



CAIM

How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

CAIM is the Celtic word meaning 'encompassment' or 'encircling'

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Trevor Miller writes:

"I don't want to meet a Stranger...."



Any expression of spiritual formation within monasticism stands in the ancient wisdom tradition, which is not an accumulation of knowledge for its own sake, but a continual down-to-earth application to life actually being lived. It is a truism that 'A wise person does not gather and dispense insights, but rather has the heart to live those insights.'

As a Community committed to living and exploring the questions, 'Who is it that you seek? How then shall we live? How shall we sing the Lord's song' ... we will always need to be examining our journey as

we journey: always seeking greater awareness of God and of ourselves. As pilgrims on the move, we know that the horizon only expands as we journey, and new insights into who we are vocationally only come as we each take the tentative steps of faith in the context of our ordinary, everyday lives.

Just recently at Nether Springs I was meeting with a good friend and a long-time Companion in Community. We have met regularly at least a couple of times each year for over fifteen years. As usual we were discussing spiritual formation, longing for God, our mutual commitment to new discoveries and fresh insights into practical ways of cultivating inner spiritual growth (and his example of an ever increasing hunger for the things of God has long inspired me). We also shared thoughts on life and mortality (we are both getting on a bit) and we then talked about why this unending quest of seeking after God was so important. His answer was a simple statement: 'I don't want to meet a Stranger.' I found that so powerful.

This is the call of God on each of our lives: to better know Him and love Him in Jesus. It is to seek, as best we can, to fulfil the two greatest commandments as stated by Jesus, "The most important one is this ... 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself'." (Mark 12:29-31)

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The important thing here is to fully grasp what God is asking of us. Thomas Merton puts it well, "*The only real gift I can give to another is who I really am*", the gift of myself – warts and all! Another writer saying much the same thing equally well is the Franciscan priest Richard Rohr who states, "*Who we are is all we finally have to give the world, and the only thing that God is asking of us. All the doing, as necessary and as good as it is, is just practise and preparation for the ultimate experience of just being.*" Cont'd pn pg 3

Lee Johnson reports on the

North West Summer Gathering

There is always a very warm welcome from Vince and Di Smith for Friends and Companions converging on the lovely Yealand St John's Church for our seasonal meetings. Despite being the height of the holiday season, 25 of us met up in August for fellowship and teaching. The subject was 'Forgiveness' led by the folk from Altrincham. Their efforts were much appreciated. We studied bible texts, had times of song and quiet meditation, and benefited from George Herbert's marvellous poem 'Love' ... the message as strong as ever after 400 years. Fish and chips from Arnside at teatime was a great way to round off the day. Do join us for our next gathering, see the news page for details.

Lee Johnson



Sue Powell has written about the South Wales' group retreat in August:



We took time out together at Nicholaston House Retreat Centre on the Gower, Swansea. After dinner and Evening

Prayer on Friday, we enjoyed watching the DVD 'My Journey to Life' by Rainer Walde.

The theme of our retreat was 'Listening to Whispers' using Celtic material written by John Birch (www.faithandworship.com). The topics covered included 'A Sense of Place', 'A Sense of Space', 'A Sense of Connection' and 'A Sense of Journeying'. Each day we gathered for prayers in the little Chapel situated in the grounds alongside the house and we were pleased to welcome members of the staff who joined in the rhythm of our prayers.

All too soon our weekend came to a close but the good news is that we have booked for the same weekend next year! **Sue Powell**

Northern Ark

This year's Northern Ark was small in numbers but significant for those who attended. Joining the others on the team from Northumbria Community were Norma Charlton, Norma Wise, Paul Lucas, Fraggie and Vicky Michael and myself. Fraggie led us through Motivational Gifts over a couple of sessions, with individual follow-ups as required. A visiting speaker reviewed Isaiah 58, and provided a sample yoke to explain how they were used to control an animal. We were then invited to write on our own mini-yokes, those things which were limiting us and tie them onto ourselves. In pairs we then released each other's yokes while saying a short prayer and our yokes were broken by someone else. During the evening session we went outside and burned the yokes, so that they could not be picked up again – no turning back. Personally, this affected me as I had to let go of part of my role as parent, since my children are now leaving home and the Dad-child relationship of providing and protecting is no longer appropriate. Two days later I realised that the release had fully occurred whilst driving back from Northallerton after getting my broken wing mirror fixed (another story, another time!) – I no longer felt the perceived guilt of the impact of separation and divorce on the children and was free of the yoke which I had placed on myself!

Each morning and evening we gathered for praise and prayers, often using CDP. One particular evening session the theme of praying for Syria, Palestine, Israel and Iraq was very deep, Spirit-filled and powerful. One of the final sessions was delivered by another visiting pastor, about being Ambassadors for Christ - comparing the secular definition of Kingdom attributes, embassy and ambassadors, with God's kingdom.

One of the sessions which grabbed my attention was the bacon buttie and scripture sharing. OK, those who know me, will vouch for my affinity with bacon, however we reviewed in silence scripture from 1 Peter 4:11 about speaking and serving through the power of God. I had an image of myself as a tree with its full root system gripped by the hands of God, unmovable. So I've decided to try and paint this, following a reasonably successful attempt at painting Freedom, as represented from the impact of Isaiah 58.

"Your vindicator shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard." Isaiah 58: 8b (NRSV)

Michael Connaughton

Welcome to the Autumn edition of Caim!

Something we're blessed with here in Northumberland - visitors often comment on it - is a VERY dark sky! Walking home last evening, I was watching my step carefully in the dark, intent on the task at hand. When for no good reason I looked up, the sky above me literally took my breath away. A timely reminder, to watch for the blessings around us...

Enjoy this edition of Caim! **Jeff & Ingrid**

Cont'd from pg 1

Isn't that great? - 'the ultimate experience of just being'. Life is just the next thing that happens, whether it is good or bad, and we have to learn not only how to cope with whatever comes our way but also to live in its reality so that it doesn't overwhelm us. I don't know about you but I don't ever want to just cope; I want to be able to live! One thing I've definitely learned on the inner journey (as no doubt you have too) is that the soul learns best, not in security and explanations of certainty, but in wandering (and wondering) in those places where only God is in control. And it's when we learn to accept positively those things we cannot do anything *with*, inadequate things; and those things we cannot do anything *about*, necessary things; and those things we'd rather do *without*, awful things, that 'the ultimate experience of just being' frees us from the tyranny of our always having to be in control of every situation. *But I must do ... I really have to ... I need to ...*

It is our lives that are usable for God, who we really are, so that we don't have to be triumphant or effective, only available and vulnerable, teachable and faithful. *God takes it all from there.* We are all in the process of being and becoming. Those committed to seeking God as the 'one thing necessary' in their lives know that this is a continual process – being and becoming a new person, wiser, more at home with ourselves, easier to live with, more contented, able to accept who we are with joy and not resignation. These are the fruits of spiritual formation and growth on the inner journey of transformation. Being teachable and open to change is what keeps you alive.

I read of a Southern Baptist Seminary Principal in the US who boasted that 'No member of this faculty has had a new idea in 25 years'. He intended it to be a reflection of loyalty to the Institution but it speaks of a dead monument rather than a living movement. A relic of 'fossilised fundamentalism' where 'no change' is seen as a virtue - but to live is to change, to journey is to change because there are always new horizons to explore, new insights to grapple with, new perspectives to freshen our understanding of faith. We need to keep on keeping on and recognise that we do so with Companions on the way. In that same article I also read this, 'mutual encouragement is a great part of the work of incarnation'. When we smile at each other, share a hug, receive

another's encouragement with thanksgiving, bless one another's story, stay teachable, available and vulnerable, cultivate desire for God and share habits of spiritual growth with each other, then God is within us and between us, and 'no longer strangers', we become a fresh expression of true Community.

Trevor Miller



Chris Saunders wrote to us with news of

The Bristol and Bath Community Group enjoyed a very successful weekend away at the Sidholme Hotel in Sidmouth. We are all very grateful to Malcolm and Sarah Kinch, whose hard work made this possible and to Duncan and Lesley McLean for being willing to lead our time together.

After what seemed like months of rain and storm the sun shone for the whole three days, a definite bonus. We followed the rhythm of the day with shared meals, the Daily Offices and excellent sessions led by Duncan and Lesley around the themes of 'seeking God', 'living as community' and 'being church' in our increasingly consumerist and individualist society. We were blessed with some talented singers and musicians, hence an abundance of sung liturgy and worship. There was plenty of space for conversation, walks down to the seafront and time alone to reflect and meditate.

The ceilidh on Saturday evening was a highlight for me: built around the Caedmon Celtic Fire with opportunity for us to contribute with songs, stories, poems and dance. It was too warm to light the real fire but Duncan provided us with a virtual version (the wonders of modern technology!). As part of the Sunday morning worship, using a special liturgy, we were delighted to welcome Les Phillips as a Companion.

The main aim of the weekend was to get to know one another better. Some already knew each other very well, others just a little and some had never met before. By the time we parted new friendships had been established and existing ones deepened. The lasting impression that I took away with me was that together we formed an oasis of peace and tranquillity amidst the busyness of a large and lively Church gathering that shared the hotel with us. My prayer is that each of us may be an oasis in the spiritual deserts of our society, offering refreshment to those in need. *Chris Saunders*



Steve Hewitt writes:

Touching places of contemplation



Contemplative prayer is not about having special experiences. But even so, there are many times and places I look back on as important places to remember on this silent journey of prayer*.

The first that comes to mind is the garden shed at Warwick which became my poustinia for some time whilst Sheena &

I experienced our call to Northumberland. Then, during this period I will not forget the profound silence I experienced at Fingal's Cave on a trip to Iona, when I lingered for a few minutes after the other visitors had moved on. Then I think of many hours I spent before breakfast in the huts at Hetton Hall after we had moved up.

My personal experience is that contemplative prayer is normally quite hard work, and its effect is more apparent in what transpires afterwards than during the time of prayer itself. But, nevertheless, I've discovered that there are significant 'markers' on the road. An example arose in 2002 when Sheena and I had a holiday on the Greek island of Kefalonia.

One memorable day we walked to a monastery in the middle of the island. It was a long uphill walk on a hot day on a stone path. At one point I almost trod on a snake, which fortunately slithered quickly away. By the time we got there we were both thinking, 'this better be worth it!' But it turned out to be the high point of the holiday and a genuine pilgrimage experience. Inside the church there were steps leading down into the cell of the island's patron saint, St Gerasimus (1506-1579). It was not much more than a hole in the ground, but its very simplicity convinced me that we had touched a saint of genuine desert spirituality.

This May I experienced another such 'marker' when I took

a month's extended leave from my parish. The encounter was very different and far less spectacular than a visit to Iona or a holiday on a Greek island, but the spiritual impact was much the same.

During the month we spent a week on retreat with the nuns of Fairacres Convent in Oxford, the first Anglican religious house founded specifically for living the contemplative monastic life. Over the six days, like Nether Springs, the rhythm of the offices - six a day - helped greatly to 'hold us'. We were generously included as guests to monastic offices and to the nuns' midday meal.



Here the life of prayer and commitment to the contemplative life shone out from the sisters' hospitality and simplicity. For example, their main meal was served onto a simple melamine soup bowl, onto which everything was piled - soup, lettuce, asparagus, potatoes, or whatever was served. Some nuns even used the same bowl for their pudding!

These nuns were in one sense apart from the world, but also very much in touch. I was impressed that in the convent bookshop were current publications on the theme of recent developments in new monasticism, and in the services we heard prayers for emerging monastic communities. Also they have their own press and there were a number of booklets from the Community about desert spirituality and contemplative prayer. Like us, these nuns recognise the connection between contemplative prayer and the early desert fathers and mothers.

All this reminds me that 'place' is important in the journey of prayer - a very Celtic insight - and 'memory stones' too**. In this sense, though you may not travel very far, the journey of contemplative prayer is something akin to a pilgrimage and the significance of special times and places like these should not be overlooked. *Stephen Hewitt*

* Sheena and I both found 'Into the Silent Land' by Martin Laird (DLT 2006), recommended in Caim, a very helpful guide

** cf Joshua 4.20

Reflections on the Northumbria Community USA retreat - August 2014

I am now four weeks removed from a Community weekend and can begin to articulate the meaning. Let me first say that I had a wonderful time. The power point presentations, the teachings, the food, the setting, and the other amenities were all excellent. The rhythm of the Community in the Daily Office was deeply meaningful, prayerful and

spiritually nurturing.

The people who were there were resplendent. Their stories, their laughter, their smiles, their tears all left me with warm memories and a reminder of the value of community.

The Northumbria Community offers a much different set of priorities than the saber-metric, ROI (return on investment) chasing, cost-efficiency obsessed place that is America. I was able to disconnect from the draining 'always on'

world. I was able to recalibrate using the NC priorities including values of personal relationships, and the cell. Stepping away from the overwhelming distraction of worldly viewpoints freed me to hear the small voice.

I became acutely aware that it is on the margin, in the transition areas, between the forest and the farmland that the richest life is found. It is that way in the human heart. In the alone/together, in the silence/song, in the cell/mission, that we see the richness of the Trinity. People long for the authentic experience of faith. We want to see God in our lives. Church can be a deeply disappointing place because we KNOW that the corporate experience shared there does not always integrate the personal. The Trinity has more for you than an hour a week. We want to live our faith.

Someone once said that our goal in life should be to be in continuous prayer. I can remember the revulsion that I felt when I heard this comment. I could think of nothing less holy than wasting away in a dark little room emaciated, alone, and silent. The NC has revealed to me the joy of incorporating the Trinity into my life in a more complete way.

I realize that vulnerability and availability allowed me to see God, be with him, and love him at a new level. The authentic experience of faith that I longed for was available here. *David Vessel*



It was hard to believe that this place of quiet, with trails, birds, and no tall building, was only an

hour away from the hustle and bustle of Minneapolis, Minnesota, where I spend my days in that business. I was immediately inspired by the silence of evening prayer with strangers and friends on the first day, but I was also captured by an image of 3 white strips, of what looked like cloth, being reflected in the window in front of me. The lush green trees filled the entire window except for these bright white reflections that wrapped around the reflection of my head, like a frame. Immediately the Lord spoke to me, "My banner over you is Love". I am His bride, I am loved and ushered into this retreat by Him! This is what I call a good start to a retreat, the rest just gets better. I continued to be inspired by unplanned conversations, both serious and silly, both filling me with complete joy and freedom, bringing me closer to Christ, closer to people and myself. The architecture also had a role in ushering in God's complete presence for us, as all of the buildings were designed with long strips of glass all around, showing

only the green trees and sky and never the ground. It is powerful when you show up, Christ welcomes you and carries you on an exciting journey.

Sara Tucker



The setting was beautiful - well nurtured flowers at every turn, warm Minnesota days, groomed walking trails, many varieties of birds, comfortable accommodations, great food.

The people were amazing - 19 wanderers ventured and risked to be together for four days. John heard about us from a friend less than a month before we gathered. Raymond returned to be with us and we were so pleased to see him again. We all arrived with our 'stuff' - one precious lady had lost her husband just a few weeks earlier, others were carrying big family issue pains.



The time together was life-changing - I have never experienced anything like it before. The level of peace and true connectedness

to God and people was incredible. The rhythm of the Daily Office was our backbone, punctuated by devotions by Carla Waterman and inspired with art by Pam Keske. Sarah and Alan Berry are true and clear voices for the ethos and values and always directed us down the right path when we were talking about what Community was all about. It was beautiful to watch the rest of our Minnesota team flourish as they lead different breakouts or in worship - the level of giftedness and joy was astounding.



The love I feel is growing - love for those who came and who love God's purposes and plans. How thankful I am to have lived in England and landed at Hetton

Hall twenty years ago during a dark season of my life. How wonderful it is to not feel any pressure to be more than I am, do more than I do, say more than I say. It is like when you are with Community - the best 'you' is noticed and affirmed and in that environment there is healing, grace and freedom.

Margene Vessel

The last edition of Caim included a piece written by Maurice Johnson, about his experience of writing the 'Saints' Days' articles for our website. Maurice died shortly after that edition was distributed, and here we print an extract from the eulogy which Roy Searle delivered at the service of celebration and thanksgiving for Maurice's life.

Maurice Johnson

The memories of a good man are a blessing indeed.

At heart, Maurice was a Celt... his nature, personality, calling and the very way in which he lived out his love of God was fundamentally Celtic. It was therefore no great surprise that he and Pauline connected and felt immediately at home with the Northumbria Community. And all those of us within Community who had the privilege of knowing and sharing with him, recall and give thanks to God for a cherished Companion; someone who embraced the Community's Way for Living of Availability and Vulnerability.

He bequeathed to the Community the riches of his love for God and his passion for Celtic Christian spirituality and we are indebted to him and have several of his writings, most recently his contributions to our new and developing Community website.

Maurice was a man who embraced the Community's Rule of Life. He was someone who knew brokenness in his own life but far from becoming or being bitter, exhibited a beauty, a touching humanity, depth and insight, wisdom and a great and mischievous sense of humour. He always had that twinkle in his eye and was good fun to be with. He was meticulous, organised and carried an attention for detail. He was a devoted husband, soulmate and companion to Pauline and a loving, kind and ever concerned father to Andrew.

Some of us were privileged to receive those Golden Threads, the letters he wrote in the final weeks of his life. In one of them he was quoting a hymn that he first sang in Sunday School back in the 1950s. It was a hymn that spoke of journeying and pilgrimage and it exudes trust and confidence in following Jesus through all of our days:

*then, like a youthful pilgrim, whatever I may meet,
I'll take it, joy or sorrow and lay it at his feet:
He'll comfort me in trouble, he'll wipe my tears away;
with joy I'll follow Jesus, all the way'.*

Roy Searle

This is a poem that Maurice wrote on his last visit to Nether Springs

Turn the World Upside-down

Creation from nothing,
full of nothing,
emptiness and darkness –
may we start again please?

Breath brooding over deep waters,
Word spoken, God from God:
light from darkness,
land from deep waters,
mud and spit – God-spit;
growth from land,
light, light and more light –
turn the world upside-down.

Living creatures from water, air and land,
human beings formed in image of God –
ikons of their Creator;
food, good and dodgy, for humans –
turn the world upside-down.

Dodgy food too tempting:
serpent's curse descends,
human's curse descends,
creation's curse descends –
may we start again please?

NO! LIVE THROUGH IT!

Shame, murder and guilt,
mixed with care for livestock,
music and technology –
AND – people begin to call on God –
turn the world upside-down.

Wickedness and flood,
With compassion and rescue –
Where's that raven? Where's that dove?
May we start again please?

You are doing, you are the new start;
I have placed my rainbow in the clouds,
so go and get on with it –
turn the world upside-down.

Maurice Johnson (written at Nether Springs May 2014)

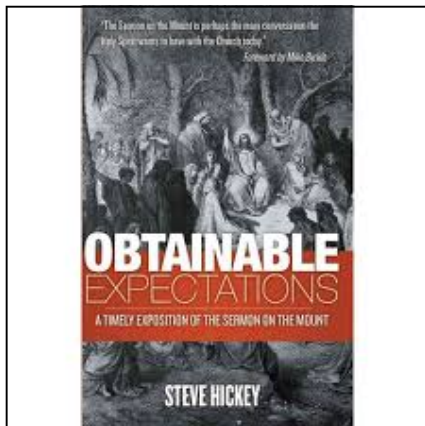
If you have any items for prayer which you would like to have included in our Community Prayer Guide, then do please email it to prayerguide@northumbriacommunity.org

Remember that the Prayer Guide is published three times per year, and so we need to plan well in advance - send your item in good time, and the team will endeavour to include it appropriately!

Ian Corsie sent us a review of

OBTAINABLE EXPECTATIONS: A TIMELY EXPOSITION OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Steve Hickey



I don't know how it is for you, but Dietrich Bonhoeffer's oft-quoted remark that 'The renewal of the Church will come from a new type of monasticism which only has in common with the old an uncompromising allegiance to the Sermon on the Mount' has always been a very handy phrase to use when explaining what the Northumbria Community is all about. But is there a danger that we refer to it too glibly, and don't take it seriously enough?

Yes, the Sermon on the Mount is very familiar – 'the Beatitudes and all that'. But it is all too easy to become over-familiar with the concepts that Jesus unpacks ('turn the other cheek'; 'be salt and light'; 'let your Yes be Yes';

'go the extra mile'; 'love your enemies'; 'seek and you will find'; etc) and fail to really think about what they mean and how they should impact every aspect of our lives.

I was challenged by this when I met Steve Hickey, an American pastor from Sioux Falls in South Dakota, and he told me about the book he had recently written. He very kindly gave me a copy and I would like to commend it as a helpful foundational resource for living out a 'life in Christ'.

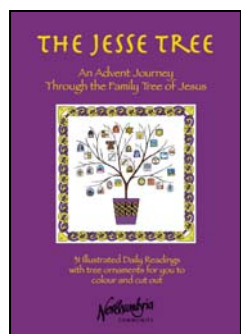
Steve has been studying the Sermon on the Mount for over 20 years, and his book contains an excellent summary of the literature on the subject, with his own 'top picks', especially the books by Heidi Baker (*Compelled by Love*) and John Stott (*Christian Counter-Culture*). So his writing is informed by years of study and experience, plus his desire to unpack the deep spiritual insights into clear instruction for living the Christian life today. He does this by verse-by-verse exposition for the Beatitudes, and section-by-section exposition of the remainder of Matthew chapters 5 -7.

His title makes clear that this blueprint for the Christian life is not an unattainable goal; on the contrary, our big challenge is to see how each injunction is very simple and straightforward (though of course counter-cultural) if only we will think hard about it and determine to live it out day to day.

This book would make a good framework for a personal retreat, or as a resource for a series of home-group meetings or Community groups. You don't have to agree with everything he says; and don't be put off by the rather old-fashioned cover and the emphasis on the current situation in US churches. There is gold to be mined here.

Ian Corsie

Judith Goodfellow gives us a timely reminder:



With Advent only a small number of weeks away, it seems a good time to remind folk of our Jesse Tree Pack – a delightful and richly rewarding resource for individuals, families and churches in the run up to Christmas.

The pack consists of a month of readings by Andy Raine presented as an A5 booklet beautifully illustrated with newly commissioned drawings by Francesca Ross, and accompanied by a set of 31 double-sided card ornaments, featuring Francesca's illustrations, for you to colour, cut out and use at home on your own Jesse Tree.

For those who have yet to meet them, the Jesse Tree readings are named after the depictions in stained glass or wood that have been used over many centuries to bring to

life the characters who are part of Jesus' family tree from Jesse through David to Joseph and Mary. In many homes and churches it has become an Advent custom to use a small tree branch as a Jesse Tree and hang it with pictures or ornaments representing the people, prophecies and stories which anticipated the coming of Christ.

The Jesse Tree can become a much-loved focal point during December that can offset and pre-empt the onset of an increasingly commercial and secularised Christmas. We hope these readings and ornaments will help you to share in this age-old practice and, by providing a focus for prayer and memory and a spur to the imagination, enrich your Advent as they take you on a journey through image and Scripture.

You can purchase a Jesse Tree Pack through the online shop on the website for £9.99 plus p+p or over the phone by calling the office on 01670 787645. If you are interested in using the Jesse Tree this Advent, early orders would be appreciated as they will help us to decide if we need to order a further print run! *Judith Goodfellow*

We've had heart-warming stories of new Companions:

Rosemary Penfold

Rosemary was welcomed as a Companion at the South West Easter Gathering. I have known her for over twenty years and she has been coming to the Group for about six years. She decided she would like to become a Companion after we hosted a Gathering/Taster Day for the Northumbria Community in September 2012. A few months later she was able to attend a Community Day at Lesley and Duncan MacLean's house and then embarked on the Novitiate.

Since having a second stroke twenty years ago Rosemary cannot always access the words she wants to say, she finds reading a very slow process and can only write with difficulty - but this never deters her from participating as fully as possible in anything she is involved with.

Because Rosemary didn't have access to a computer, I would visit her with each module and we would discuss the content, pray, and catch up on our news. In a way, going through the modules was a formality because to my mind Rosemary already embodied all that Northumbria Community stands for. She gives us great joy with her presence and rarely misses a group. She brings Christ to our meeting - He is with her always.

Liz Brobyn, Mentor

Carla Waterman

Google Maps refuses to calculate the distance between my home in Florida and Northumberland. Why did I become a Companion of a new monastic order not only 'up North', but across the ocean? I do 'alone' pretty well, much of the time. Yet I long for a significant 'together.' Here are some thoughts:

- While I've only been in Northumberland three times in the past five years, you never seem far away. Celtic Daily Prayer is a most practical spiritual gift.
- You have a rooted theological center and flexible practical edges. This combination I find to be both firm and welcoming.
- I'm not good at singing the Lord's song solo, especially as the land gets stranger.
- I need a solid Rule of life in a world full of trendy spiritual suggestions.
- I've seldom been quieter, nor laughed harder than when I'm with you.

This summer I was handed a once-in-a-lifetime treasure to be blessed and welcomed into the Northumbria Community at Acton Home Farm, surrounded by friends from both sides of the ocean. I can't yet find words for the meaning of that moment. But I catch a glimpse of why I became a Companion. It was time to embrace my piece of an unlikely 'together' that the Spirit is making in this season. I can't explain it. I'm just grateful to try and live inside of us. We are Community.

Carla



I first met Carla across the Nether Springs dining room table. It was one of those serendipitous meetings that so often happens in the Community. Carla and I had been emailing for months but had never met - neither of us knew the other would be at the house but there we were! So it seemed fitting that 4 years later we were again seated around the Nether Springs dining room table - this time to welcome Carla into the Community as a Companion. It was a joy to mentor Carla through the novitiate. She thinks like a theologian and I often incorporated her reflections into my own further understanding of the Rule. At times I wasn't sure who was mentoring whom!



It was also wonderful to be reunited with Janet - who took part in our Florida retreat several years ago and was also being welcomed as a Companion. It is unusual for Americans to have much of the 'together' in our alone and together journey. To find six of us not just together - but together at 'home' around the table where most of our formative Community conversations happened - made this a very special time indeed!

Sarah Berry (mentor for Carla)

Janet Atkins

When I was accepted as a Novice in The Community of St. Helena, an order of women in the USA, over thirty years ago, I began to realize what a wonderful gift the daily rhythm of monastic life was. I learned so much from my novitiate experience that stays with me to this day, and though it was not meant to be the life I would live, those lessons have followed me to the point where I have come full circle.

Two years ago, I began to seriously contemplate a commitment to the Northumbria Community. My first encounter with Community was while on a pilgrimage with a group from my parish. We had a storyteller join us on the tour whose name was Simon Airey. We talked about the Northumbria Community, and though we didn't get to visit Hetton Hall, I felt what I call a 'God moment' while we chatted. Later, I attended a Northumbria USA retreat in Orlando, Florida, facilitated by Sarah Berry and Margene Vessel, who would later become my Mentor. Then, along with a group of friends who compose the nucleus of our house church, I visited Acton Home Farm where I learned more about the Community and what would be involved in becoming a Companion.

The Novitiate was a very challenging and moving experience. I learned where I was vulnerable and available, and I learned some places I was not so available. I learned how to recognize paradox in a new way, and to accept all over again that most of life is not black and white. I learned that spirituality is a messy business, and that praying as I can, not as I think I should, is the only way I know how to pray. Through it all, the daily monastic rhythm helps me focus on my relationship with the Holy One.

My heart now belongs in Northumbria. Certainly, it is very much my spiritual home. After spending two weeks there this past summer, volunteering on the house team, and leading a retreat, I know I came as close to God as I have ever been. And it was all so normal. Even my reception as a Companion, along with Carla Waterman, was normal or 'homey', if you will. We all sat around the table in Brigid after dinner as she and I each made our commitment. And then we chatted, celebrated as a family might celebrate a birthday or other special event, and afterwards, just like family, we cleared away the dishes and tidied up the

kitchen. Even our departure was like being part of a family since our friend Norma Charlton took us on a sightseeing expedition before we had to go to the airport for our return journey. All in all, becoming a Companion of the Northumbria Community has given me a renewed focus and pattern for my life, so that with the Psalmist, I can say, *"I believe I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."*

*O wait for the Lord!
Have courage and wait,
wait for the Lord."*

Janet Atkins

Thoughtful, reflective and embracing the Rule in the every day joys and in the messiness of life...

These are a few of my summary words after walking with Janet this past year as she made her way through the Novitiate process. Janet and I had the privilege of meeting at the 2012 Northumbria Community retreat in Florida. It was nice to have met her in person, because for the next year all of our communication was done on the phone. Her background as an English teacher made for rich and, at times, poetic reflections on the modules.

It was a beautiful thing for her to enter into the Community over the summer. The timing was perfect. She had already been scheduled to lead a retreat at the House, and the Berrys were there to see Carla Waterman, a fellow American, be welcomed. I was with them in spirit, and my heart is still with her and her family as we all travel together on this journey and *'sing the Lord's song in a strange land.'*

Margene Vessel (mentor for Janet)

We asked Pete Askew to update us about

Life and Developments at Nether Springs

It's hard to believe that it's been nearly four years since Nether Springs moved out of Hetton Hall to its current home at Acton Home Farm. In some ways it feels like ten years and in other ways it's almost like yesterday.

I suppose that this is largely because there has been a huge number of things to figure out in the new space, things that take time, such as the planning and planting of the gardens, the pondering about the chapel, the figuring out of what home feels like here and how best to offer hospitality, the prayerful waiting for artwork for the walls, now received, to name but a few. But it's also because, in the midst of all of this, there have been things that have been there from the start, a Rule of Life, a rhythm of the day, an ethos to embrace, timeless things. Above all, it's the people who come and seek God here, stepping out of busy or confusing lives and slowing down, pausing,

reflecting, laughing and crying, finding 'home' and Companions for the journey. All of these things in some way being a fulfilment of the purpose of Nether Springs as it offers heart, home, hospitality, and hope, and continues to build on the foundations of old. Ernie Whalley, one of our Community Visitors, made the comment that the apple trees that we planted in the walled garden when we moved in are symbolic of what he sees here - a carefully tended rootedness that is bearing new fruit in this new season of the Community's life.

Nether Springs feels different each year as the space develops and grows. The best way I can describe this is that it feels as though we're living into the space more fully, that it's being more and more of what it's intended to be in this place. As a Community we've got to know the place and the prayers said here have shaped it somehow; people often comment on how full of peace it seems, and to use a well worn phrase, 'a thin place'. One of the things I'm particularly thankful for is the large numbers of people who come here from all over the world, and from very diverse backgrounds, who are not part of the Community, but who have found rest and refreshment with us for their journey. *Cont'd over*

This, I think, is a healthy sign of the outward looking hospitality that is one of the charisms of Community. We are blessed with this space that we can offer to others for the purposes of God.

In terms of the physical developments at Nether Springs, I am often reminded by returning guests of how things have changed in the last few years. It's easy to lose sight of this when you live with it every day. There have been three particular delights this year: the completion of a new chapel in the woodland; the gardens in front of the house which have been ablaze with coloured flowers and butterflies, and we've managed to take some significant steps in being greener as far as our energy consumption is concerned.

The 'lean-to' Chapel was completed in March with the help



of quite a number of Community folk and local tradespeople. Made out of an old agricultural building in the woodlands next to the walled garden, it has no electricity and is heated by a wood-burning stove and lit by candles. Wooden bench seating, covered in sheep fleece and deep red cushions, is built around the warm gold coloured walls to form a gathering 'in the round'. Icons and candles are scattered around the walls and in the middle of the pine floor stands a wooden altar. It feels prayed in, a sacred space.

Last summer the St Alban's Community Group came for a work week and widened one of the large flower beds in the front garden; the removed turf was used to create a labyrinth in the walled garden. The flowerbed was dug over, and replanted last September, and this spring both flowerbeds in the front garden have come into their own and really feel established. They have made a significant

difference to the gardens and have been enjoyed by many visitors.



The other major development at Nether Springs this year has been the switch over to biomass heating instead of oil. This was installed by our landlords as part of a community heating project and burns waste wood chips. It has reduced our heating bills and more importantly is much better for the environment. Alongside this, we have changed all of our lightbulbs to LED, reducing our lighting power consumption by approx 60%, and have installed Far Infrared Heating in the garden rooms - a new technology that uses 300w heaters instead of the 3.5kw wall heaters that we used to have. Both of these initiatives have cost some money to install, but they will pay for themselves quite quickly, and again are great for the environment.

In reflecting back on the last few years I think particularly about the men and women who have come to Nether Springs to serve on the 'House Team' and been Community in a particular way for a season of a couple of weeks to a couple of years. The work here is often hidden, and can be quite demanding physically, spiritually and emotionally. Without them this would all be impossible. We are delighted that Ben and Lucie from Belgium will be with us for another year, and that Andrew and Lucie Joy from Middlesbrough will be joining us in January for an extended time too.

So, as I reflect on the last few years, and think about the people who have come to Nether Springs, I have a continuing sense of God's purpose for this place, and a recognition of His provision for it too. Please continue to pray for the life and work of Nether Springs and give thanks for the gift that Acton Home Farm is for us.

Pete Askew

Anne Quaderer is a Community Companion, part of Northumbria Community NE USA.

The Wonder of God

Recently JRR Tolkien's book trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* and his book *The Hobbit*, have been made into motion pictures. I have looked again at *The Hobbit* (a sort of introduction to the trilogy). It is the tale of a small fellow, a hobbit named Bilbo Baggins. Hobbits are one of the peoples who inhabit Middle-earth. We are told that they are

simple rural folk who love peace and quiet, and growing things. They enjoy their simple occupations and routine days with routine meals which are many and often. Quite an ordinary life. In fact, they are looked upon by their peers as being more respectable if they don't have things happen to them which are out of the ordinary.



Things like adventures.
Cont'd over

However, in the beginning of *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins is said to have, on his mother's side, the Tooks, a strain of fairy blood in him. The Tooks were of a type that *did* have adventures and it is because of this that Bilbo (although he seemingly does not want to come near an adventure of any kind) finds himself attracted to a very great adventure which is presented to him. The book goes on to tell what happens to Bilbo, as he and others partake of this adventure.

Perhaps most of us are like hobbits, in that we like to lead simple and predictable lives. We do not like our lives



interrupted, especially by the unexpected. Yet, if we think about it, as Christians we have, so to speak, a different strain in us than those in the world. We have been *born from above*. We have about us an 'other worldliness'. God is forever desiring to take us on new adventures with Him. To bring us into the realms of the Spirit and to reveal His mysteries to us...the heights and depths of His character and to participate in His creativity.

Perhaps many of us find ourselves to be quite hobbit-like in nature....wanting things to be safe and under control. We may even want God to be predictable. But could it be that the Lord calls us from time to time to venture beyond

our comfort zones and to launch out in the Spirit.

*Leave me alone with God as much as may be.
As the tide draws the waters close in upon the shore,
Make me an island, set apart,
alone with you, God, holy to you.
Then with the turning of the tide,
Prepare me to carry your presence
to the busy world beyond,
The world that rushes in on me
till the waters come again
and fold me back to you.*

Adventures anyone?

Anne Quaderer



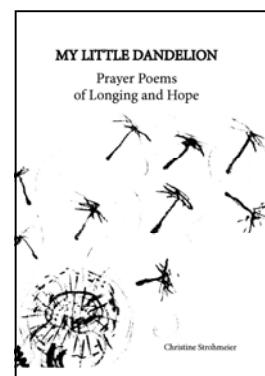
My Little Dandelion, Prayer Poems of Longing and Hope

Christine Strohmeier (available from Community resources: £6)

Fresh off the press is this jewel of a collection of prayer poems, written by someone who has drawn deeply from her life experience of God as love, and who writes with authenticity, intimacy, and passion. Christine has a rare gift, of being able to express in her writing the overflowing and enriching relationship of love between the human soul and the Beloved, in a way which draws the reader into a deeper place. Here is a writer who is acquainted with the reality of life, the depth of longing, grief and loss, the giving and receiving, wounding and refining of a deeply loving relationship, who also finds rich resources of hope and life in it all which draw her even closer to her beloved Lord. There is a generosity and openness in the writing, which is sensitively enriched by the beautiful drawings of Ute Plank, and helpful background notes on the context out of which each poem was birthed. They are poems to walk with, wrestle with, and be nourished by, which touch the soul in the areas that are beyond words, and are indeed prayers as well as poems.

The title is derived from an insight that the little we feel we have to give to God is, through Christ, magnified and transformed into a beautiful bouquet of flowers. What we

might discard as being only a small weed, is exquisitely attractive, and of inestimable value to God, and as we learn to receive ourselves and all that we offer as such, we will grow, nourished by the awareness of our eternal beauty and value in God's loving eyes. Christine explores the mystery and intimacy of God's love, the nurturing motherhood of God's nature, the pain of grief, and of birthing new life, identity and awareness of our shadow side, the eternal sense of belonging in Christ. I was particularly touched by 'Living Water', which explores the thirst and longing of Jesus, and our inner thirst for him, which I read whilst at Nether Springs, in a week when we journeyed with the woman at the well (John 4) in the daily meditations.



Those who know Christine as a gifted retreat guide, (see her article in the last edition of Caim) won't be surprised at the revitalising spirituality of these prayer poems, which resonate with our Community Rule of life. I commend them to all who are longing for a deeper relationship with the living God.

Sue McWhinney

Christine will be leading another retreat, 'Hearing the voice of the beloved' ~ 16-18 November at Nether Springs



The smaller-than-usual newsy bit!

Sue Powell of the South Wales Group met up in Porthcawl in July with Cathy Hutcheon of the Carrying Place, Toronto. "We shared thoughts and ideas from our respective groups and enjoyed a pub lunch. Lovely to connect in this way for mutual support."



Date for Your Diary

Saturday 15 November is the next quarterly North West gathering at St John's, Yealand Conyers, starting with Middyay Office. More info and directions from Di Smith ~ Tel: 01524 782341 dianesmith1@me.com.

We asked Andy Raine to tell us the story behind the **Meditation for DAY 13**



These Achsah and Othniel scriptures have been such a treasure for us here in Northumbria! From my earliest days on the Island working alongside Douglas Graham at Marygate House and involved with prayer-groups and numerous preaching appointments on the mainland we had identified the Island with visible Upper Springs, but recognised a need for both

Upper and Nether Springs to water a spiritually dry and desolate area.

As time went on this picture of the Upper and Nether Springs gave language to John and Linda Skinner and me as they looked for a place that could be a home for the 'Nether Springs', the establishing of which would unlock my own return to the Island. In the Priory over Easter Workshop we would sing and dance 'Lord, give me also springs of water that I may overflow.' There were already places where the Nether Springs were evident – Cuthbert's Cave or Old Bewick, for instance, but mostly it was hard-digging to release the hidden springs out of the land by making it a prayed-in place. When Ferg Matthews first

came to Hetton Hall he exclaimed 'But there's nothing here!' – and the same has often been said of other key places where wells needed uncovering. It's interesting that an extra spring was discovered as work was done on Hetton Hall which helped the supply of water for increased numbers of visitors. With a new and different mother-house being provided in more recent times and the intention of carrying much of the same spirit and ethos with us, the transition still needed to be made and marked.



So the journey walking from Hetton to Acton was an Achsah pilgrimage, asking God to help us release those depths of prayer in a new location.

The Upper Springs speaks to us of tangible presence, mission, torch-carrying, launching of small boats, movement, sending out, ripples spreading outwards, the Shadow of Aidan. The Nether Springs speaks of going deeper, of contemplation and silence, holding the Presence, stillness, an intercession that ripples inwards, and the carrying of Cuthbert. Both springs have the same source, and both irrigate a needy land. Our job, like Achsah, was to go to the Father, to cry for the desert, and ask for the springs. *Andy Raine*



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