Sunday, January 23, 2005

I’ve been trying to understand what “evil” means, so I read part of a book recommended by a friend. Goldsmith says that Adam and Eve’s “fall from Grace” was the acceptance of the belief in two powers—good and evil; i.e., the act of consciousness” (12). I guess that if one perceives the Whole, there is no good or evil—all is God, so the very idea of evil is an incorrect one. Yet people do choose to act in horrible ways, so what is that—where does it come from?

Friday, March 11

I am so “ripe” for another conversion experience that I am a little afraid/wary of reading about Adventism—it isn’t the way I want to go. But I am powerfully curious, drawn to visit again (though not for communion and foot washing). In her book about conversion, Griffin wrote,

There are many kinds of conversion experience. Conversion is an inner change of heart. The whole course of the convert’s life is altered by the awakening of faith. A whole new life, inexorable, relentless, and invisible...is set in motion.... Evelyn Underhill, in Practical Mysticism, as quoted in Griffin, called conversion a ‘violent shattering and rearranging of the self, which can now begin its true career of correspondence with the reality it has perceived.’ Griffin said: it is the work of a lifetime... and quoted John McCall, ‘it’s a process, a continuing series of events.’
Griffin: It is to know a reality which demands a response of us, and that response is one of love” (21-24).

Paraphrasing C.S. Lewis as quoted in Griffin: each choice turns us toward harmony with God, other beings, and oneself, or toward war (30).

But this euphoria—which accompanies so many great and positive life decisions—cannot last for long. The day-to-day realities crowd in; the celestial music dies away; the energy which has been set loose within us has to be integrated into life in some practical way. ... There are practical choices to be made...one example is the need to turn what has been mostly a private dialogue with God into a real commitment to communal worship. For some, this change is painful (152). One of the most striking characteristics of the continuing conversions is a growth in the ability to find pleasure in ordinary experience (167-8).

I have experienced both the shattering and the euphoria; I find communal worship is more of a duty than “pleasure”—I find it difficult to go to Friends Meeting more often than not—it is hard work to be so “present.” But I seem to be charged with finding a path of harmony rather than war.

Sunday, March 13

I am afraid of being converted—of “falling in love” with Seventh-day Adventism. Yet, realistically, my goal is to learn—part of my ministry of listening, learning, and teaching—and to understand my own faith and practice within the Religious Society of Friends better. One of the ways of
learning is to dive in, to become as a child, to open up. I have to make the “leap of faith” to get where I’m going! Remember that the greatness of the reaction or resistance to a change indicates the largeness of the change occurring.

The SDA church is unobtainable, unavailable, and so it is perfectly safe for me to “fall in love” with it; I couldn’t—morally, ethically, and integrally—become a member. All of the tenets of Friends make spiritual, intellectual, and moral/ethical sense to me. They fit who I am, how I understand God, and relate to people and this earth. Yet I am feeling called toward exploration of Adventism. I feel fascinated, powerfully curious, drawn in. I felt similarly when I learned about the Episcopal Church, yet it just strengthened my Quaker ideas and beliefs. The only way “out” is through.

**Thursday, March 17**

Met with a Bible Instructor who listened to and answered my questions about Adventism, and who tried to do so without proselytizing. I found the certainty of belief, black and white thinking, and absolutism to be disconcerting. This instructor knows a tremendous amount and has the zeal and the convictions of the converted. I found the beliefs in Creationism, the literal 24-hour/6-day creation and only 6000+/- years of existence, and the denial of evolution entirely unsettling, since I grew up without any of these kinds of beliefs or with any trust in religious fervor.

The Seventh-day Adventists arose from the Millerites in the 1840’s. William Miller construed that the time of the Advent (the second coming of Jesus) would occur in 1843 or 1844, based on the prophecy of Daniel 8:14. Miller used the suggestion from Ezekiel that each
day represent a year, and further calculated that the Advent would happen on October 10, 1844 (Numbers). The Millerites fell apart when the Advent didn’t occur, but the Seventh-day Adventists formed around the prophecies of Ellen G. White (EGW), which explain the date as the beginning of the preparation of a heavenly sanctuary.

Despite this interpretation of the Advent, Miller and the Adventists insisted on a literal Creationism, i.e., adhering to the 24-hour day, 6-day week creation of the earth in Genesis (which is why Jews and Adventists have Sabbath on Saturday—designating the first day of the week as Sunday, on the seventh day, i.e., Saturday, God rested). Apparently the interpretation of one day equaling a year is used only for prophecy, i.e., looking forward, not for history, i.e., looking back. While the Adventists read the prophecies in the Book of Revelation as events which will happen literally, there are some historical Bible passages that Adventists interpret. SDAs seem to believe that all apparent contradictions in the Bible can be resolved by a correct reading of all of the passages relevant to the question, and they refer to this right reading as “truth.” Jewish scholars consider the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 concerning the restoration of the desecrated sanctuary to have been fulfilled—the sanctuary was restored within the number of days specified. However, Miller’s definition of “sanctuary” was different. It seems like a paradox, that the beginning of Adventism had such a contradiction at its heart between reading literally and interpreting, and that this inconsistency continues today.

Shall I talk with other SDAs about some of my questions?

Later, I realized that I do fit with Quakers and won’t be converted by the SDA evangelical zeal.
Saturday, March 19

Was EGW simply “envisioning” the Book of Revelation? I watched the DVD called Final Events, and wondered, “Who believes such rubbish?” It has some homophobic statements, scapegoating gays and lesbians. That alone is enough to put me off.

SDAs have no creed except the Bible, but all members are expected to subscribe to the doctrines of the imminent return of Christ, seventh-day Sabbath, the divine inspiration of EGW’s visions, the unconscious state of the dead, and the importance of the date 10/22/1844, and to practice immersion baptism, foot-washing, and tithing.

Sunday, March 20

These experiences with the SDA church are helping me to understand my own spirituality and faith community better, and are helping me to learn a new language. The SDAs treat EGW’s visions and the visions in the Book of Revelation as literal instead of metaphorical. Bull and Lockhart wrote about the beginning of Adventism: “It was presumed that language was perspecious [clear]...and that words corresponded directly to objects. Language could be trusted.” And the Adventists believed that EGW’s visions were literal (25). EGW was a prophet, but what that means as far as her “authority” goes is another matter. SDAs believe that the Bible consists of “revealed proposition,” (statements of truth disclosed by God and transcribed exactly as they were heard or seen) not just writing inspired by God (30). Yet, they are not fundamentalists and also distinguish between themselves and evangelicals. I understood one Adventist’s explanation to mean that they don’t believe in an eternal hell, a secret rapture, a second chance for those “left behind,” or predestination. Yet they do read the Bible literally,
putting them into the broadest category of fundamentalism, and they do believe in converting others through both personal and public evangelistic efforts.

Marcus Borg states in *The Heart of Christianity* that the Bible is a human response to God and is the product of two historical communities—ancient Israel and the early Christians. It is not God’s witness to God, but two peoples’ witness to their life with God. So the Bible is not a divine product, not absolute truth or God’s revealed truth, but rather is related to the time and place of its writing, and uses the language and concepts of those particular cultures. The laws of the Bible result from the ethics of the two communities; they are not God’s laws for all time. The documents which now make up the Bible were not sacred when they were written, but were declared sacred over time—500 years for the Old Testament and 300 for the New. Yet the Bible is at the heart of Christianity. It is human in origin, sacred in status and function, but not infallible, literal, or absolute. It was written to and for the people of its times, not to and for us. Much of its language is metaphorical. Some events are historical, but it is the metaphorical, “larger” story behind the historical which matters most—e.g., exile and return and images of the human condition. The metaphors speak to human truths (even if they are not always factual reports). Genesis was *Israel’s* stories of creation, not God’s. The underlying truths signify that God is the creator of all that exists, the creation is good, we are created in God’s image, and we are imperfect and want to be united with God. The commandments indicate that we should live balanced and ethical lives, in relation with God and people (Borg, chapters 1-3). This seems closer to what members of the Religious Society of Friends believe, rather than reading the Bible literally, and reflects my own feelings and thoughts, so very different from the Adventists’. 
Saturday, March 26

Only a few years ago, I was entirely unwilling to call myself Christian, yet here I am. But in the “emerging paradigm” (not traditional Christianity), as described by Marcus Borg. I don’t like being in chaos, but do like being at the edge when and where chaos is beginning to sort itself into patterns.

Sunday, March 27

It’s disconcerting to be pulled out of my comfort zone, and difficult to try to discern what the call means. I’ve been through this kind of thing before—I always feel chaotic until things sort themselves out. But I feel like the patterns are becoming clear.

Thursday, March 31

Dreamt of trying to “solve” SDA issues for myself, and of trying to reconcile coastal (more liberal) versus Midwestern (more conservative) views.

Friday, April 1

I suspect that my calling is to establish relationships with more “traditional” and evangelical faith communities in some way—Evangelical Friends, perhaps.

Douglas Morgan wrote that Miller “built his theories on the basis of a direct encounter with Scripture, free of interference from clergy, commentaries, or creeds” (20). This sounds much like Quakers. Rufus Jones’ chapter on “The Family of Love” founded by Henry Nicholas in England in the mid-1500’s (preceding Quakers by a century), describes the Familists’ beliefs that
“ceremonies and services are mere vain husks” – that the religious life is an inward experience of God incorporated into the soul plus a moral life in daily walk and conversation. Like the Anabaptists and Quakers who followed, Familists did not swear oaths, nor did they engage in or support war or capital punishment. They saw the Scriptures as only “shadows” since they were merely words, and true understanding of God is inward and wordless. Familists were anti-baptism since believers who follow Jesus’ example become baptized in the Holy Ghost (without needing a rite). They denied original sin, condemned all war, prohibited the bearing of arms, held that all days were the Lord’s days (none more holy than another), and stated that hell is in the heart and conscience. Jones states that by the middle of the 17th century the Quakers, with clearer insight and with far wiser leadership than the Familists had, were presenting all that was valuable in the “Family of Love,” with a broader expression of common human brotherhood and with a more positive insistence on the necessity of carrying religion into daily life (435). It is really interesting, seeing the historical development of Friends. Taking the scriptures literally gets in the way of the direct experience of God!

**Wednesday, April 13**

Am I crazy, being so involved in the SDA stuff? During Sabbath hours (sunset Friday to sunset Saturday), they try not to spend money or go to “commercial” establishments—no eating out, buying gas, going to concerts, etc. They could go to the Symphony on Saturday nights during the winter, but not in the spring or summer before sunset. One couldn’t be a professional musician unless in the Adventist music field. It’s a totally different approach to life. No attending professional conferences which take place on Friday evening through Saturday night. Yet this
practice does lead to simplicity, a slower pace, and mindfulness. It reminds me to seek balance in my life—creative activities, quiet time, and intense learning. Practicing my ministry of writing, doing the healing work. Somehow, this reminds me to be who I am, deeply, and not apologetically. But how can Adventists deny science and advances in knowledge?

SDAs feel themselves to be called “out” of the world, (both like and unlike Friends, who felt themselves to be called out of the world during the “Quietist” period in the eighteenth century and who were called back “into” the world by the revivalists in the nineteenth century). SDAs are taught not to socialize with outsiders (Seventh-Day Adventist Kinship). It seems to me as if, in waiting for the Advent, in the belief that they are called out of the world, and in the apocalyptic views, SDAs are experiencing God’s absence rather than presence or immanence. The view that God is external and while Christ is expected in the second Advent, is not currently present in the world, does seem to focus on a very poignant separation from the Spirit. I have experienced a sense of disconnection during periods of depression but the Quaker emphasis on the immediacy of the Light of Christ within has given me sustenance during the darkness.

Thursday, April 14

We have to let energy, whether positive or negative, flow through us, not let it get trapped inside. To me, that seems to be the idea behind EGW’s emphasis on hydropathy (i.e., hydrotherapy), eating whole foods, etc. If she had bottled up her visions, she would have sickened and died. God spoke; she answered, wrote down what she saw and understood, and brought these things to others. Realizing that God is within us, as well as all around us, “equalizes the pressure” when we experience God’s call—we usually “hear” it as the “still, small
voice”—yet if we don’t heed it (and even when we do), it grows into a steady pressure, and can be clamorous.

Plain and durable dress was important to EGW (Numbers)—so why do the SDAs dress up so much at services? Apparently they’re taught that it is to show respect for God, that it is traditional, and some people have “Sabbath clothes” which help set the tone for the day and helps set it apart. SDAs don’t wear any jewelry (similar to Conservative Friends -- “Plain Quakers”), including wedding rings, but some women do wear make-up and dye their hair, which seems like a contradiction to the testimony of simplicity.

**Friday, April 15**

EGW, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 291: “By communion with God in nature, the mind is uplifted, and the heart finds rest”—describes me, as a solitary.

I want to be “let off the hook” for awhile—relax from the SDA “investigation” and just be a Friend, in our non-Christocentric, non-Biblically-based, no-rule way.

**Saturday, April 16**

What I felt during Sabbath School was amazement at the depth of thinking. I expected the participants to stay on the surface level, but they went way beyond me—showed me up, put my stereotypes to shame. I was glad to have a Quaker friend present during the worship service. He said it was very like the Baptist services he had grown up with, though they’re very different now. The pastor remembered my name. I felt far more comfortable, happy, relaxed, open, and centered this time.
My presence in and of itself at SDA churches is a kind of ministry, as are the questions I ask. I bring what I've learned back to Friends Meeting in my written sermons, vocal ministry, listening and discernment, and ordinary conversations.

I can’t kneel. I can sing familiar songs without worrying about the words too much. I don’t have to say “amen.” I can pray silently. I can learn the vocabulary and use it. I can look for the connections between Seventh-day Adventism and Quakerism and not force similarities for the sake of unity—I can let the differences stand.

In EGW’s vision concerning the SDA church’s relationship to the World Council of Churches and ecumenism, she wrote that Christ calls for unity (within a Spiritual basis), and yet, there must be allowance for diversity within that unity—there can’t be uniformity—because each individual must maintain his own relationship with God. There can be oneness in diversity. SDAs must aim for unity yet do so without compromising their truth. (EGW’s truth is from the reformed tradition, with a literal reading of the Bible.) From my experience in Sabbath School, Adventists do emphasize deep thought about the Scripture and their faith, not shallowness of learning.

Sunday, April 17

Think of “salvation” and “redemption” as reconnection with the Whole. My difficulties with SDA are mostly with the literalism—creationism, a young earth, the oppression of gays and lesbians, and the Book of Revelation. And as with all evangelicals/conservative Christians, they believe in the sinful nature of people and an unchangeable God. I believe God changes and grows with us and the universe. In Exodus 3:14, God names himself to Moses as “I am,” or “I am who I am
becoming." God is always in flux, will ever be changing. We change, God changes, and we change again. Each stirring of the wind, each movement of the leaves, and each chirp of a bird shows us the breath of God, the spirit of life. With each inhalation our life blood is renewed. We breathe, we grow. Not only living things have cycles of change—a star is born and dies, rocks are formed in various ways, are worn down, and eventually become sand. Everything we know changes or is modified. How could the essential, underlying and completing spirit which is God not change? God assigns himself neither identity nor definition of his relationship with us, but simply a statement of being. Nothing which is can be static forever. To be is to change. God expands with each of us as we discover our lives.

SDAs also believe in blood atonement/sacrifice—which is a very violent idea about God; a theology of fear—fear of annihilation if the right rules aren't followed (or so it seems when I listen to ordinary laypeople, despite official theology that God is always forgiving, never turns His back on us and won’t "strike us down with lightning", that nothing we can do can separate us from God’s grace)—and in Satan as a literal being and embodiment of all evil, opposite to God. I think SDAs aren’t alone in these particular beliefs, but they are representative of evangelical Christianity in general. I do not believe—never have believed—in Satan—I tend to see God as the all-inclusive connections in the universe, within us and encompassing everything. My brain works the way that brain researchers and theologians have both defined as "mystical," which is not at all dualistic but more holistic (thus God as whole, not as only and entirely good, with a corresponding bad being/fallen angel). So where do bad thoughts come from? From my mind, from my experiences....
Wednesday, April 20

Somehow deep down, I fear that I need to follow the “rules” or God will reject me. Even though I believe in God as the connection between all things, and don’t believe in hell or Satan. But I am loved, do love myself, and am connected to the Spirit.

Thursday, April 21

I feel released from trying to live the SDA “rules” (keeping the Sabbath, no alcohol, no jewelry, eating vegetarian) and also feel like rebelling against them. There are good things there. But Friends are my spiritual home. Writers like Mulholland and Gulley, Marcus Borg, and Jack Spong come so much closer to the ways I believe. But why do we like to be scared and to believe that these are the end times (e.g., TV shows such as Revelations, movies, books on this topic)?

Saturday, April 23

Went to Sabbath School this morning, to a different class than the usual one—there was more preaching than conversation. I felt strange, alienated. It wasn’t meaningful. I could never belong there. What we call mental illness they call demons. They have such strange ideas, to my way of thinking.

I asked about the flag at the front of the church sanctuary. Presently, the emphasis on separation of church and state means neither is imposing itself on the other, but still includes respect for the country and government in which the church resides. There is a flag at the front of the Sanctuary in the churches, and SDA school children say the Pledge of Allegiance. Some people vote against the Republicans or Conservative Right because they believe that the
Conservative Right and Catholics are going to unite to impose their beliefs on everyone as a state religion and create Sunday laws, which would contravene the seventh-day Sabbath. Yet a pastor should never be heard to advocate for a particular political party from the pulpit. To be in God’s community doesn’t mean that one isn’t a citizen too. Yet having a governmental flag in the church seems very wrong to me—our first (and sometimes only) allegiance is to God, not to a government.

Douglas Morgan describes the SDA’s view of government thus: “God’s reign must come through destruction and re-creation, not progressive improvement.” This seems to underlie an interesting history of SDA relationship with the U.S. government and alliances with other Christian political movements. Because they felt “called out of the world,” believing in the immanent return of Christ, Civil War-era Adventists were conscientious objectors; because they believed that all races are equal in Christ, they were also abolitionists (albeit somewhat reluctantly) (Numbers). After the 1950’s, Adventists began to refer to themselves as “non-combatants.” They still believed in pacifism, yet wished both to display their distinctness from the Jehovah’s Witnesses (who were adamant conscientious objectors and refused to allow their children to say the Pledge of Allegiance in school) and to show that the SDAs weren’t disrespectful of the U.S. government (Morgan).

The Bible Instructor seems to enjoy my questions. Too bad I don’t enjoy the answers.

Has this been an infatuation with a church, and have I fallen “out of love” with it? Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God. And I did certainly feel joy. Seventh-day Adventism is a way of life, just as Quakerism is.... What I want is to let the light shine through me and spill over, and to be able to help others who are in pain or need.
It's like being an anthropological participant-observer.

**Sunday, April 24**

My gifts of ministry are: listening and discernment; learning and teaching—learning both about other faiths and practices, writing essays, teaching about Quakers; occasional vocal ministry; healing. As far as outreach goes, my presence as a Friend is a kind of “witness.” The kinds of questions I ask may lead SDAs to think more deeply about how they connect to God and practice their faith; I did a program for the Episcopalian Women’s Spirituality Group—will I do one for the SDAs? What kind of reporting back to the Meeting is appropriate—verbal or written, to Ministry & Counsel?

What I did at the Episcopal Church: from 1999-2002 I performed a ministry of music; I participated in a Women’s Spirituality Group 1999-2005, and facilitated a program on Quaker Silence in the Worship Sharing format. What did that group do for me? I had a member of that church on my recent Clearness Committee; studying with them helped me understand Quaker history; I wrote the four “Sermons of a Shaman” from my interactions with them; they encouraged my music; they encouraged me to read spiritual Christian literature on spiritual direction and companioning, contemplative life and prayer, radical Christianity, and women’s spirituality; and together we attended programs like Jack Spong’s talks and Margaret Guenther’s workshop on prayer.

The Religious Education director at the Episcopal church noted that she thought that I brought a new perspective on the life and witness of another community that they did not know much about and that their community was blessed by my presence. She believed that I
enlightened them, by being willing to share without expecting the others to become part of my church. While I was willing to stand up for what I believed in even when it varied from the others’ views, I listened to other voices, clarified my own views, and found that which is enriching in a variety of traditions—especially through music, which is universal, above and beyond any one faith/religion/spirituality.

How did that affect my participation in Friends? A Friend and I began “spiritual companioning;” I suggested the meetings for healing, and I suggested involvement with the Interfaith Thanksgiving.

What has been the result of my time with the SDAs? I’ve gained a far better understanding of theologically conservative and evangelical Christianity, and a better understanding of Quakers.

**Sunday, May 1**

Have I not gone deep enough into Seventh-day Adventism or Quakerism? I need to write a comparison/contrast essay. I am feeling as if I’m only at a midpoint here. Midpoint of what, exactly?

**Tuesday, May 3**

I want to understand how SDAs decide when to interpret and when to read literally (if there is any rational reasoning).
**Sunday, May 8**

What is the purpose of going into the SDA church? To be open, to learn? It’s not the place for me—too restrictive. Wait and see what shows up in my writing?

**Friday, May 20**

Went to Sabbath School again this morning, and was once again surprised by the questions and answers the participants came up with about the section of Mark we read. I had never thought to ask myself why Jesus did such and such. On my way out, the pastor was trying to remember my first name, and recalled my surname when I reminded him of “Kim.” I added, “the Quaker minister,” and that was also how I introduced myself to one of the Sabbath School members. At the very least, I can be a witness to the presence of Friends among them.

**Tuesday, May 24**

I wondered, “Why this particular SDA Church?” I answered myself, “Because I know a couple of people, because the pastor makes an effort to remember my name, because I liked the associate pastor’s preaching, because I like the questions and answers the people in Sabbath School come up with (I didn’t connect with the preaching version at all), and because it’s easy to get to. Because the worship service at another, smaller SDA church seemed chaotic, and the people were actually too friendly—I don’t like being hugged by total strangers, though I do like folks to introduce themselves.

But to be fair, maybe I should visit the local other churches too, especially one of the Hispanic ones.
I'm called into some type of ministerial relationship with the SDA church, as part of my various ministries as a Friend, and as I was called into one particular Episcopal church. When one is called, one has to answer...figuring out how to respond is the hard part. But I have the support of and clearance from my congregation, and they're writing a formal "minute" of such introducing me to the SDA church in general, not any particular congregation.

*May [undated]*

The idea of Sabbath being a single and complete day of rest, relaxation, and joyfulness, a day for practicing that which brings us closer to God, is a wonderfully simple idea in this increasingly busy and complex world. My question for the Friends is: is each of us practicing the idea of Sabbath as holy connection every day? How can we live out our understanding of Sabbath every day? (From Sabbath School discussion: if there were no people, there would be no need for Sabbath. Jesus, as fully God, created both people and the Sabbath. The many rules of Orthodox and Hasidic Judaism take concentration away from the meaning of Sabbath.)

*May [undated]*

The SDA emphases on racial equality and the sinfulness of gay, lesbian, or bisexual (GLB) relationships seem very contradictory. While it seems that slavery was condoned in the Old Testament, Jesus came for **everyone**. All of EGW’s arguments for racial equality could so easily be used for GLB equality. Adventist and evangelical views elevate human prejudices above God's law of love. See Mark 7:7-9.
**Friday, June 10**

I never consciously knew, pre-SDA involvement, that many people live their lives with real fears about the horrible ending of the world and the hope for a totally perfect heaven afterward. That they live with the fear of God’s judgment on them and hope for God’s vengeance on everyone who has hurt them (”justice”). I never understood God in that way and still don’t. But I know many people who want any new leader to be the Messiah and for everything to be miraculously perfect when the new leader begins. They act as if Judgment Day is coming—they act chaotically, striking out—and it’s all fear-based. Maybe they fear that now they’ll be held accountable and they’ll have to change. Maybe those who haven’t been living with honor and integrity have something to fear, if only change. These are people who create “tribulations” – emotional volcanic eruptions, tornadoes, earthquakes, boils, etc., which hurt themselves and those close to them.

Why don’t most people experience God in a mystical way? They’d be more compassionate if they felt/experienced the connection with the All. They wouldn’t be as fearful.

**Saturday, June 11**

I feel I have to slow down to a contemplative crawl. Listen, do nothing, be. Be with God. “Be still and know that I am God.”

I am awake, aware, resting in God. Wondering why we put so much emphasis on two peoples’ (the Old Testament Israelite and early Christian) understanding of God and their writings about that knowledge. What makes those particular people’s perceptions “sacred?” I agree with the Friends’ concept that we can find sacredness in writings ancient and
contemporary, that there is not one right interpretation, but that which touches us deeply is of God.

Why is it that I don’t want to use titles with other people (because they are hierarchical), or for God (such as “lord” or “father”—because these are patriarchal, male-centered), yet crave the title of “minister” for myself? This is an ongoing struggle with my need to be recognized. A friend reminds me to remember that these masculine words come from people/our language, not from God – and asks if I am withholding honor/respect from God just because of our limited language choices? Honestly, I don’t think of “honoring” or “respecting” God, but of being one, listening and trying to act based on the understanding that comes from that perceived union. …

Monday, June 13

In the Adult Sabbath School Guide discussion of Mark 12:26-7, Jesus says that God is the God of those who are dead (Abraham, etc.), and that God is God of the living. Is that supposed to mean that there is an afterlife, that the dead are living and therefore resurrected? A contradiction, a paradox. To say that God is for both the dead and the living, how does that translate into the dead are living? If a=b and a=c, does that mean that b=c? Can’t remember enough logic/geometry to know.

Everything and everyone continues to live in God, who exists in the present, past, and future (everything all at once), yet who defines himself in the present tense only (“I am”). So that is a way of understanding the “afterlife” – that we’ll be cognizant of everything all at once, and so “alive” when we’re (re-)united with God.

What is the difference between a mystic and a prophet?
According to the definition in the New Oxford Bible introductions to the Prophets (862-5 OT), Daniel (1126 OT), and Apocalyptic Literature (362 NT), EGW was a prophet. Prophets are persons capable of transcending themselves and therefore are able to voice a message other than their own; they are channels for the speech of God, albeit expressed through their own personal experiences; they are advocates for marked, daring, radical, subversive, and unpopular social policies—they are advocates for fairness in social relations and a pure worship of God as an alternative to the dominant social and religious mores; they exercise enormous imagination in discernment and articulation—redescribing reality and construing social experience in new ways. They leave behind a powerful and enduring influence and vision of reality. They are not predictors or fortune-tellers. But they do believe that God’s intention for the future is identifiable and knowable, and that this intention can be reliably expected, because the character of God is known and reliable. God’s intention for well-being (i.e., for fertility, peace, justice, righteousness, and joy) is certain. The community must live in moral coherence rooted in God’s rule, and the present moment is critical.

Numbers’ book on the health reforms of EGW reveals that she was hit on the head with a rock in childhood and was in a coma for 3 weeks; also her father was a “hatter” (i.e., made hats, which probably involved a mercury process) and EGW may have had mercury poisoning. Could her visions have been hallucinations from possible mercury poisoning or from the blow to the head, which could have caused a kind of temporal lobe epilepsy? Does it matter why or how she experienced her visions—whether because of a physical effect or because God reached out to her? According to everything I’ve read she was a prophet, albeit not a perfect one: EGW’s later
visions overturned earlier ones and she changed stances on issues like medical help for illness and foods which were acceptable to eat. Roy E. Graham wrote that in EGW,

we have an illustration of an individual who was very sensitive to what can be described as a concept of holiness in her experience. She was intensely devout and concerned to do what she believed was God’s will for her both personally and in ministry to others. These convictions combined with a strong personality to produce a leader who was to exert a major influence in Seventh-day Adventism both in her life and subsequently through her writings. While she saw her task as primarily within the framework of her own denomination, she produced material which she offered to a wider audience... (210).

If the prophets are those who are capable of transcending themselves and voicing messages of the Spirit, and are advocates of daring, radical social policies and a “pure” worship of God, then Friends taken as a whole are prophets. Certainly George Fox was. Inarguably, we try to live in moral coherence, i.e., with integrity and very much in the present. Quakers, as a whole, are a prophetic group. We believe so strongly in the spirit of prophecy that our worship is the epitome of opening ourselves to the voice of God. We believe that each person can encounter God directly, without the need for a paid, ordained clergy. We teach each other the discernment process for vocal ministry, and we practice group discernment or interpretation/analysis of prophecies—or as we call them, “concerns” or “leadings.”

I understand God to be the connections between every being, to be the Whole, everything all at once, existence. A mystic is one who has experienced union with God, with everything all at once, who understands that God is within, who perceives herself in all and all in
herself. “Everything about them conveys wholeness and inclusion” (Flinders, xxi). A prophet is one who radically changes society, based on their understanding of God, and whose words are captured (more or less) and shape the religious body and its future. Someone who has visions and amazing imagination and interpretive abilities, whose “vision” is relevant and new long after they’re gone. What crossover is there? Many mystics were prophets, but not all prophets are/were mystics. EGW was a prophet, but not a mystic, or so it seems from what I’ve read so far. George Fox was both mystic and prophet. I consider myself a mystic but only a very minor prophet in the sense of being able to practice vocal ministry.

Flinders wrote, “What is not often celebrated explicitly in Christian mystical writings…is the experience of a formless god, one who is not so much a being as a state of being…” (xxi-ii). And, “the culmination of the mystical life as many Christian mystics have described it is the so-called unitive state, during which the seeker feels herself wholly united with God. Helpless to describe this state, mystics reach for metaphors: a drop of wine blends into water, the wax of one candle melts into that of another, starlight is subsumed in the light of the rising sun, and boldly, Catherine of Genoa cries out, 'My me is God!'” … “an experience of divinity that is without form, and therefore without gender, a divinity that is indistinguishable, as far as they can tell, from their own deepest sense of self.” Yet, “For orthodox Catholics, however, as I understand, there is a difference. God must remain, in a certain and very important sense, ‘the other’” (xxii). So the experience of Catholic mystics was heretical because they proclaimed that God was not “other!” “The use of orthodox language to describe their experience was a basic skill of survival” (xxiii). And so many Christians believe this—that to claim to be the daughter or son of God is heresy, that only Jesus was God incarnate. Yet we all have the capacity for (but
perhaps not the grace of) union with God while we live, not just after death. Jesus himself said this. I take Jesus’ statement that “I and the Father are one” to mean that not only was he God, but that we are too, in the sense that we can all achieve union with God; we are all sons or daughters of God, or are of the nature of God.

Flinders wrote again about mystics, that “they were making an arduous journey, solitary and often terrifying. They were making it, moreover, because they wanted to more than anything else in life” (xxii). “Their own hunger was too great to be satisfied with anything short of everything…” (xxiv). That is exactly how I feel. Once connected, always seeking that wholeness within God.

**Wednesday, June 15**

SDAs don’t want to get caught up in “end-time hysteria” but do want to maintain a sense of the imminence of the Advent. Is that a way of “being present?” With the Advent and Heaven, they’re trying to imagine/picture what union with God might be like. George Fox believed that Christ has already come (the Advent has happened)—that the call of God is **now**, not in the future—and yes, it seems to be a way of being present. Gulley and Mulholland believe that all people will be reconciled with God, but Fox didn’t believe that. He did look forward to Christ leading Friends into the new age/Kingdom of God—the end times.

**Friday, June 17**

What do I believe? That Jesus (on the cross) was an example of the fact that any of us can experience a sense of absence, a sense of separation from God (and other people) and that this
sense of separation can supersede our knowledge that God is always present. When we experience that, we may forego acting with compassion toward ourselves and others, and that is sin.

To obey is to “hear,” and to act. If we can’t “hear” God, can’t sense our relationship, we may do harm. We may feel empty, without hope. Our community has to help—to reach out to those experiencing this loss and draw them in; express love and caring; reiterate that hope and joy, while not present at the moment, will come again. We have to remind each other to seek connections: with God, with each other. To act as if we are connected, whether or not we feel connected. To learn compassion and to practice it always—integrity, peace, simplicity, equality.

Saturday, June 18

Went to West Virginia, today, to go to the SDA church, but they were closed, all gone to Camp Meeting. I had looked on the web to see if that might be the case, but hadn’t seen anything about it, and I’m sorry to have missed them.

Sunday, June 19

Listened to the “New Dimensions” radio program with guest Harvey Cox, who wrote When Jesus Came to Harvard: Making Moral Choices Today. According to Cox, the Gospels are a combination of history, recollection, and interpretation. It’s good to keep a variety of voices—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Thomas. The Gospel of John may have been influenced by the interpretive framework of Buddhism. Mary Magdalene and other extracanonical gospels help fill in the picture and reveal the heavy hand of the patriarchal editors, who left out the Gospel of
Sophia (Wisdom) and Mary Magdalene. In the Old Testament, Wisdom/Sophia was the companion of God during the process of Creation. In the letters of Paul in the New Testament, Jesus was referred to as the Wisdom/Sophia of God—Jesus was the fleshly expression of the feminine aspect of God. Referring to God as both feminine and masculine is an old tradition, not a new feminist innovation. The central message of Christianity is that God has chosen to become “one of us.” Jesus’ parables don’t mention God but put the listeners into other people’s stories or situations. Jesus’ central messages were: look around you and see the presence of God, here and now; and observe the entanglement of our lives with all life and the universe.

Hurray for this kind of “liberal” Christian scholarship!

Tuesday, June 21

Recorded (officially recognized) as a “Minister of Ecumenism” by the Grand Rapids Friends Meeting.

Friday, June 24

The “end of time” could refer to the absolute present (past, present, future all one). “Final judgment” could mean that all will be incorporated in God, and thus will know all of the harms/evil done in all times, as well as all of the love/goodness. To know infinite darkness as well as infinite light—something we can’t imagine—unimaginable pain and grief as well as joy and rapture. Horrible and terrible and wonderful and amazing. That’s why it’s important to act in the belief that we are all connected (whether or not we feel this), to love all—self, enemies, friends and family, those who are unknown—because all will be revealed when we abide in God.
Spong wrote about life after death, “For Jesus it seemed to mean something like communion with God” (289). Immanence (here and now) and transcendence (that which goes beyond). 

[Jesus] engaged each moment and each person with the intensity of eternity.

The attention, the gaze, and the presence of Jesus to that person was portrayed as total. That person was perceived as being the only person in Jesus’ life at that moment. In that manner he seemed to challenge with his very life the hierarchy of values by which human beings judged one another. To Jesus, each person bore God’s image, each person was worthy of God’s love, and therefore each person had the potential to grow into the full life of God’s Spirit (Spong, 244).

“The life of Jesus seemed to call people into wholeness and wellness” (Spong, 246). – Does my life do so as well?

“Jesus made God real...” (257). “There is no hell...in Paul’s writings” (283). “The business of the church is to love people into life” (288). –If only all churches practiced this, formal religion wouldn’t have such a bad reputation.

This life [of Jesus] is the life of God being lived among us.... When those whose fear of God’s presence was so total that they struck back to kill him...[what] they actually did was to free the meaning of his life from the boundaries of finitude and to make him timeless, eternal, and ever-present.... [Simon/Peter] saw Jesus inside the meaning of God.... How does one talk about that? Only symbolically....

To quell the doubts and to answer the questions, details were added (290).
Spong’s understanding draws me deeper into Christianity, rather than the distancing I experience with the fundamentalists’ thoughts.

Wednesday, June 29

This week’s Sabbath School readings are on Jesus as “Lord and Savior.” I have trouble with both of these words. For me, savior means that God’s love is present and calls to us—inexhaustible, infinite, emancipating compassion. To redeem means to return, turning and re-turning to our deepest selves within the Whole. What about “lord?” Its roots sort of mean a keeper of the bread (masculine) or mother of meat (feminine)—an employer, as opposed to an “eater” of bread/meat or laborer. It’s also a translation of the Latin of the Greek of the Hebrew for Yahweh (the ineffable name of God).

I don’t understand God as “reigning/ruling” over me. Earthly lords have such a reputation of neglecting/abusing the people who lived on and worked the land, and of living off them as if they (the lords) were fungi. It’s a very medieval concept.

Friday, July 8

I’ve worn jewelry less and less since beginning this SDA experience, and now it doesn’t “look right” when I hold something up against my outfit while looking in the mirror in the morning. I wonder if this is a long-term change for me.

Worked on the “God-Given Nature” essay about the SDA stance on same-sex relationships. Almost ready to have a spiritual companion read the draft.
Saturday, July 9

A sermon point which stuck with me: salvation is by faith alone, but belief in that salvation frees us up to do good works. Or, in my language, trusting in our connection to the Whole allows us to create constructive relationships with ourselves, others, and God.

As ever, I wondered why I was at this church. Where is my deepest self? Am I truly called here, and why? Yet I still have a strong sense that I do need to be there. I yearned for Sabbath School when I wasn’t able to attend—missed the discussion of ideas; today hearing a fellow say that the Adult Sabbath School Guide’s translation of Luke 14:26 was unfortunate made me feel better about the week’s reading—I had had trouble with it too.

I said something in Sabbath School about reframing the idea of “surrendering to God” to a more positive “making a commitment to God” and they talked about it, liked it. I prefer to think of surrendering or submitting as giving back, making oneself available to God; committing to connection and relationship. Maybe anyone who has ever been assaulted has trouble with the idea of surrender, and also with the “parent” model for God. That is probably why I couldn’t finish the thought about “God as parent” during Sabbath School.

Been thinking about the Psalm 16:7, which says “I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; my heart teaches me, night after night.” This seems to be in answer to the prayer of “Thy will be done” – part obedience, which means listening, and part giving God “authority” over us or letting God “direct” our lives by acting on what enters our heart via that still, small voice. As for “savior, redeemer, lord,” I think of Jesus as the ultimate example of “being in relationship” (with self, God, others).
But church—I can see the appeal of it for some people—not only the community, but also the appeal of the charismatic preaching. Yet I find myself “translating” during the service, e.g., “sin” into “separation from self, others, God.” Then it is bearable, and I can get something from the messages.

I don’t want to do music for them—I don’t want to play music at all, and their musicians are so good I’m afraid I feel inadequate.

I think I’m attending so that people begin to recognize my face and name. As for what’s next, I still can’t imagine. Perhaps it’s time to make an appointment with the pastor and talk things over with him.

Asked the Friends for someone to talk with when I’m doing the Bible study—a spiritual companion is willing to help with this.

Monday, July 11

I was told that the church will be having evangelistic meetings starting in October and I might want to go. I think of Baptist revivals and altar calls when I hear “evangelistic meetings.” The format would include a minister speaking for about 20 minutes on some aspect of EGW’s writings, then 20-30 minutes of small-group discussion. I could be part of one of the small groups facilitated by an acquaintance (providing a safety net for me). And yes, there would be altar calls (“What you fear will happen”). Still, it would be a chance to experience what I’ve been reading about.
Why am I afraid? Is it of being converted? Because of what it would mean if I were?

Would I give up my essential self, my rational being, my honor and integrity, my Quaker community, my friends? Am I afraid of not being in control? Of being spiritually brainwashed?

*Friday, July 15*

In everything, give thanks. Thanks for this time of reflection, this time of opening up, my heart spilling over into tears.

*Saturday, July 16*

In church, while listening to the singing, I felt a flood of tears—a release, thinking about being released to become a leader, and to minister. Church is a time when I open up, and this is why I’m afraid of altar calls. I’m afraid of being carried away by emotion.

What do other ministers do when they need to be ministered to? Go outside their congregation to another minister. I need someone to pray for me, pray hard. I am so tired; feel like a wrung-out dishrag. I pray that I might continue to open up to healing and the continuing process of conversion (turning toward God). Called a former-minister friend. He calls it “weeping for humanity” and offered himself as a minister for me. He also counseled me to let the schools of religion know that I’m interested in their programs and ask about financial support.

That’s actually one of the things I could offer to the SDA church—a ministry of listening, though I don’t have the SDA knowledge to respond in their way—but caring, being present to another person, listening for God—I can do that. Do they have such a need?
Today's Adult Sabbath School discussion included their belief about the reality of an evil being (Satan) who plants thoughts in our minds and tries to direct our actions—I just don't think that way. I think both “good and bad” thoughts come from our own minds and our experiences. But what does draw me in—that they are truly trying to be good people. They are thoughtful and try to talk and act out of care and compassion. Not judging others, but trying to live their beliefs for themselves. They are happy when someone comes to share their beliefs but they don't seem to be proselytizing. What are they like in the mission field? What will I see at the evangelistic meetings?

**Sunday, July 17**

Worked a lot on the comparison table between SDA & Friends' beliefs. Am using Cooper’s book.

Like SDAs, early Quaker theologians (i.e., Robert Barclay) also believed that all biblical passages relevant to a topic had to be “harmonized.” (See entry on March 17, 2005.) However, they used a “situational” approach to read texts in context of the culture and times, not a literal one (Freiday, xxii).

**Tuesday, July 19**

Still grappling with literal vs. interpretive readings, especially of the creation, Revelation, and prophecies. There is an unnamed evangelist preaching at Christ Community Church and his outlines are on the web at http://www.hope4thehopeless.com/home.htm. There it says, "Expect it to be symbolic. The book of Revelation was written in a sort of “code” to preserve the prophecies from the malicious intent of those who would destroy them. Local and literal people,
places and things take on a worldwide and symbolic form in prophecy." So this implies that they read Revelation, or any prophecy metaphorically, not literally. Yet Bull and Lockhart state that SDAs take EGW’s prophecies literally (25). Which is it?

It's time to call the pastor and make an appointment. Created a “spiritual resume” to send him. How do I deal with my reluctance to address (or refer to) him as “pastor?” This reluctance feels like a barrier.

Made the appointment with the SDA pastor.

**Saturday, July 30**

Reading Chuck Fager’s book: a "summary definition of a Liberal Quaker: one who feels united with others by a common experience of being gathered or called into this faith community, despite the diverse names the experience may be given" (38). This defines me.

**Sunday, July 30**

d’Aquili and Newberg wrote: "if God is truly infinite, then God should have infinite manifestations. Why, then, should any particular version of God be set completely apart and exclusive of any other version? … ritual in religion tends to lead to the development of a group cohesiveness that excludes others not in the group" (167). This concept of the brain function they call a "holistic operator," and God experienced in terms of the mystical "absolute unitary being" is called the "God as connection" model…. It explains why Quakers don't have ritual and aren't exclusive.
**Tuesday, August 2**

This evening I met with the SDA pastor and a senior elder. These are the items I addressed: I feel called into relationship with the SDA church; I’m here as a minister, to learn and carry that learning back to my own congregation; I’d like to build a bridge between our congregations—are there mutual concerns in the GR community—joint project? How can I serve this church?

We met for more than an hour. I’m glad I’ve read and thought through so much history and theology lately, because we discussed many things, and I represented the Religious Society of Friends’ varied and collective beliefs as best I could. I wish I could hear the pastor’s sermon on Saturday, on that of “God within”—have asked to borrow a video. The pastor said I had given him a lot to think about. He thinks it’ll become clear what I am being called to do as I continue to attend and study with them. He thanked me, and believes my presence alone is a witness.

**Friday, August 5**

The pastor and I also talked about the upcoming evangelistic meetings in October, and he is looking forward to seeing how they turn out—both because of the new format of small group discussions, and because he is interested in how people will react to the altar calls (which he thinks will be “soft”)—many Adventists do not like alter calls, and believe they have no part in church services! Whereas certain SDA ministers include some kind of “invitation to respond” in most services.

In *Without Apology*, Fager discussed the revivalism beginning in the 1870’s and the reaction counter to revivalism, which led to the beginning of the Pacific Yearly Meeting, and
later, the reunification movement within the Society of Friends. He states the theological underpinnings of reunification:

- Their belief that the Inner Light is available to all persons;
- Finding the measure of authenticity in the practice of worship and witness in the faith community, rather than adherence to doctrinal formulas or emotional experiences;
- The insistence on a free ministry, equally available to all;
- A fiercely congregational polity, with “higher” structures kept to a minimum and largely restricted to cooperative and consultative functions;
- Concern for the testimonies, such as peace and equality;
- And, ... an emphasis on the magnetic effects of personal example and contact, “letting your life preach,” as the proper basis for congregational growth or “evangelism” (61-2).

So, along with my upbringing contributing to my aversion to revivals and evangelistic meetings, the Liberal tradition of Quakerism provides justification for and reinforces my disinclination.

**Tuesday, August 9**

John Woolman: “Love was the first motion, and then a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life, and the spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they be in any degree helped forward by my following
the Leadings of Truth amongst them...” (127). This comes close to describing my feeling about sojourning with the Adventists....

**Saturday, August 13**

I liked what one man said today in Sabbath School about setting boundaries, i.e., don’t let others define your Christianity by their labels and expectations. I’d like to talk with him about the question of the father/parental/familial model of God not working for those who were assaulted/abused.

If the *Final Events* DVD is a “precursor” to the evangelistic meetings in October, what are they going to be like? What messages will be given? Don’t dismiss them until I’ve experienced them. On the video of the August 6, 2005 service was evidence of the similarity to Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses, in the door-to-door handing out of the DVD and the return visit a week later to ask for people’s opinions/reactions. I can’t reconcile the DVD with my interactions with SDAs who hold more liberal views.

**Monday, August 15**

Isaiah 45:5-7 “I am the Lord, and there is no other.... I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things” [emphasis added]. This passage seems to provide evidence for God as an integrated, holistic being rather than solely good with a separate evil counterpart.
Sunday, August 21

Went to Battle Creek Friends Church (Evangelical) with a spiritual companion today. They were very friendly, recognizing that we were strangers. They have two services because of the size of their congregation. The early service has older folks, and the second one more families and young people. They have a “praise and worship” style—a choir of six singers and a band (the words and notes were repetitive but the musicians were skilled). They clapped and swayed (unlike the SDAs). There was a greeting like the “Peace” in the Episcopal service near the beginning, in which everyone shook hands. I looked around at people dressed casually yet with jewelry, so unlike the SDAs. There were a few prayers and a 5-minute quiet prayer/centering time with the lights off and soft piano background music. The sermon was gospel-based, but focused on a few verses, not on many verses like the SDA sermons (SDAs try to gather all relevant verses on a particular topic). We introduced ourselves to the pastor as being from the Grand Rapids Friends Meeting. So, a beginning. Read Douglas Gwyn and Marge Abbott on evangelical and liberal Friends.

Monday, August 22

It seems to me that the Evangelical Friends have moved a long way away from being a prophetic church. They also separate themselves from the word “Quaker.”

Wednesday, August 24

I don’t expect anyone’s thinking to change because of something I write (though I can hope that it would). Writing the essay on homosexuality, “God-given Nature” (Appendix II) is my way of
engaging SDA and Evangelical thought and texts. I gave it to the Friends Meeting Ministry & Counsel. If I were to give it to someone in the SDA church, I should also add that it represents my thought and not my church’s. A Friend called with the email address of his Quaker seminary advisor, who has had some Adventist contact.

Saturday, August 27

Visited another SDA church today. During Sabbath School, I asked why SDAs dress up so much for church (although they didn’t at this particular place). Because it’s special, they’re visiting God, was their answer. But God is always with us and isn’t just “in church,” I think. The folks in Sabbath School decided that the Holy Spirit leaves us when we sin (and may come back—it sounded like a revolving door!).

Sunday, August 28

Reported to Friends Meeting Ministry & Counsel. Before Meeting for Worship, one Friend suggested a worship-sharing format for Bible Study, and perhaps something like Lectio Divina. Several people expressed interest. A spiritual companion and I are going to the Quaker Bible workshop on September 24. During Meeting, one message given was that we are called to be a prophetic people, that is, not only to listen inwardly to that still, small voice, but also to speak those messages from God. To use the discernment process of asking, “Is this message from me or God? If God, is it meant just for me, or might even one person benefit from hearing it?” That we may stand or remain seated, but should project our voices so that all may hear. That God will
provide the words, so don’t worry about having it all thought and planned out. A message could be a sentence or two, a story, a blessing….

Tuesday, August 30

Wowee, what a great conversation with a couple from the SDA Church tonight! They’re very liberal—deeply thoughtful and challenging—thinking things through for themselves, not just accepting the status quo and doctrine. The fellow said he thinks their church focuses too much on the Advent to the extent that some Adventists don’t really live thoughtfully—they’re rule-bound and legalistic…. This pair, too, sometimes have a difficult time with the Bible Instructor’s approaches to things, though we all admire the knowledge of the instructor. They find west Michigan very conservative. They understood when I asked about dress at church—together we came to understand that when I protest about the dress it is because it reflects bringing “the world” into church—it’s a way of “being seen,” not so much a matter of immodesty or expensive clothing. They think their church is very welcoming of divergent views and will accept me as a Quaker in their midst. They think I know more than many Adventists do about their beliefs. As for there being any “rational” guidelines for when to read the Bible literally or when to interpret, they said that if the writing is prophetic, it should be read symbolically. But each person will understand things differently, uniquely. Regarding my convening Bible study with the Quakers—the goal is to get the group to trust that they can speak their ideas without being “put down,” to share and discuss with each other. I don’t have to have any answers. If I can pose a question which gets them going, that’s all that is needed. Not to necessarily get them to share my views(!), but for us to come up with better understanding of the texts and stories in relation to
our lives. They suggested that I ask a particular SDA pastor to explain Creationism (in person, not via email). They exclaimed that this pastor is really good at explaining.

**Thursday, September 1**

I've been wondering why I should go to the evangelistic meetings. There are so many things I disagree with SDAs about: labeling glbt folk as inherently more sinful than other human beings (this seems to me to be a theology of hate, not love and compassion); the interpretation of the end times (Book of Revelation); the belief that the theory of evolution is evil. I've read a lot of SDA history and theology, know more than most non-SDAs and perhaps more than some SDAs about their faith and practice, and I'm not looking to be converted.

And to be fair, there are many things I admire about the SDA church, which is what keeps me coming back. I still don’t know exactly why I'm there, except that the Bible study in Sabbath School challenges me, and I'm learning and growing in general—and perhaps that is sufficient for now.

**Friday, September 2**

One of the church members thought that the evangelistic meetings would be helpful in that they would provide information I was seeking, would help me connect with more members, and through them I would gain new perspectives.
Saturday, September 3

I see God as intersticial, existing in all of the spaces between things, in the connections. Infinitely loving and compassionate, reaching out to all people in all ages. If we choose not to listen and respond, well, we have free will, but that doesn’t limit God. The Calvinist idea seems to be in direct contrast: God is limited and there is limited space for people in heaven. When people begin to describe God as wrathful and vengeful, that seems to me to be a model of Satan, or a way of describing evil.

Tuesday, September 6

“It is more important for each of us to be the person we were meant to be and do the things we are called to do than to maintain a close family relationship, painful as that may be for everyone involved” (Watson, 156). Consequently, honoring father and mother cannot supersede integrity and good boundaries. Watson’s book might be a good one for the Friends Bible Study group.

Monday, September 12

These are the kinds of things I have going around in my mind recently: I keep attending church in spite of the portrayal of SDA beliefs in the Final Events DVD; I keep seeing a sense of SDAs being aware of God’s absence rather than presence; in the education field, SDAs are up with the current brain research and teaching and learning theory...so why doesn’t this currency apply to other areas of knowledge, Creationism, for example?
One SDA member’s thought that the theory of evolution is evil and forms the basis for the Nazi genocide horror in WWII horrified me. I recognize that this thought may be typical of “black and white” thinkers and isn’t necessarily what other SDAs believe. But I have noticed more duality of thinking in SDAs than in Friends. I appreciate Friends’ willingness to live with gray areas and with not knowing the answers. I am glad for the Friends’ conviction that one’s beliefs depend on personal revelation—on how the Holy Spirit leads one to interpret things—rather than the SDA adherence to a “right” or “correct” set of beliefs. Two SDA theories I find difficult to reconcile with the science I learned are that carbon dating measures some substance from the “void” and so doesn’t reflect the age of items truly, and that dinosaurs were a product of genetic engineering and as such they were a by-product of human arrogance and had to be eliminated, i.e., they didn’t get onto the Ark (scientists believe that most dinosaurs were extinct by the time humans evolved!). I inferred that the “young earth” idea based on a literal six-day creation is "because Ellen White said so."

Perhaps these are psychology or sociology of religion subjects—the need for answers and control, and the Judaic/Christian/Muslim definition of a God who is an all-knowing (omniscient) and all-powerful (omnipotent) being. I get the omnipresent part—I don’t perceive God as a being, but as the all-pervasive connection, always and forever. But mystics seem to be a very small subset of perceivers. I see all creation stories as theories to explain our origins, including the Big Bang theory. There were no video cameras, no one wrote down these things; we have no eyewitnesses. The Bible comes from human interpretation of visions and trying to understand the ineffable. Groups of humans decided that these were the stories to live by, and
left other stories out. "God is capable of anything"—well, that only holds true if God is a being.

(This is where I differ from Quaker theology, which is theistic.)

Saturday, October 1

I don’t really feel emotionally safe in going to the Evangelistic meeting today. I wish there were a friend who would go with me. What I’ve been feeling is raw grief, physical pain—which is exhausting. My self-esteem is at its low point. Everything is connected—my feeling unheard and devalued in the world, Mom’s dementia and her trying to draw me back into relationship with her, the dreams I have of danger everywhere, thoughts about the upcoming holidays, the changes I feel deep within myself as I learn about conflict management and designing organizational change. I needed time to myself; instead of going to church, I spent the middle of the day in Aman Park, just being still. I will probably always have trouble being myself and feeling centered around anyone else—I may always feel at my best when I am alone in the woods and fields.

Wednesday, October 5

What is the nature of my soul? Who is it that I am? How do I hang on? I have cared for all the world, yet cannot care for myself at the moment. What I’ve been feeling has been almost unbearable. Is this horrible self-doubt and hatred always going to be part of fundamental change in my self? (And if so) what is it that is changing this time? Is this upheaval a reaction to deep change in myself? Naked and broken.... I have felt myself on the verge of disintegration—
and perhaps this is only when deep, fundamental realizations can occur and change can be lasting.

I was a prisoner of my parents and grandparents. I was stripped of my humanity, denied my own perceptions and reality, degraded, shamed. But I am still alive, have survived, sometimes thrive. I can heal. I can make a difference in the world. It has taken a lot of energy to get here, to break down the barriers. Help me to be present....

I still need something from the SDAs. My acquaintance’s assertion that I seem to be looking for information is incorrect—I’m seeking connections. But with everything going on, I don’t have the emotional energy to go to two churches. For now, I don’t know what to do.

**Saturday, October 8**

This week’s Sabbath School lessons were particularly relevant. Sunday focused on conversion, being called to ministry, and identifying what I’ve been called to do: teaching and learning, writing, listening, contemplation. Monday’s lesson defined “saint” as “a person the light shines through” and “someone whose life—speech, actions, attitudes, relationships—points to Jesus” (Fowler 16). A particularly “Friendly” (Quakerly) idea! Saints connote “all believers,” not just one particular group of people. Tuesday’s lesson was about what peace means to Christians—and I read the texts to denote: to be untroubled and unafraid, to be reconciled with God, to be joined with all people, to be in that particularly mystical union with God which Jesus epitomized. I need to spend more time just be-ing. Wednesday focused on “unity” as “universal, in which all things in heaven and earth move toward an ultimate unity in Christ” (18). Again, ultimate union with God and the universe. Friday’s discussion question asks about not experiencing “peace” even
though one has given oneself to God. My answer is that to be in relationship isn’t always gentle and one may not feel calm, but one has to make the commitment to listen, to act, to trust. Letting the light shine through can mean that we don’t continue to focus on the darkness and difficulty, but that we let ourselves find meaning and then become literally “lighthearted.”

**Friday, October 21**

I went to a talk about Creationism ("Intelligent Design") vs. Evolution. I think some groups of people mistake simplicity of thinking for wisdom; others mistake complexity of thinking for wisdom. But isn’t wisdom about knowledge which connects us and the compassion out of which we act? The speaker mentioned St. Augustine, something along the lines of God being eternal and outside time, so that to try to “pin down” the sequence of events in creation is pointless.

Tim Berra wrote, “evolution itself is a fact.... *How* evolution occurs...is theoretical.” And, “Creationists insist on a young Earth, but if there is anything science knows, it is the great antiquity of the Earth and the solar system. This has been verified by at least five independent radioisotope clocks” (141). He also stated that, “In recent times, Christian fundamentalism has been a peculiarly American movement; nowhere in Western Europe, in fact, has creationism been an issue” (142). I wonder why that is?

**Saturday, October 22**

Tried to say something at Sabbath School along the lines of wisdom being different from intelligence in that wisdom comes from our connections with God and people, and in always
acting out of the compassion which comes from that connection. One fellow responded, "so that which draws in, rather than that which separates...."

**Sunday, October 23**

Listened to Christa Tippett’s *Speaking of Faith* radio program (www.speakingoffaith.org) today, featuring Jamie Smith from Calvin College, discussing “Evangelicals out of the Box.” He calls it progressive evangelicalism, saying that evangelicals need to hold onto the concept of personal holiness but also move to a corporate and public holiness via a commitment to the poor. He thinks that evangelicals should not be so pro-big-business and pro-free-market because those stances further injustices, but should look at the Bible for what matters: the Prophets, and Jesus. He says we are in a post-secular society, and calls this radical orthodoxy, which results not in Christianizing the state, but neither withdrawing politically—not using the partisan political strategies we’ve seen recently. This would be a policy of engagement which wouldn’t translate into public policy, but would create alternative ways of embodying beliefs within the church community: modeling a community of virtues, not lobbying for political changes. The state should be a pluralistic public sphere, and the church could stand to just take care of their own for a few years. This sounds similar to “emergent” Christianity—a positive trend in my opinion.

Also, Nancy Murphy, a professor at Fuller Seminary in California, was on the program, talking about evolution and Creationism. She said that those who are committed to not resolving the two have done a very good job of teaching the public that mode of thinking, but that we need to teach that events in the natural world are a result of both natural causes and God. Evolutionary process is a means by which God created/creates the world. Amen to that!
I asked for a friend’s prayers both for traveling mercies and for my willingness to be open to learning at the leadership institute I'll be attending. Before going, I've been trying to spend as much time as possible in the “church without walls,” walking and sitting with God in the forest, where I can be totally receptive and unguarded, without the barriers I put up around people.

**Monday, October 24**

Yesterday’s Sabbath School lesson seems to correlate disbelief or unbelief with evil, and “unbeliever” with non-Christian, so that all those who are not Christian would be considered evil. Exceedingly non-Friendly.

I’m a “liberal” Quaker because I feel very little need for ritual and don’t want to get caught in “dead faith,” yet it is often the singing at the SDA church which catches at my heart—we don’t have superb singing in Friends’ Meeting.

**Wednesday, October 26**

Today’s Sabbath School text is about salvation coming by grace through faith. To me, “grace” is the indescribable call from God; faith is our listening and response. As God reaches out to reconcile us to “him,” if we can open up, this connection reaches our hearts and the light can flow through. Jesus was the epitome of that of God within, and the light spilling out.
**Friday, October 28**

Maybe I should ask for an invitation to sit with an acquaintance at church. I’m willing to be open but I don’t want to be alone. I just have to live through pain.

**Saturday, October 29**

I stayed for church, which was okay—I was sleepy, but the sermon was on why there are so many Christian denominations—each has some of the truth.... In Sabbath School the big question was, “What is sin?” I said it was “separation from God, which leads to acts of harming others or oneself.” One person responded that it is the choosing to ignore God or to not trust God, and lots of little choices follow, which take one further away from God. Satan’s sin was in wanting to control things, to be equal to or better than God. I still don’t believe in a personal God-as-a-being, or in evil personified. I believe in God within all, and transcending all (more than just the universe, not just a synonym for the universe).

Went to Aman Park and sat in the sun, looking at trees, plants, sky, and realized that I feel better. Hermit-y, but not so fragile and in pain. I can learn to respect myself and walk my talk. To repel those who seek to take from me without my permission. To step back, to observe and listen without reacting. To love myself, feel my fears and let them go, to find the gentleness of spirit that heals all wounds, to be serene. To shield myself from hurt, envy, jealousy, to go inside myself and honor my feelings, to honor the creative source within, to be grounded, to know that as a child of the earth I am not ever alone and will be healed enough to share this energy with others. To trust in my path and in the open doorways, to wonder and be adventurous and play, to not get caught in chaos, fear, suffering, seriousness.
**Sunday, October 30**

After Friends Meeting, went to Aman again—felt like I was flying high like an untethered balloon, and so deliberately grounded myself. Sat in the sunshine—slanting light, scents of Queen Anne’s lace, leaves, apples. I feel good, strong.

**Saturday, November 5**

Today in Sabbath School the lessons emphasized that the differences which had separated Jews and Gentiles were eliminated by Christ—that there was “one new creation...a new society; a new humanity” (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, 49). There is unity of all peoples, all creation, with God. This “church without walls,” our universal and shared access to the presence of God, seems to depict the union I experience as a mystic—as one people we become “God’s holy sanctuary, ‘a dwelling place of God in the Spirit’” (51). The teacher challenged me by asking if all denominations are equal. I stand by my answer—not the same, but yes, we are all united as one body in God. **All** believers have access to God’s presence and are the sanctuary for the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is important to remember the past—including the present divisions (denominations), so that we keep moving toward and not away from God. I believe Friends have as many “pieces of the truth” as the SDA church, though we understand those “pieces” differently. The Study Guide asks what can be done to help heal the division and disunity which exists within the Christian Church (52)...this is the basis of my ministry and another friend’s as well.

I still find it extremely difficult to talk about these things—Sabbath School stretches and challenges me, especially as my views are often very different from SDAs’ views.
Sunday, November 6

Someone in Sabbath School didn’t believe that Affirmative Action had been a good thing, though I think it has. I think we wouldn’t have made changes without the extrinsic motivation of legislation—the same is true of environmental laws. Sometimes we have to legislate change and provide a structure for it. The Ten Commandments are an example, as is Jesus’ preaching and his relationships with God and people.

The SDA church, along with many others and society in general, chooses to persecute GLBT people. Our fighting back isn’t enough—we get beaten, raped, murdered, and imprisoned, lose our jobs, families, churches, houses, etc. Getting anti-harassment legislation provides some structure for change. Getting equal opportunity legislation helps. The church used to believe that left-handedness was sinful and evil, and that slavery was condoned by God. Society changes gradually, and legislation provides impetus.

Monday, November 7

Realized that I was at ease with having the pastor in our Sabbath School—I saw him as an equal and had talked fairly openly with him about my Quaker beliefs. I’m guarded and careful in Sabbath School generally, often feel off-balance, wondering if I’m being judged. I feel less free to say what I think and also feel less articulate.
Liberal Quakers believe that human language is imperfect and can only record small glimpses of the truth of God. So we’re not literalists or fundamentalists.

Talked with a Sabbath School teacher today about my thoughts related to the question, "Are all denominations equal?" This teacher asked the question because of my work with other denominations—thought I might have an authoritative answer which would be different from theirs. So the teacher was reaching "out of the box." But the teacher does believe that SDAs have the truth, or more of the truth, especially regarding Sabbath—and believes that the denominations will try to unite as one Christian body (catholic church) and will impose Sunday laws again, because EGW prophesized so. There is and will be a drive to ask individual denominations to give up that which makes them unique, e.g., seventh-day Sabbath. I tried to explain that even the interfaith movement doesn’t do that. But it’s a good question to discuss with my Friendly spiritual companion—is the megachurch movement and even our ministry trying to do something which could be seen as harmful? We’re reaching for dialog, discussion, relationship, connection.

I also asked one of the Sabbath School teachers if she would have entered ministry, had the ministerial path had been open to women. She, in turn, said that it sounded as if I were still thinking about paid ministry. I don’t think I am. I find pastoral care both uplifting and draining, and am glad to be part of a committee, not having to bear the responsibility alone. I like studying theology, but wouldn’t want to have to write a sermon every week. I wouldn’t like being on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. She explained that the congregation doesn’t pay the pastor, but that the tithes go to the Conference, thus it is the Conference who pays the
pastors, and that teachers in the SDA schools get a portion of the tithe too. I hadn’t understood that before.

I asked about Sabbath as a day of rest versus the day of corporate worship, and she didn’t really answer, except to say that there are rules governing appropriate behaviors for Sabbath. From the SDA Church, Fundamental Beliefs: “The fourth commandment of God’s unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath.” And I challenged that difference between Jewish ordinances and SDAs’—Jews don’t care if others work on the Sabbath, as long as they don’t themselves. But she challenged the servant aspect—do they pay others? If not, then it’s not work for the other. The teacher talked about the creation of the SDA church—a lot of borrowing from other Protestant denominations, but she herself can’t understand why the Saturday to Sunday shift occurred. Yet she acknowledged the changing understanding of core principles—e.g., at first Sabbath was defined as 6:00 p.m. Friday to Saturday nights, but with further study, they came to understand it as a sunset-to-sunset cycle.

From the Church Manual [http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/church_manual/]

The Sabbath is a special day for worship in the home and in the church, a day of joy to ourselves and our children, a day in which to learn more of God through the Bible and the great lesson book of nature. It is a time to visit the sick and to work for the salvation of souls. The ordinary affairs of the six working days should be laid
aside. No unnecessary work should be performed. Secular reading or secular broadcasts should not occupy our time on God’s holy day.

"The Sabbath is not intended to be a period of useless inactivity. The law forbids secular labor on the rest day of the Lord; the toil that gains a livelihood must cease; no labor for worldly pleasure or profit is lawful upon that day; but as God ceased His labor of creating, and rested upon the Sabbath and blessed it, so man is to leave the occupations of his daily life, and devote those sacred hours to healthful rest, to worship, and to holy deeds." - *The Desire of Ages*, p. 207.

**Wednesday, November 9**

I have so many questions about Sabbath-keeping. Isn’t paid ministry work? (Yes, and ministers have difficulty enjoying the Sabbath as a day of rest.) Would I want to be paid for vocal ministry—paid to open myself up, to lay my soul bare and let God speak through me? To be paid for pastoral care—to listen and discern? To be paid to write sermons? I would like to be paid to study and share what I learn by writing! Corporate worship is "work" for me—it takes a lot of energy and concentration (perhaps it should be defined as "service" rather than "work"). Sabbath School is a joy. Yard "work" isn’t work, nor is laundry, if I can hang it outside—these are activities which somehow bring me closer to that of God in nature. But in other seasons, I do laundry during the week. If these things bring me joyful connection to God, if I am not doing
salaried work, and if I’m not paying someone else to work, then I can “justify” my activities when I do them on the Sabbath.

If people set aside a day (nightfall to nightfall) for God, why does it matter which day of the week it is? One of my SDA acquaintances said that as long as there have been calendars, they have been seven-day weeks; the Jewish calendar was so strong that people always went back to it; God commanded that the seventh day be for rest and worship (in Exodus, Matthew, etc.). She asked, if Quakers are listening for/to God, why haven’t we “heard” God speak about the seventh-day Sabbath? And why are Sunday-keepers so willing to pay others to work for them on this day (e.g., going out to dinner after church)? I believe that every day is holy, none more than any other; that we must strive for balance between work, play, and rest; and that we are to seek God continually. Every act should be approached in a sacred manner, as connection to God and/or people, not as something to be done for its own sake.

How and when did the switch from Saturday to Sunday happen? What about the change from Julian to Gregorian calendars—didn’t that change the days of the week? Apparently not—see THE WEEKLY SABBATH: SATURDAY OR SUNDAY? at http://www.religioustolerance.org/sabbath.htm on this. It also explains that conservative theologians believe in a literal six-day creation with seventh-day rest, and that this idea first shows up in Exodus, not in Genesis; liberal theologians believe that the Sabbath day was designated arbitrarily. Also, aren’t days/dates arbitrary too, considering that God is outside of time?

I wrote to a Quaker professor to ask if he knew of any Friends who felt led to return to the Saturday Sabbath (and wrote or preached about this), but he had not. My Adventist
acquaintance had asked me why, if Friends are a people who actively listen, we had not "heard" this message? Why aren't we keeping this commandment? Is it because Friends don't subscribe to the belief in a literal six-day creation? Although I wondered if Evangelical Friends do. I thought that was part of what was meant by considering the Bible to be the "infallible, authoritative, written word of God."

Regarding the other commandments: I still struggle with "honor thy father and mother" – what does "honor" mean? Especially for survivors of abuse? And the name of God is unknowable—how can it be taken in vain? Yet, I do understand that it means not to curse or blame God for misfortunes. Yet, in my terms, one can't blame or curse a non-being! If I used the ideas of connection, union, or wholeness as epithets, then that would be a negative, not a positive way of speaking (and the word "God" does carry those meanings for me).

**Thursday, November 10**

I don’t know, absolutely, for certain, that Jesus was entirely God. I wasn’t there. I can choose to believe so—and that’s faith—but I don’t **know**. I don’t have a “personal relationship with Christ” – I’m a mystic and my brain seems to work differently. I experience union with God, but it’s not usually in words or even in images. The brain research says that this is just one way people experience God, and it’s a small part of the population whose brains work this way. But because I am like this, there are beliefs that many of the more conservative theologies espouse that I can’t subscribe to—because of (what seems to be) my direct experience of God. I’m not a prophet like EGW—and I don’t deny her experience—but as humans, we aren’t able to completely know all of God—we can’t (or won’t) know everything until we die or unless there is
an Advent. Our brains are wired to sift through experiences and to block the majority of sensory input and make sense of (or make connections between) the rest. So we’re limited—we’re not capable of infinite knowing. It seems as if Jesus was directly connected all of the time, that he was God embodied. Yet I can’t know for a certainty. Again, I can choose to believe so. But it also seems to me that Paul (and Peter along with the other disciples) created a religion around Jesus—interpreted and made rules based on their human understanding of their experiences with God. And so it has been with all religious leaders and writers since. We have pieces of truth, but not the whole picture. As for Sabbath—again, it’s important to create balance between work, rest, and play, every day, and within the other cycles—the week, the season, the year, etc. So there are days set apart—Sabbath, holy days/holidays, sabbaticals. Sabbath means rest, rejuvenation, reconnection with the Ultimate. We need reminders, guidelines. Some people need laws and rules because either they don’t experience a direct connection, or somehow their connection is faulty—and they behave in harmful ways toward themselves and others. Some people have more empathy, some less.

And then I come back to the Sabbath School lessons on Ephesians about God’s love, the radical change in understanding that all people are God’s people—and yet the SDAs continue to practice a hateful attitude toward LGBT people, and I do not experience a hateful God!

EGW had visions from God, which she wrote down, interpreted, re-wrote, and then she tried to preach her understanding of those visions. But she wasn’t Christ—she wasn’t God embodied—and so her understanding was necessarily limited to a human wisdom. Inspired but not inerrant, and as a group, the SDA church continues to study and learn, and sometimes re-interpret. The same as the Friends do with George Fox’s prophecies and preaching.
So, no, denominations are not all “equal” yet we each have some understanding, pieces of the truth, and we are united as one body in Christ, have equal access to the presence of God, and are a sanctuary for the indwelling Holy Spirit.

My heart is full and overflowing. I’m grateful for the learning I experience with the SDAs and the Friends, for all the other theological writings.

Literalism and interpretive reading are both, quite literally (ha ha), mindsets, brain functions.

**Saturday, November 12**

Wednesday’s lesson states that our access to God is “without fear or restriction and without the need of any intermediaries such as priests or saints or ritual” (Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, 60). I asked about baptism, and one of the Sabbath School attendees said they follow the example of Jesus being baptized.

When the teacher asked if there were prayer requests, one of the participants asked me if there were any from my congregation. I said yes, named it, and thanked the questioner for asking. I was surprised and pleased to be recognized in that way.

I thought there were some interesting parallels between the Jews during Paul’s time and the SDAs, who can still be very insular in some ways, despite their evangelizing mission. They have gone through periods of retreat from other religious groups and society in general, as have Friends during the Quietest period. I myself feel so much need for retreat into solitude, time to be with God, apart from community, though I recognize that making a commitment to a community of faith is part of the ongoing conversion process. Yet I keep being called not only
into my own (primary) faith community, but also into others. It is a continual struggle to balance my life—work, Friends and SDAs, friends, family, creative time, solitary/contemplative time, etc.

I’m trying to live the question: What does Sabbath mean? Why Saturday or Sunday?

“1700 years of tradition are hard to change,” one friend observed. What does observing it mean for my relationship with God and people? I can see how rules give a sense of comfort, security and certainty. But are they relevant to me?

**Friday, November 18**

Back to the question of not spending money on the Sabbath—there is a spectrum of interpretation and behavior, from those who justify eating out by paying with a credit card, to those who look at when the work is being done for them—not subscribing to a Sunday newspaper because some of the work is done on the Sabbath, even though the workers choose to work on that day and the company chooses how it allocates work throughout the week. The underlying concept is to clear one’s thoughts and concerns from the mundane and secular, so that one can focus on being present to God. So, to prepare, one looks ahead during the week and tries to accomplish tasks before Friday sunset. I guess I’d say it is both of the following: the act of payment in and of itself is work for the payer (whether or not another person is involved), and it is also a combination of making payment (even if through taxes) and using the services provided by a person who is working during the Sabbath.
Saturday, November 19

I realized in the SDA church this morning that I didn’t have the usual discomfort of feeling reluctant and resistant which I usually have. In Sabbath School I talked about the process Friends use for discerning if a personal leading is something the Meeting should support or take up, and one person said he hadn’t realized we were not so different. I stayed for the worship service itself and a young person delivered the sermon, which was short, sweet, to the point, about not judging based on appearances. I wished I had that kind of spirit when teaching.

Friday, November 25

Walked in the park for an hour and a half today, recouping my soul, listening to the birds.

Saturday, November 26

The sermon in church today was on thankfulness—in all things, give thanks—and on being a "peculiar people," which the Quakers have also been called. The Sabbath School lessons this week were on becoming new—how is it that we keep trying to live according to what we believe is right (the SDAs might say, "God’s standards") and keep turning toward God and not away? Continually called out of our comfort zone, like orthodontia—when the braces stop hurting, it is time for them to be tightened. I said I could not imagine God ever giving up on reaching out to us (which contradicts SDA teachings). Another person made the analogy of rebuilding of a car engine—you can’t see the changes from the outside, and we can’t judge people’s interior changes from their exterior. When are the changes "good enough" to last awhile or forever? What does it mean that we are all made new again, yet still have to change our habits?
I felt comfortable and engaged instead of out-of-place. I went downstairs for the baptisms, to see if it felt different—and it did, though I couldn't see, or hear as well as observing via the video link. To be in the same room is different—to be present to the Spirit. One could not experience Friends Meeting from a video!

**Sunday, November 27**

Reported to Friends Meeting committee on Ministry and Counsel about the ways I have changed as a result of my involvement in the SDA church. I read and study the Bible regularly. I even used scripture in vocal ministry! I have been more conscious of observing a time of rest, seventh-day Sabbath specifically, though not as rigorously as Adventists—I also try to find more balance between work, play, and rest in my daily life. I continue to make an effort not to swear. I no longer drink alcohol (for health reasons). I eat less meat, and am more conscious of my diet in general. I have a greater knowledge and understanding of Quaker theology, practice, and history, from liberal to conservative and evangelical—along with SDA theology and practice and history. Though I hold different views, I have a greater appreciation for evangelical thought in general and I understand the arguments for Creationism. I am more open about my religion at work. I continue to grow in understanding of prophecy and other spiritual gifts. I try to walk and talk what I believe, and I am more committed to ministry. I think I've worn jewelry (and only pins) all of three times since March. I'm still thinking about how to "give back" to the SDA church.
**Thursday, December 1**

Up until tonight, I’ve felt that I didn’t want to make a commitment to keeping the Sabbath in terms of not attending certain functions that are a part of my job. But tonight, I’m having doubts about that decision. I still spend money and go the public library, and those things don’t bother me, though I do think about them. I haven’t done work for my employer on Friday night or Saturday for months, though. I don’t have church membership to fall back on—does the minute on my ministry give any credence? Probably. The idea of asking for exemption from work-related functions scares me. What am I getting myself into? Am I serious about this? Serious enough to stick with it and make a commitment? Is it a real leading? Do I follow it for now and live the question over time? One decision doesn’t have to stand for my lifetime.

I wish the SDA church would reconsider having the U.S. flag in the sanctuary (especially at the front!). Our first allegiance is to God, not to a nation. God’s commandment says, “Thou shalt not kill.” Jesus said to love God and love thy neighbor as thyself; he didn’t say it was all right to go to war, but said to turn the other cheek. I wish the SDA church would also be more consciously supportive of the conscientious objector option.

**Friday, December 2**

I asked two Jewish colleagues if they attend certain work-related functions on Saturdays, or if they cite religious conviction in asking not to attend. One does not attend, citing an obligation to teach adult education classes for the Temple during that time. The other considers attendance at commencement a requirement and a conflict. I do not want to feel hatred for what should be a celebratory ceremony both for those who are graduating and for those who
made it possible. So, I took a step that seems fairly momentous, and asked to be excused from attending graduation for religious reasons. I remind myself that one decision doesn’t mean that it’s a decision for all time (unless the world ends or something happens to me tomorrow). I think that the Minute from Grand Rapids Friends Meeting commends me to the SDA church, that my attendance has been fairly regular there, and that this is sufficient substantiation, if it is needed. If asked, would I work on Sunday morning? Yes, very probably I would unless I had committed to do something specific for Meeting that day. Yet I feel an obligation to attend Meeting on Sunday mornings because I am a recorded member and minister. This continuing process of conversion (in the sense of “turning toward God”) is not easy. My SDA friend asked if not doing salaried work on the Sabbath brings me a sense of peace, and my answer is unreservedly "yes." I’m beginning to think that it brings me closer to connection with the spirit, and that this is truly a leading. I just have to keep living the questions.

A Quaker friend let me know that he loves the idea of observing a Sabbath and that it makes sense to him regarding my involvement with the Adventists. He agreed that Friends don’t seem to feel obligated to observe Sunday as a day of rest any more than any other day.

**Saturday, December 3**

Went to Aman Park for a long walk and saw a flock of yelping Sandhill Cranes, more than 25 of them, a bright Pileated Woodpecker, and reflections of snowy trees in the creek. I felt leaping, bounding joy, a still and clear heart, a calm mind. I am convinced I made the right decision not to attend graduation. Regarding the future and Sabbath—way will open.
I felt I might be "nuts" because I'm afraid of becoming pious, zealous, narrow, judgmental. But that's not who I am. I become more open as I stretch. Understanding and using shared language doesn't mean I share the evangelical conviction, but means I can communicate more effectively.

**Sunday, December 4**

Friends don't impose our views; we don't evangelize. We offer help and accept where people are at. So our aid isn't contingent upon their changing their ways and beliefs to match ours, unlike SDA and other churches' evangelism. They seem to see perfection ahead, but only if certain conditions are met by each individual. Some SDAs see unrealized opportunity and possibility for those who haven't met the conditions, but still see the conditions as absolute, I think. Modernism kept the idea of an unchanging God, but that doesn't fit my paradigm. Mine is a paradigm of shifting structures, temporary and function-based, flexible, fluid. Like water, and chaos theory—describing smaller, rapidly-changing patterns instead of one large unchanging structure. Contemporary Liberal Friends are like this, postmodern. A fluid model fits my conception of God as the connections between everything, an inclusive model instead of exclusive, instead of a changeless being who controls and directs everything.

**Monday, December 5**

I received a response from a knowledgeable Friend to my questions about SDAs and Quakers regarding Sabbath. Much to think about—Friends don't emphasize any day over another as more holy, not even Christmas or Easter—thus no emphasis on Sabbath. Every day is holy. So
how do I integrate this belief with the practice of Sabbath—and leave it at the personal level, not as a concern for Friends Meeting? Live the question.

_Monday, December 12_

The SDA emphasis on two aspects of good and evil, God and Satan, as separate and entirely opposed to each other is in and of itself opposed to wholeness. The battle to destroy evil is to destroy God as well, along with ourselves. To disown our deepest fears, to hate this aspect of our psyche and the universe is to deny life. Jesus represents a third way.

And the SDAs do not (cannot?) acknowledge that the Kingdom of God is at hand—is here in our hearts. The “Kingdom of Heaven is within” is another way of describing the mystical realization of union with God. We are One Being, One Connection. To make war on any part is to make war on the whole.

_Sunday, December 18_

Not “Sacrifice” but rather “Model”: Jesus was the ultimate example of how we can reconnect with God and neighbor, via his life and stories/teachings. He wasn’t “atonning” for our inherent evilness. The idea of Satan seems to me as if God dissociated from himself all of the bad parts and said to that separated self, "Have at it." Thus, in the "fall" of Satan, it seems as if God invented multiple personality disorder.

What would happen if God re-integrated these two selves? What would that look like to us? How would our theology and practice change?
Are we, as Friends, trying to live integrated lives, acknowledging the darkness, light, and everything in between, trying to live as though connected to every being on the earth and in the universe? Do we acknowledge our shadow side and take responsibility for not acting on it but moving toward the light?

I'd like to have a conversation with an Adventist about Satan, a conversation which allows for the possibility of movement but which doesn't require it. A talk with someone who can push back gently as I push against SDA theology. I just don't understand their concept of Satan. It seems dualistic, leading away from integration. I seem to experience God in a totally different way, as connection and wholeness.

Monday, December 19

A New Kind of Christian by Brian McLaren is an amazing book about an evangelical who meets postmodernism, and thus is born "emergent Christianity" or "progressive evangelicalism."

Curiosity led me to look for his web site.

Going back to the idea of Satan: "The question is this: to what degree are the Biblical writers speaking in the language and imagery of their times, and to what degree are they affirming a cosmology of cosmic warfare between angels and demons, etc? The cosmology seems to come not from the Bible itself, but from Babylonian and Zoroastrian religion, which influenced the Jews greatly during the Exile" (McLaren, A New Kind of Christian website).
Read Meredith's discourse on Seventh-day Sabbath. He cited Gal. 4:10-11, Rom. 14:5, and Col. 2:16-17, stating that the Apostles met on Sundays because it was supposedly the day Jesus was resurrected. He interpreted the "Lord's Day" in Rev. 1:10 as the literal first day of the week, though he admitted that this is tradition, not a commandment. Based on Deut. 5:15, Meredith wrote, "the Sabbath Day was given to the Children of Israel, and to them only, as a Sign between God and them" (10) and that "the Son of Man was Lord even of the Sabbath Day; which can be no otherwise understood, than that he had Power to Change, alter, or abrogate that Precept, concerning the Seventh-Day Sabbath...." (11). Since the days change when crossing the international date line, this meant that the days of the week weren't instituted by nature, "since it is nothing but a Sport of Light that continually moves about the Earth, and never abides one Minute in the same Place; and therefore the Night...is a Shadow in a true and proper Sense" (12). Thus, he wrote that, "the Observation of the Seventh Day is not of a moral and unchangeable Nature, because...before the Coming of the Israelites out of Egypt, the Precept of the Seventh Day was but a Precept of Remembring, but not of Observing..." (12). So it applied only to the Israelites and no one else. Meredith explained the history of worship on First day (Sunday) thus: "The First Day was by Human Laws ordained to be kept, as soon as the Civil Government fell into the Christian hands, which was in the Time of Constantine the Great..." (18). Yet, he states later, which could be used to justify either day, "the Action it self is more to be regarded than the Circumstance of it, and the Thing it self before the Order of it..." (18). At some hours and times we are more free from outward hurry and disturbances, and prefer those hours and times for devotion... (18). I still don't know what I think.
**Monday, December 26**

One of the women at the SDA church asked me to play music for an upcoming service. I don’t know what to play! Quaker hymns? Bach? Other sacred/classical music? To play as a form of prayer—can I manage it?

**Thursday, December 29**

The SDA model of the “Great Controversy” battle between God and Satan bothers me because of its dualism and its military imagery and warfare framework.