we put up with such vile epithets. It not only dehumanizes those who are targeted and those who speak such epithets, it is blasphemous, because it degrades God’s creation of the human person.

If Advent has anything to teach us, it is that the Holy One is present to us by way of those who are absent from history: those whose story is almost never told because they have no power and neither shape nor influence the events of history that are considered “important.”

Those who are absent from history are those who in their own lifetimes are “thingified” — the poor and those who are the objects of the powerful and the elite. They are to be used and moved around like pawns on a chessboard. We have to read between the lines to find them; we have to lift the pages of history to look for where they have been trampled underneath. And then we have to go into the highways and byways, prisons and streets among the poor and dehumanized. Reading history is essential; but it is not enough. History (even with a leftist historiography) can clean our glasses, but history alone will not engage us with the incarnation. The Christmas faith in Emmanuel — God *with us* — brings us to a new way of seeing one another in I-thou relationships.

That is why Jesus was born as a “nobody.” His parents were peasants; he was born out of wedlock (a bastard, if you will), born at the very margins of the society of a people under the harsh occupation of Empire. He was born out of doors among the domesticated animals because his immigrant parents could not even get indoors to give birth. Thank God they did not encounter a fortified wall or the Roman military that would not let them get over the border into town.

And yet, this nobody baby *was* sought out by the white Empire’s military who wanted to kill him just in case he was going to be a threat to the established power.

Counterinsurgency tactics (a primary step is identifying “enemies” and proceeding to dehumanize or “thingify” them) are usually the preferred method of Empire: keeping a sharp eye open for the peasant leadership who could rise up and become an organizing power. When potential enemies are labeled and understood as “less than,” it is permissible to do anything to them. This is happening not only to refugees and prisoners but at an alarming rate as journalists are being identified as “enemies of the people.” They are being attacked and even killed. Globally, 52 journalists have been murdered in 2018 alone.



Brian Kavanagh

revealed for our time and place? Unless we are looking for the answers and continuing to tell the stories, we have abandoned a crucial task of discipleship. Still, the stories of suffering sisters and brothers are only words until we find the courage to reach out with healing action to those who continue to suffer and to find concrete ways to resist the structures and powers that cause the suffering. *No* to walls and militarized borders, *No* to gun violence, *No* to poverty and government policy that makes it worse, and *NO TO WAR*.

We have been privileged for more than 40 years to stand close to and alongside the poorest of the poor and to work to provide opportunities for people of privilege to reduce the distance and come close — to speak with and to listen — to live together offering food and companionship

— to watch expressions change and hearts soften as the human connection is forged. The stereotypes and myths fall away. The human being emerges from the shadows and fog of unknowing, and isolated persons find common ground.

The unknowing which assumes thingification is particularly malignant. We can live unquestioningly with unknowing, particularly because we can so easily live without knowing that we do not know and how wrong and dehumanizing we can be. As the Psalmist sings (Psalm 19:12), “But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.” We often fit nicely into a set of cultural assumptions without knowing that they are not based in truth. And because we do not know the truth and we do not know our own ignorance, we will never seek to learn: Assump-

**This is no THING — this is the Human One.
This is the glory of God in human flesh.**

If Advent helps us to identify those in whom God becomes incarnate, Epiphany reminds us of the light that shines in the darkness that the darkness has not overcome. Dehumanization and losing the deep understanding of the dignity of the human person is surely the deepest darkness. In the long shadow of our deepest forgetfulness, the light of Incarnation — the presence of the Holy within the ordinary — the light of God with us — leads us to see deeply enough to look into the face of every child of God and see the presence of the Holy. This is not automatic — and surely not easy — and we are not always able to see so clearly. But this is what the light can reveal if we continue the discipline of walking in that light. The word discipleship comes from the same root as discipline: The way a disciple sees has everything to do with the discipline of where and how we walk in the light. If we constantly walk in a shopping mall then we will tend to see ourselves and others as consumers — the *things* that drive consumer capitalism. If we are disciplined to walk in the light among the dark places that Jesus went, it gives us the clarity of vision to “see” Emmanuel.

What are we to do? In short, we have to go into the places and find the practices that affirm our own humanity and the humanity of our neighbor, no matter how distant, no matter how “thingified” by the Empire or corporate totalitarian systems. Each human being has a name and a story. Learning the names and telling the stories continues the gospel tradition. Where and through whom is God continuing to act and be

tions go unquestioned; we pass by human beings that are to us objects — a means to an end — indeed, things.

Something must interrupt the process. Some event or accident must change our course to bring us to a new way of seeing and understanding. This simply cannot happen without changing social location. This could mean moving out of a neighborhood that is all white or all upper-class into a neighborhood that is mixed racially. It could mean participating in a church or community group in which we are a minority race. It could mean making friends with people who are poor, homeless, imprisoned, and visiting in each other’s homes or cat holes. In some way, we all need to find the ways that bring us close to the suffering of the poor, the marginalized, the victims of violence and our brutal systems. When this can happen, we can be opened to understand the scriptures (and other wisdom traditions) that would teach us of the dignity of the human creation and our responsibility to respect this in all others.

We might imagine ourselves as members of the audience hearing Frederick Douglass. Surely once we hear him thunder, “Behold the Thing!” and we begin to understand the ravages of thingification, we will strive toward a life of resistance to fight for human rights and dignity for all people. ✠

*Murphy Davis is an Activist Pastor and writer with the Open Door Community in Baltimore.
(murphydavis@bellsouth.net)*

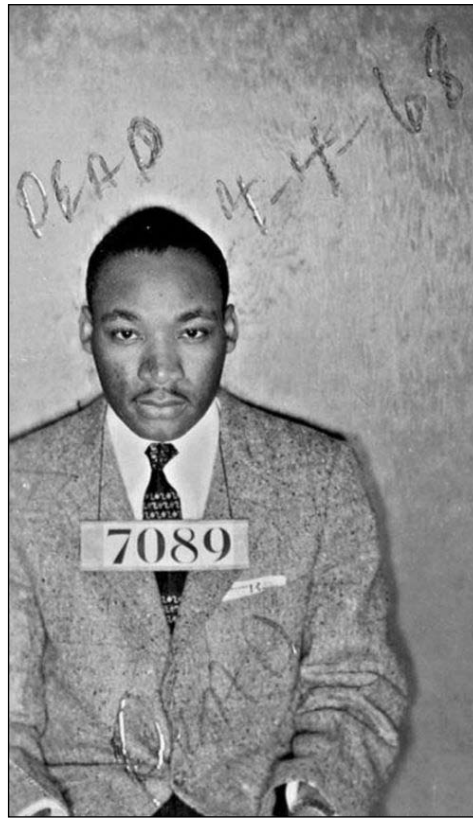
Black Jesus Visits Martin Luther King Jr. *continued from page 1*

bit more. Dr. King put it like this in his book *Stride Toward Freedom*. “At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced [God] before. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying: ‘Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever.’” He would need that assurance because, three nights later, his house would be bombed. No one was injured. Dr. King stayed the course.

Black Jesus would visit Dr. King many more times, but the next visitation I want to note came in the mid-1960s in regard to the Vietnam War. King had laid out his philosophy of nonviolence in *Stride Toward Freedom*, and in an article entitled “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence” in 1960. Black Jesus was not satisfied, though, and kept poking him and prodding him in the midst of all his other struggles. Aides and politicians urged him to stay clear of the Vietnam War, especially after Lyndon Johnson became president and gave signals that he might be an ally for the civil rights movement. In a strong irony, Black Jesus appeared to Dr. King through a program called “Rolling Thunder” in 1965, perhaps echoing the spiritual line “he calls me by the thunder.” This Rolling Thunder, however, did not seem to be a message from God. Rather, it came from the American military, as President Johnson openly bombed North Vietnam and rapidly increased the

1965, urging them to take a public stand against the war. When Dr. King finally heard Black Jesus openly and clearly, he asked Vincent Harding to write the first draft of what eventually became King’s most controversial speech: “A Time to Break Silence,” given on April 4, 1967, at the Clergy and Laity Concerned gathering at Riverside Church in New York. In this speech, King condemned the war and urged its cessation, and the response was similar to the phone call he received in January 1956. Indeed, Dr. King would be assassinated one year to the day after his CALC speech.

The third visit by Black Jesus came as Dr. King began to connect the dots that he had named in his Vietnam speech: the demonic powers of racism, militarism and materialism. He put



Montgomery County Sheriff's Department

ington, which came to be known as “The Poor Peoples’ Campaign.” The opposition to this was almost universal among his staff; only Ralph David Abernathy stayed with him. And, with this connecting of the dots of American society, he indeed became the most dangerous man in America. Black Jesus had moved him all the way to the margins. He would be killed before this march could take place.

It took me a long time to discern this. As I wrote in *Hospitality* last year, I was in Memphis at the time of the garbage strike, and I participated in it. I was there when Dr. King was assassinated. I felt at that time that King was not only too mild, but that he was irrelevant. Oh, the arrogance and short-sightedness of youth. We’re in a similar time now. The forces that aligned against Dr. King and the prophets of justice and equity are regaining strength at a rapid pace. The gaps are even wider now between those who are poor and those who are comfortable. Our prison system has become the cradle-to-prison pipeline

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number of American soldiers there, dubbing this acceleration “Rolling Thunder.” (Sound familiar, like “Shock and Awe”?) Dr. King began to openly criticize the war, but it would be two more years before he would publicly condemn it. Black Jesus came to him at that time through a Black minister named Vincent Harding, a longtime friend of the Open Door. Harding had written a long letter to King and the SCLC in

it this way in that speech: “When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered.” He proposed to take on the economic issues that intertwined with race, and to seek justice and equity for all who were poor in America. He wanted to focus the effort first with another march on Wash-

that not even Dr. King could have imagined. These are difficult days.

Where is Black Jesus now? He is among us, calling us, cajoling us, pushing us, pulling us towards the margins where he is. Will we have the perceptual apparatus to receive this calling, as Dr. King did? ✦

Nibs Stroupe is a longtime friend of the Open Door; retired pastor and author of the recently published Deeper Waters: Sermons for a New Vision. He writes a weekly blog at www.nibsnote.blogspot.com. (nibs.stroupe@gmail.com)

Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Take My Somebody Away

By Peter Gathje

“Do you know how I can get my check started again?” a guest asked as folks gathered in the front yard of Manna House drinking coffee. “My check stopped when I was in jail.”

I was curious about why he was drawing a check. “Disability,” he said. “I have a brain injury. I get seizures. I can’t work.” Other guests started to offer advice. One said, “They’ll make you prove that disability again, even though you proved it before.”

This elicited some hard realism from another guest. “They’ll turn you down at least a few times before you’ll get approved. Seems like standard practice.”

The guest was discouraged. “I don’t know if I have it in me to get through all that again. I had a social worker help me the first time.” This led to more advice about who could be asked, what organizations might help. But again the realism, “Seems like they just don’t want you to get help.”

Then a word came from a guest who had been standing by silently, taking it all in. “Whatever you do, remember, the people at the Social Security Office didn’t make the rules. Your battle is with the system, not with the people there.”

At that, our resident Bible scholar looked up, turned a few pages of his Bible, and read, “For we wrestle not against

flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” And he added, “Ephesians, 6:12, King James Bible.”

“Well, ain’t that the truth?” a guest added his version of “Amen.”

“How,” I asked, “do you go about rejecting the system but loving the people complicit in the system?” I had been to a Memphis Light, Gas and Water office with Manna House guests before. The long lines, the multiple layers of regulations and requirements to get power turned back on, the presence of an armed guard, the long lists of rules posted on the walls as we sat in uncomfortable plastic chairs — all were typical of places where the poor go to plead their cases for justice or for mercy. The Social Security Office on Cleveland, the “pit” at 201 Poplar, General Sessions courtrooms, jail visitation areas, emergency room waiting areas — they all have a mean spirit, just as they tend to be organized to be inhospitable.

A guest offered this wisdom born of years of confronting the principalities and the powers. “You can’t get caught up in the place. Stay loving with the people. They have it hard, too.”

Manna House guests regularly experience and look deep into the reality of evil structured in the way things are.

As a guest said to me one morning, “I’m told I’m nobody so often in so many places and in so many ways. They try to take my somebody away.” But he concluded, “Ain’t gonna let nobody take my somebody away.”

When I heard that I thought of Kathleen, who often says, “Our guests bring us their best.” Their best comes with a strong realism regarding how things are messed up, but an even stronger sense of hope. This is not a facile optimism, but the kind of hope grounded in faith tested by suffering and injustice, and unwilling to yield to the powers and principalities. This is the faith and the love I experience each time our guests come to Manna House, because we certainly do not meet all of their needs, and we certainly have days when our edges are a bit rough.

The witness of the guests at Manna House helps me to buck up and to not give in to the “luxury of despair” that tempts the privileged. They teach me how to live in hopeful and loving resistance to the principalities and powers, seeking justice, as Sharon Welch writes in *Sweet Dreams in America: Making Ethics and Spirituality Work*, “without the assurances of eventual victory and without the ego- and group-building dynamics of self-righteousness and demonizing.”

Or, to put it more succinctly, “Ain’t gonna let nobody take my somebody away.” ✦

Peter Gathje is Vice President for Academic Affairs/Dean of Memphis Theological Seminary, and a founder of Manna House, a place of hospitality in Memphis. He wrote Sharing the Bread of Life: Hospitality and Resistance at the Open Door Community (2006) and edited A Work of Hospitality: The Open Door Reader 1982 – 2002. (pgathje@memphissem.edu)

Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Ed,

I was sitting in a pew at East Goshen Mennonite Church the Sunday before the mid-term elections, when I found myself upset. The whole service had no mention of the election and no place for a sharing time for people to share their concerns. I didn’t know what to do, so I just waited until the benediction. Next thing, I found myself on my feet heading to the microphone at the front of the church.

In 1986 I was in the Great Peace March for nuclear disarmament, walking nine months across the United States. Then in 1987 the INF mid-range missile treaty was signed between our country and the Soviet Union, eliminating short- and mid-range nuclear weapons. On October 20, Trump announced plans to dismantle this treaty, to the dismay of many, putting us at the risk of a new arms race with Russia.

Hospitality is a Biblical value exemplified by Jesus. Currently, exiles from Central America, escaping violence, most likely will be denied sanctuary status in this country. What has happened to the spirit of Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty during the Nazi era? Like Paul Simon sang, “Counting the cars on the New Jersey turnpike/They’ve all gone to look for America.” Are we losing our compassion?

Bruce Bishop
Goshen, Indiana

Bruce is Potter-in-mission for the Open Door Community.

Hi Ed and Murphy,

Greetings from Atlanta! From your pictures on Facebook and in *Hospitality*, you both look great—hope that is the case! Your granddaughter is so cute.

On your Facebook page, I noticed that you were asking for donations to purchase warm clothing for the people of the street for the coming winter. I am sure Baltimore winters are much colder than in Atlanta! Jim and I are sending a check that we would like to be used in helping to purchase some of those needs.

You both are in my nightly prayers as I ask God to bless and keep you as you continue to do His work. You are truly His faithful servants in every way.

We are well, but have challenges that getting older will always present.

Love you both and miss knowing that you are no longer, “down the street” from us.

Love,
Jeanie Royal
Atlanta, Georgia

Come One and All
to a peace and Catholic Worker reading

Friday February 22, at 7 p.m.

Red Emma’s Bookstore and Café
1225 Cathedral Street
Baltimore, Maryland

David Eberhardt
reading from his peace movement memoir
For All the Saints, a Protest Primer.

Brendan Walsh and Willa Bickham
reading from their *The Long Loneliness in Baltimore*, a memoir of the Viva House Catholic Worker.

Contact: 410-235-7507
or email Mozela9@comcast.net

Dear Ed,

Thank you so very much for your very kind letter on my birthday, which for me also is a time for reflection and expression of gratitude. Believe me when I say that your life and ministry and Murphy’s and ODC’s too, have been woven into my life and Margo’s. During our prayers at bedtime Margo and I would often express our thanks for our community in Atlanta. Our life would never be the same after the privilege of serving directly the poor and hungry and imprisoned! It brought to a head our belief that Christianity lives in the work of the gospel that the Black Jesus of Nazareth lived and taught us — a genuine work of liberation. Thank you for all you have done and are doing.

So glad that you had such an encouraging time in Atlanta. I miss our times there. Will you let me know the next time you do that again? I may well go with you.

Ed and Murphy, have a blessed Christmas as well as a restlessness about doing the Works of love wherever you are. God be with you!

I love you,
Ron Santoni
Granville, Ohio

Hope you fared well during the storm. We are fine. Much of Lumberton and the county is not. Two major hurricanes in two years has devastated the primarily Black and Indian communities. They are suffering PTSD and economic hardships as much as any war veteran.

Thank you for your prayers.
Anne and Jack Crain
Lumberton, North Carolina

Please continue to feed the homeless, hungry and abandoned. Here is \$20 to help. Wish I could do more. Continue to share a word of Love with the poor and God will give the increase.

Bless you all so much,
An Illinois prisoner

Berta continued from page 4

for driving without a license, I’m going to show you this. You can’t give me a ticket — you ate my *gorditas*!” The room erupted in laughter, with the chief of police laughing the most heartily.

For nine nights the family and friends of Berta packed into her tiny home, spilling out into the yard, praying the rosary, observing the Mexican Catholic tradition of *novenario*. Huddled with Berta’s loved ones around the home-made altar filled with flowers and candles, I felt overwhelming gratitude to be a small part of this community that knows well how to mourn, remember and celebrate.

Berta was laid in her casket dressed like Our Lady of Guadalupe, in a bright red satin dress and green mantle adorned with gold braiding, holding her rosary and two white flowers. Tears flowed again as we each had our moment to say goodbye to our sweet friend. As I bent over and touched my lips to her forehead, I smiled, remembering the last time I dropped off Berta at her home. She thanked me and walked up onto her porch, where two Mexican Christmas ornaments in the shapes of a parrot and a peacock danced in the breeze over her head. She waved. Then she called out, “I love you, Joy-eece.” I love you too, Berta. ♣

Joyce Hollyday is an author and pastor serving undocumented immigrant women in the mountains of western North Carolina. She has been a friend of the Open Door for four decades. Her blog can be found at www.joycehollyday.com.

Dearest Murphy and Ed,

The May 2018 issue of *Hospitality* is among the best. I’m so thankful, Murphy, that you’re writing again. John used to say, “What is Ed’s rant about this time?” Keep ranting!

Judy Collins was delighted to see you at the EJI gathering and our pastor, Deb Richardson-Moore, preached about the memorial and Bryan Stevenson’s life and work.

Bunches of love,
Nikki Day
Greenville, South Carolina

Ed & Murphy,

Hello again from us to the community. Please continue our subscription to *Hospitality*, a creative, inspiring and just awesome idea-laden newspaper!

Our best wishes to you, our shared sadness over the state of leadership in our country, and our hopes for a positive future with “decent” health!!

Our love and hugs,
Ed & Barb Kusek
Hartford, Wisconsin

Don Beisswenger continued from page 4

the parish walls. The “yes” Don gave to our questions and strivings pressed us ahead in ways we are still realizing. And it turns out we are not alone in that: Countless others have experienced Don’s careful listening, wit and wisdom as gifts of clarity that helped the road unfold ahead of us.

Seventy long years of listening to the cry of oppressed peoples, of accompanying people struggling for justice, of making room for weary people to find rest gave Don insights distilled into wisdom so clear and concise that it never failed to wake me up whenever I heard it. What is spirituality? Three words: “stop, look, listen.” What is the first question you ask in the face of injustice? “What’s going on?” Does God call us to be religious? No, God calls us to be human. Embrace your finitude, keep sabbath rest, laugh, love. Don’s attentive spirituality and his justice-making were two sides of the same way of being in the world. A world that will never be the same because of him, and that will never be the same without him.

When Lindsey and I visited Don and Judy in hospice in early November, though he was getting weak, he was still as Don as ever. He cracked jokes, talked about hot fudge sundaes and root beer floats, and asked *us* how *we* were doing: How’s the work on the streets, how are the guys at the prison? Lindsey asked him if he had heard about the passage of Amendment 1 in Nashville. “They fought for community oversight and they won,” she said. “We’re going to have community oversight of the police!” Don perked up. “Is that right?” He pumped his fist in the air and held it there for a good 10 seconds. And we followed suit, as we have for a long time.

We were planning to visit Don again, but it turns out he had somewhere to be. We’ll catch up with you before long, dear friend. Until then, enjoy that deep rest you spent your life giving to others. We’ll try our best to keep the light you carried lit. And we’ll leave room for the Spirit to do the rest.

Thank you, Judy and the whole Beisswenger family, for sharing Don with me and Lindsey and the truly countless number of others who were blessed to share even a moment’s interaction with such a special man.

Once again, Don Beisswenger. *¡Presente!*
Don Beisswenger. *¡Presente!*
Then, now and always: Don Beisswenger. *¡Presente!* ♣

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