

West Branch Friends Meeting

May 2021

She Said, “How Do You Know When You Are Hearing From God?”

A prayer by Amena Brown

I have been thinking and praying recently about my relationship with God. About my faithfulness to a practice of prayer — prayer that shares with God and prayer that listens for what God wants to share with me. As we have discussed in meeting for worship, I encountered a set of questions — queries if you will — that I am really trying to pay attention to around these issues. The questions are:

How would you describe God?

How does God make Godself known to you?

How would you describe the status of your relationship?

I am also reminded that in our relationship, God doesn't ask me to be perfect, superhuman, different, or overachieving. God simply asks me to be faithful. To show up. To pay attention. To be in relationship. So the final question is simply: Where/how is God asking me to be more faithful — to show up? I share this prayer by Amena Brown because it is guiding me on this particular prayer topic and continues to give me much food for thought. I share it with you in hopes that it will also speak to you as you ponder and investigate these questions.

She said, “How do you know when you are hearing
from God?”

I didn't know how to explain

It is to explain the butter grit of cornbread to a mouth
that just discovered it has a tongue

The sound of jazz to ears that only ever thought they'd
be lobes of flesh

The sight of sunsets to blinded eyes that in an instant
can see

To fail at the ability to give words to how the scent of
baked bread can make the mind recall a memory

Every detail

Of a house, a room, a kitchen, a conversation

Like explaining to a newborn baby this is what it feels
like to be held

My words never felt so small, so useless, so incapable

I wanted to say

Put your hand in the middle of your chest

Feel the rhythm there

I wanted to say you will find the holy text in so many
places

On crinkly pages of scripture
In dusty hymnals
In the creases of a grandmother's smile
The way she clasps her hands
The way she prays familiar, with reverence as if to
dignitary and friend
The way she sings a simple song from her spirit and
porches turn into cathedrals

I learned from my great-grandmother how to pray
How to talk to God
How to listen
Watching her and the other silver-haired church mothers
gather in her living room
Worn wrinkled hands on top of leather bibles well
traveled

They prayed living room prayers because you don't
have to be inside the four walls of a church to cry
out to the God who made you
Because no matter where you sing or scream or
whisper God's ears can hear you
And despite what the laws say or what our human
flaws say
God's ears don't play favorites
God's ears don't assess bank accounts or social status
before they attune themselves to the story your
tears or your fears are telling

God's ears are here for the babies
For the immigrant, for the refugee
For the depressed, for the lonely
For the dreamers
The widow, the orphan
The oppressed and the helpless
Those about to make a mess or caught in the middle of
cleaning one up

Dirt don't scare God's ears

God is a gardener

God knows things can't grow without sun, rain, and soil

I want to tell her to hear God

You have to be willing to experience what's holy in
places many people don't deem to be sacred

That sometimes God sits next to you on a barstool

Spilling truth to you like too many beers

That God knows very well the dance we'll do

When we love ourselves so little that just about anyone
will do

That God cares about the moments we find ourselves

On the edge of a cliff

On the edge of sanity

On the edge of society

Even when we have less than an inch left of the thread
that's been holding us together

I want to tell her God is always waiting

Lingering after the doors close

And the phone doesn't ring

And we are finally alone

God is always saying

I love you

I am here

Don't go, stay

Please

I try to explain how God is pleading with us

To trust

To love

To listen

That God's voice is melody and bass lines and whisper
and thunder and grace

Sometimes when I pray, I think of her

How the voice of God was lingering in her very

Question

How so man of us just like her

Just like me

Just like you

Are still searching

Still questioning, still doubting

I know I don't have all the answers

I know I never will

That sometimes the best thing we can do is put our

Hands in the middle of our chest

Feel the rhythm there

Turn down the noise in our minds, in our lives

And whisper,

God

Whatever you want to say

I'm here

I'm listening



Amena Brown is a spoken word poet, performing artist, and event host whose work interweaves keep-it-real storytelling, rhyme, and humor. The author of five spoken word albums and two nonfiction books, Amena wrote and collaborated with award-winning actress, producer, and activist Tracee Ellis Ross on the *Manifesta* and *Glossary* for Ross's natural hair product line, *PATTERN*. She's also the host of *HER with Amena Brown* podcast, which centers and elevates the stories and experiences of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian women. Amena lives in Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband, DJ Opdiggy.



May Anniversaries, Birthdays, and Upcoming Events

Birthdays

- May 1: Blake Winder
- May 4: Elaine Wedeking
- May 7: Daisy English
- May 11: Mary Denmead
- May 15: Anita Starr
- May 16: Bob Arn
- May 17: Gordon Edgar
- May 18: Wade Bowers
- May 21: Sally Peck
- May 27: Henry Alvarez
- May 28: Lauren Bowers

Anniversaries

- May 15: Chad & Dusti Cermak
- May 18: Lucy Hansen & Jim Kasper

Upcoming Events

May 4: M&C meeting 7:00 pm

May 9: Mother's Day

May 11: Endowment meeting 7:00 pm

May 16: Monthly Meeting (MMFWWATB) 11:40

May 25: Stewardship meeting 7:00 pm

May 30: Special Offering for WB Food Pantry

Meeting for Worship LIVE in the Meeting house AND on Zoom!

May 31: Memorial Day

Gathering Music each Sunday 10:25 am

Meeting for Worship Sunday 10:30 am

Prayer Group⁵ Mondays 9:30 am at the meetinghouse

Humans for Racial Justice: Tuesday 5:30 pm on Zoom

Meet Our New Friends!

This month's new friend: Liz Drexler

Liz Drexler grew up in Noblesville, Indiana, on the family farm. Liz's dad was a chemist who worked on the lubricating oils for WWII bombers. He missed the farm, and vowed to return after the war. He did so, but in addition to farming, commuted to Eli Lilly in Indianapolis where he worked as a research chemist.

Liz grew up in the Methodist tradition, even though her mom was Quaker. Her family was very involved in their Methodist church in Westfield, Indiana. Liz's family also had very strong ties to Earlham College. Liz's mom, uncle, grandfather and great-aunt all graduated from Earlham. Liz went on to graduate from Earlham as well. She began attending Quaker meeting while she was a student there. Liz's husband and her brother-in-law are also Earlham grads, and she met her husband on campus.

Liz's husband is originally from Cedar Rapids, and came to Iowa when he went to dental school at the University of Iowa. He was recruited by the town of Clarence — which needed a dentist — and they moved there in 1973, where they have remained ever since.

Liz's passion is dog training — primarily obedience, but also some agility training. She has 4 dogs currently, one Shetland sheepdog who is 14 and a retired obedience and agility champion, two younger Shetland sheepdogs currently competing, and a new 2-year-old Belgian Malinois. Liz is proud to have qualified for the upcoming National Obedience Championships with both of her younger shelties. The competition will take place in Ohio in June. Liz's daughter also competes, and has also qualified for this show. Liz's granddaughter competes internationally — a very tough field.

In addition to the work with her dogs, Liz enjoys camping, traveling in her motor home (mostly to dog shows!), reading, and yardwork (which she describes as a love/hate relationship).

Liz truly appreciates the opportunity to worship on Zoom — not only because of COVID protocols, but also when she is away at a competition, if she's not in the ring, she can hop on her phone for worship. So at our next Zoom gathering, be sure to give Liz a wave onscreen and plan to say Hello in person at our first meeting in the meetinghouse on May 30.

Welcome Liz! We're glad you're here!

BLESSINGS AND PRAYERS

Our Senior Friends

Larry Reiner

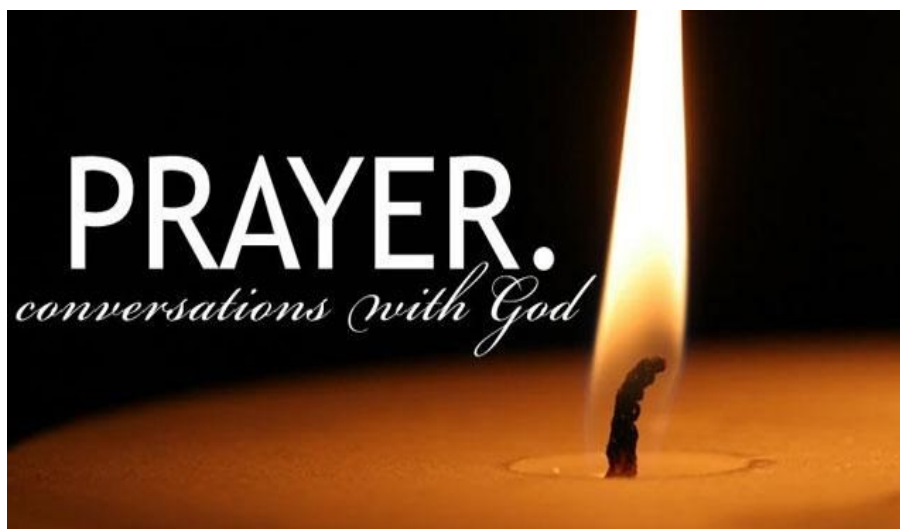
Lois Semotan

Marvin and Fran Fritz

Nancy Stacks

Ed and Maria Denmead

Mildred Torkelson



Joys & Blessings

- New friends joining us in worship
- The joy of gifts shared in worship: our pianists, special music, bells and children's messages
- Friends helping each other in times of need
- For all those who have received their COVID vaccine
- Celebrating friendships
- Celebrating in-person visits with family and friends
- Celebrating new jobs for Ben Wedeking and Morgan Draiocht
- Celebrating Andrea and Benjamin Lewis' new dog
- Celebrating all of our birthdays and anniversaries
- Diane is celebrating the opportunity to participate in a clinical trial at Mayo.
- Celebrating the continued recovery of Sally and her grandson Aaron after their car accident.
- Celebrating the opportunity to participate in prom and other activities
- The Scott family recovering from COVID
- Margaret Fraser's granddaughter recovered from COVID

Requests for Prayer

- The Demis family upon the death of their grandfather
- Prayers for Ben for finding a new place to live in New York and for a non-stressful move!
- For Addie as she wrestles with depression and treatment and for her parents Julie and Jim as they continue to provide support on her journey
- Diane who continues with cancer treatment
- Racial injustice particularly praying for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders at this time
- Mental health and the lack of funding for needed services
- The smooth distribution of COVID vaccine
- Robin's sister Jodi struggling with auto-immune issues and traveling to Mayo for treatment
- Lyn's friend Menuch dealing with health issues

Climate Justice

I've been doing a lot of learning around Creation care, environmental stewardship and climate justice. Science tells us that the time to act is NOW. If we drag our feet, we may not be able to make enough of an impact to significantly affect life on this planet. I share with you this month "6 Rules for Humans Rejoining the Natural World". Notice the word "rejoining". These principles are not some strange "out-there" proposal, rather they are rules that the natural world has always followed, and have caused it to be possible to sustain life in this place we call home. We have forgotten many of these principles, but if we could begin to switch our thinking, this would lead to switching our actions, and this, in turn, would switch our current path toward destruction. These rules come from an article by Jeremy Lent in Yes! Magazine. If you are not familiar with Yes! I encourage you to check it out — online or in print. Each issue, this magazine takes on one issue and explores it from many different points of view, from many different areas of expertise, and from countries all across our planet. I would love to discuss the following "6 Rules" in more depth. If you are interested in ecological issues and climate justice, or just want to talk about what you've read, email me at deaconchris@peculiarpilgrimage.org or give me a call at 319-210-4038. I would LOVE to hear your thoughts!

6 Rules for Humans Rejoining the Natural World

1. Diversity

A system's health depends on differentiation and integration. **When this principal of natural ecology is applied to human society, we see it as** affirmation of different groups — self-defined by ethnicity, gender, or any other delineation. Such as:

- Community self-determination
- Indigenous rights
- Restorative justice
- Social equity for LGBTQ communities

2. Balance

Every part of a system is in a harmonious relationship with the entire system. **When this principle of natural ecology is applied to human society, we see it as** competition and cooperation in balance and an equitable distribution of wealth and power. Such as:

- Global wealth tax
- Multibillionaires proscribed
- Abolition of offshore tax havens
- Legal support for co-ops and the commons

3. Fractal Organization

The small reflects the large, and the health of the whole system requires the flourishing of each part. When this principle **of natural ecology is applied to human society**, we see it as individual dignity and self-determination. Such as:

- Universal Basic Income
- Universal access to housing, health care, education
- Cities redesigned for walking
- Community interaction
- Education for life-fulfillment
- Cosmopolitanism (the idea that all humans are, could be, or should be part of a single community)

4. Life Cycles

Regenerative and sustainable flourishing into the long-term future. **When this principle of natural ecology is applied to human society**, we see it as economic growth halting once it reaches healthy limits. Such as:

- Steady-state economies
- A triple bottom line for corporations

5. Subsidiarity

Issues at the lowest level affect health at the top. **When this principle of natural ecology is applied to human society**, we see it as grassroots self-autonomy and deep democracy. Such as:

- Decision-making at the lowest possible levels
- Horizontalism (equitable distribution of power in a society)
- Cooperatives

6. Symbiosis

Relationships that work for mutual benefit. **When this principle of natural ecology is applied to human society**, we see it as fairness and justice, regenerative economies, and circular energy flows. Such as:

- Measuring well-being instead of GDP
- Regenerative agriculture
- Permaculture principles
- Circular economies and manufacturing processes
- Rights of Nature

What do you think?