

“Thou Gentle Beam...” Annual Meeting Talk

By Craig L. Ghislin, C.S.



Good afternoon. I'm so grateful to be with you today. Thank you for inviting me. I don't think we can overestimate how important—and needed—Christian Science nursing is to our church community. So before I even start I'd like to say, “Thank you,” to all the staff of the Visiting Christian Science Nursing Care of Greater Chicago,

for your selfless devotion, and support of the healing mission of Christian Science.

Honestly, I didn't always quite understand the importance of Christian Science nursing. But over the years, as I've visited people, and served as a chaplain in conventional government and privately owned nursing facilities, I've realized that there is a huge difference when the words, “Christian Science” are added to the title of Nurse.

To be sure, society owes a debt of gratitude to anyone working in the nursing field. Irrespective of the quality of the physical building, amenities, and services, or lack thereof, the quality of the staff determines whether or not the atmosphere is inspiring or depressing. I have to admire the fact that even workers in the most uninviting facilities, in the most menial positions, though they may have little choice or joy in the work they're doing, somehow find it within themselves to take on work that many others would never dream of doing. It may seem a thankless job at times, but they are very much needed, so I'm grateful for everyone. I think it's important to point out that Christian Scientists don't have exclusive rights to kindness. I regularly find staff members in traditional nursing facilities, as well as visiting nurses, who are especially kind, thoughtful, and even religiously minded. But human kindness isn't what brings healing.

A case in point was the experience we had with my mom.

Due to my step dad's antipathy toward Christian Science, my mom had been sent to a medical facility because he didn't like her behavior. We were told she was being moved to another facility for observation, which we thought was a preliminary evaluation for a senior community. In actuality, they had her in a psych ward, and ended up giving her drugs against our wishes, and without permission. As a result, her head hung down looking at the floor, and

she was unable to lift it up. We demanded her immediate release, and she went from there to a private facility where the staff was very accommodating regarding her desire to rely on prayer, and for the most part they were very helpful, but they had no expectation of healing or progress. Almost a year of physical therapy yielded no results in lifting her head, and her cognitive functions continued to deteriorate. When my step dad passed on, I had the opportunity to remove my mom from that facility and arranged for a Christian Science nurse to stay with her. Eventually she ended up living in the nurse's home.

Upon my first visit at the nurse's house, my mom recognized me immediately, and told me how happy she was to see me. In less than two months my mom could hold her head straight upright like a ballerina—something many family members thought would never happen again. The difference was that the medically oriented nursing staff was using human means to manipulate a body, while the Christian Science nurse, supported by my prayer, allowed the power of the healing Christ to do the work.

What is it that makes Christian Science nursing so powerful? What is it that rouses the sufferer from resignation to receptivity and expectancy? What opens the door, and paves the way for the patient to let go of worldly cares, and embrace the possibility of healing? It's not just human kindness. It's not talk of love. It's the power of that “gentle beam of living Love” shining forth on all who come in contact with it.

Let's think about that gentle beam for a moment. How is it generated? Where does it come from? Human goodness and kindness are helpful, but the gentle beam we're talking about is much more than that. It's the Christ in action. Indeed, Christ is the only activity that is ever really going on.

The fact that this gentle beam is God-derived makes all the difference. Our dear nurses regularly go where others fear to tread. They're not remote from those who call for aid. They are on the scene facing the foe on the field of battle. They have to be particularly fit, and mentally prepared to keep their thought looking away from the body to the realm of Spirit. Human stamina, fortitude, and resiliency all eventually wear out and break down. The only way to stay above the material picture, while seemingly looking right at it, is through the power of that gentle beam of living Love.

I've found that Mrs. Eddy's poem “Christmas Morn” wonderfully describes the source of the spiritual outlook, and Christly animus so necessary to Christian Science Nursing.

The poem begins,

Blest Christmas morn, though murky clouds

“Thou Gentle Beam...” Annual Meeting Talk *continued*

Pursue thy way,
Thy light was born where storm enshrouds
Nor dawn nor day!

First of all, in one sense, “blessed” means made holy or consecrated, to set apart for sacred use, to keep completely free from defilement or contamination. In a way, it’s like metaphysical sterilization. No germ of evil enters there. The nurse not only keeps the physical environment healthy and clean, but the mental atmosphere as well.

I also love the way *The Amplified Bible* defines “blessed.”—“happy, to be envied, and spiritually prosperous—with life-joy and satisfaction in God’s favor and salvation, regardless of their outward conditions.” That’s exactly what is going on in nursing. The state of blessedness that comes with the Christ is certainly born where the murky clouds and storms of error are powerless to hide the coming light of inspiration, and the full daylight of healing.

The second verse reads:

Dear Christ, forever here and near,
No cradle song,
No natal hour and mother’s tear,
To thee belong.

This verse acknowledges that the Christ is always here, and right with us. There is never a millisecond when we are separate from God, or lost in the darkness and gloom of illness, injury, pain, immobility, or despair. Why? Not because God comes to our human condition to save us, but because we live, move, and have our being in Him. This is an essential point in prayer through Christian Science—God doesn’t come to the human situation, *there is no human situation* because we live in Him. Mrs. Eddy explains this in *Unity of Good*.

To gain a temporary consciousness of God’s law is to feel, in a certain finite human sense, that God comes to us and pities us; but the attainment of the understanding of His presence, through the Science of God, destroys our sense of imperfection, or of His absence, through a diviner sense that God is all true consciousness; and this convinces us that, as we get still nearer Him, we must forever lose our own consciousness of error.
(Un. 4:7)

So healing isn’t really God coming to us. It’s Christ reconciling us to realization of our oneness with God.

Notice that there is no “cradle song” for this divine idea. A cradle song is a lullaby. The Christ never sleeps, never needs a break. The Christ has “no natal hour”—no birthing process—the Christ has always been the same yesterday, today, and forever. Spirit doesn’t know any time. There is just the eternal now.

We don’t exist in time. Time is only a framework constructed by mortal belief. By definition, a “finite being” is one who lives in a state of contingency—in a linear timeline, in which the future is always uncertain. A linear timeline includes constant hesitancy and worry about the future, because we never know what’s coming next. But the Christ doesn’t live in an uncertain temporal existence. In reality, there is no linear timeline with an uncertain future. The Christ says, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Rev. 22:13). “Before, Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). “I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white, already to harvest” (John 4:35). All these statements underscore that the gentle beam of living Love, was never born into a temporal existence, but has always existed in the eternal now.

And let’s remember no “mother’s tear” belongs to this divine idea. The emergence of the Christ in thought brings no anguish or pain, only joy and healing.

The third verse reads:

Thou God-idea, Life-encrowned,
The Bethlehem babe —
Beloved, replete, by flesh embound —
Was but thy shade!

This verse confirms that the Christ idea isn’t man’s idea, but God’s idea. Likewise, it’s important for us to know that God isn’t our idea; we are His. We’re not thinking about God, God is thinking us. God is Mind, and we are Mind’s idea. Understanding this is a tremendous help in easing the false burden that somehow we need to figure everything out before earning a healing. Could healing really depend on whether or not we know something? That would make us more powerful than God. God knows us, and knows us perfect and whole. That’s what counts, and that’s why we’re well.

This “God-idea” is “Life-encrowned.” As we mentioned in discussing the previous verse, the Christ doesn’t develop over time. It operates from the standpoint of perfection. In addition to the imagery of “crowning” that signifies honor and dignity, “crowning” also implies success, completion, and achievement. So we know that we can rely on Christ because the work is *already done*.

And we love this idea—it’s cherished, precious, adored, treasured, and venerated. It’s also replete—which means, completely filled with all it needs.

The only thing that can seem to hide this glorious light from our view is the mistaken belief that the Christ can be confined in a fleshly form. The old theological view that Jesus was God in the flesh personalizes the Christ, and consigns it to a period long ago. If that were true, we would have

“Thou Gentle Beam...” Annual Meeting Talk *continued*

little hope of feeling its demonstration today. But Mrs. Eddy assured us that we can indeed witness those demonstrations.

They are the sign of Immanuel, or “God with us,”—a divine influence ever present in human consciousness and repeating itself, coming now as was promised aforetime,

To preach deliverance to the captives [of sense],
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised. (S&H xi.: 15)

So after we’ve established the facts about Christ, in the fourth and fifth verses the poem shifts focus and becomes a petition prayerfully acknowledging our desire to never lose sight of the Christ.

Thou gentle beam of living Love,
And deathless Life!
Truth infinite, — so far above
All mortal strife,

Or cruel creed, or earth-born taint:
Fill us today
With all thou art — be thou our saint,
Our stay, always.

This brief prayer begins with an acknowledgement that the Christ is a gentle, yet powerful beam—the very emanation of living Love that never dies. This light of Truth is far beyond the reach of any of the awful hardships that seem to thwart us in our journey, infinitely above orthodox creeds, and forever untainted by human opinions.

We pray that this light permeate our being to the point where we’re so filled with Truth, Life, and Love that sin, disease, and death cannot enter—creating an impervious armor that shields us from every attack of error, protecting not only ourselves, but everyone our thoughts rest upon. We invite this gentle Christ, this beam of divine Love, to be our savior, the rock of our salvation, in every circumstance, through every trial, and in all times and conditions.

This poem and the heartfelt petition that concludes it, like all spiritually Scientific reasoning, begins and ends with Truth. That gentle beam, that light that cannot be dimmed, impelled the Master to proclaim, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

He who called himself “the light of the world,” declared, “The Son can do nothing of himself but he what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19). He also taught his followers, “Ye are the light of the world... Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:14, 16). The Master fully expected his followers to express that same light that he

did.

The apostle Paul experienced first hand the healing, transforming, and forgiving power of that light, and gave his listeners instruction that continues to speak to us today:

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (II Cor. 4:6); and “...now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.” (Eph. 5:8).

Anyone who’s ever been in a cave knows that it doesn’t take a lot of light to see where you’re going. Any light, no matter how small, makes a difference.

When I was in the midst of a severe physical challenge, I often felt as if I were in a cave with little hope of getting out. Curiously, just before I was faced with that trial, I was reading Tolkien’s trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*. I had just finished the part where Frodo was in the dark, in the lair of the giant spider Shelob. Earlier in his journey the elf queen, lady Galadriel, had offered Frodo a crystal phial filled with water from her fountain, which held the light of Eärendil’s star. She said, “May it be a light for you when all other lights go out.” In the darkness of Shelob’s lair Frodo and his companion use that light to battle the spider.

In the darkest hours of my challenge Galadriel’s words echoed in my thought, “May it be a light for you when all other lights go out.” In my thought, I held to the light of Christ, and I knew that light would never go out.

In a way, Christian Science nurses fill that function to those who need their help. When we’re struggling, it can seem like we’re in a dark cave, but the gentle beam reflected by the nurses radiates that light—the atmosphere that enables the sufferer to get a better view of the path leading to healing—that never goes out.

We’ve mentioned several times now that this gentle beam of living Love isn’t of human origin. It’s the coming of the Christ. The gentle beam of living love transcends human communication as well.

I’d like to share an experience we had with our son that illustrates this point. When he was an infant, there was a short period where he wouldn’t make eye contact with us. Making sure we were covering all the bases, it came to us to handle the belief of autism. The eye contact issue was quickly resolved. Now whenever you’re working with a child, you have little choice but to handle your own thought about it. Verbally reasoning with an infant doesn’t get you very far. So we knew to handle it in our own thought.

When he became a toddler, he used to have terrible crying fits. He’d go over to a corner and just stand there

“Thou Gentle Beam...” Annual Meeting Talk *continued*

screaming. We were again concerned that the crying fits may have been another symptom of autism. During these attacks he wouldn't acknowledge us, or accept any comfort; he'd just stiffen up and keep wailing away. We weren't quite sure how to handle it.

One night it was particularly trying. I tried taking him into the back yard to distract him. But he kept on screaming and stiffening to slip out of my arms. I really didn't know what to do, so I just went to the textbook and opened it at random. I did my best to let the truth of what I was reading sink in, but I was really grasping at straws. Eventually after a half hour or so, the crying subsided, but it was clear that in this case, I had more faith than understanding. The fits continued on and off without warning.

After a month or so it happened again—this time, in the middle of the night. It was my turn to try and comfort him, so I went into his room. I picked him up and held him there standing in the dark with the door shut. I reached out to God with all my heart. I suddenly got a sure sense that there was nothing in that room but the Christ. That was all there was, and I knew it. In less than a minute, he stopped mid cry, looked over my shoulder, and pointed up saying, “light, light!” I looked around and the room was pitch black, but he saw the light. The gentle beam of the Christ brought him his angel, and that was the end of it. He never had another crying fit like that again.

I really felt the presence of the Christ that night. I knew that it wasn't me and my son in that room. It was just the Christ. That made the difference. That was a Christian Science healing, and it's a lesson I'll never forget.

Mrs. Eddy writes, “Let there be light” is the perpetual demand of Truth and Love, changing chaos into order and discord into the music of the spheres” (S&H 255:3-6). “Let there be light” is the command that is spoken through that gentle beam, and it heals.

Two summers ago at Cedars Camps we had a panel of Christian Science nurses talk to the staff. They said that, “as a *Manual* activity, nursing is expected of all [church] members.” They cited the qualities mentioned in the textbook regarding nursing—such as being “cheerful, orderly, punctual, patient, full of faith,—receptive to Truth and Love” (S&H 395:18).

I had to think about that some. The more I did, the more I realized that while Christian Science nurses are trained and qualified professionals, the qualities inherent in nursing, and the healing effect of letting that gentle beam shine can be, indeed, expressed by anyone who answers the nursing call when the need arises. My wife isn't a nurse, but during the severe challenge I mentioned earlier she certainly did some measure of nursing.

It is often said that the role of the Christian Science nurse is to care for practical needs while handling his or her own thought, whereas the practitioner is the one treating the case. The fact is, the practitioner is also handling his or her own thought about the case, but while the practitioner is often praying from a different location, the nurse is on the scene. This means the nurse has to be constantly correcting his or her thought so as to keep that gentle beam lit in the face of sometimes alarming conditions.

As I said, my wife isn't a nurse, but she is a practicing Christian Scientist. By now, we've seen that human qualities of compassion, kindness, persistence, affection, and so on aren't enough to maintain a healing atmosphere. One might assume that because we were married, my wife would have a certain amount of human affection for me. But up to that time in my life, I honestly admit, I wasn't always the most lovable person. In fact, in those days I was a bit of a jerk. So the help she gave me wasn't based on human attachment. Her actions were chiefly impelled by Christly love, and a refusal to accept the material picture regardless of the circumstances.

Some of you may have heard parts of my story, but today I'm specifically looking at it from the standpoint of my wife's approach to being my *de facto* nurse. I had a variety of alarming symptoms. It's not necessary to go into all of them, but I had lost forty pounds in a week; I could barely breathe; one of my lungs appeared to be collapsed; I couldn't eat, and found it difficult to think.

I also had periodic bouts of excruciating pain on one entire side of my body. During each of those bouts even in the middle of the night, my wife was with me verbally contradicting everything she saw. She was treating herself out loud, and she consistently and firmly encouraged me. One of these bouts came on the way to a restaurant. Believe it or not, I was substituting as First Reader at church that week. After the rehearsal we were meeting my parents for dinner with our kids, and my wife was driving. When the attack hit me, I begged to be let out on the side of the road, or to be taken to my parent's home that was close by. She absolutely refused, saying I needed to fight, and she was not going to let me die. When we got to the parking lot, she made no special effort to park close to the door. What did she do? Gingerly help me to the door? Nope! She got out with the kids, instructing me to stand up and follow. She didn't wait for me. I inched my way to the entrance, and was able to lean against the wall a bit before picking up a tray, and entering a buffet line. The family was all ahead of me waiting at the register. I had the choice to follow or collapse. I knew what she was doing. She was telling me without words to claim the truth and live it. She couldn't do that if she wasn't clear in her own thought about it. She was impelled by the Christ, and I knew it. By the time I got to the

“Thou Gentle Beam...” Annual Meeting Talk *continued*

register, the pain had ceased, and I had a good meal.

I asked my wife to read this for accuracy, and she wanted me to add one detail that I'd been unaware of. Two days after the dinner and after reading at church, on Sunday afternoon I felt really spent. My wife helped me upstairs and into bed. I asked to hear Handel's *Messiah* while I prayed. After an hour or two my wife came upstairs to check on me. She said when she saw me she started to gasp because my skin color was ashen gray, and then caught herself with the thought, she needed to be a nurse, and she could not convey any error to the patient. It was the first time she ever understood the term, "bedside manner."

In the following weeks, as I began to grow stronger, she insisted I go with the family to the mall, to the movies, and for walks. She never slowed down or coddled me. She spoke the truth and encouraged me to press on. By the way, the family motto has always been, "Don't stop for error." More than once, she found me lying on the living room sofa with a bunch of pillows. One time, she told me to take those pillows upstairs and choose to be well. I could barely stand up, but I knew she was right, and I did as I was told.

Frankly, even though in my own mind I never even considered giving up, I don't know if I would have made it without her unwavering encouragement. She was firm when she needed to be, but she also gave loving support when I needed it. She would hold my hands through dark times when I was struggling to breathe, always speaking the truth to me. And one time in the middle of the night, I woke up with the eerie feeling that I was passing on. I woke her up and said, "Tell me the truth. Just speak the truth." She responded immediately, and she spoke to me with a fervency that was uncompromising. She stayed with it until I felt normal again. I then told her why I woke her, and she spent more time punctuating the necessity for me to take command, and to remind me that God was bigger than any claim of evil.

Now throughout these challenges, even though she was firm, I never felt she was cold or unkind. Her strength was based in the Christ, that gentle beam of living Love. She never appeared flustered, or frantic, or resigned to the physical evidence. She was holding on to her understanding of deathless Life. Based on what I've seen from my interaction with Christian Science nurses, I have to suspect that this is also what they're doing.

They aren't the practitioners for the case, but whether verbally or non-verbally, Christian Science nurses are consistently correcting what they see for the benefit of keeping the "light on" (so to speak) for the patient in need. And as we've said, human fortitude wouldn't hold up. But the gentle beam of living Love always has the power to support us through every challenge.

I have to say too, that even my children followed my wife's example. My son who was in pre-school at the time was often telling me of God's presence and that I was well. And my daughter who was in high school, came home one day and pronounced that she was tired of living in a sick house. How could I not respond?

A big part of my healing took place when I saw how much care my family gave me even though the argument could have been made that I didn't deserve it. My thought turned away from myself, and I wept with remorse for what I was putting them through, and with deep gratitude for their willingness to stick by me. That was my turning point of repentance and transformation of character as I gained higher perspectives on true spiritual love. The practitioner and I were praying throughout, but the nursing and support of my family were invaluable.

There's much more to the story, but as you can tell, the healing came. That was just over fifteen years ago.

Throughout that experience we were alert to never try to heal a physical situation no matter what it looked like. I find it telling that directly after Mrs. Eddy's description of what it takes to be a nurse in *Science and Health*, she writes:

It is mental quackery to make disease a reality—to hold it as something seen and felt—and then to attempt its cure through Mind. It is no less erroneous to believe in the real existence of a tumor, a cancer, or decayed lungs, while you argue against their reality, than it is for your patient to feel these ills in physical belief. Mental practice, which holds disease as a reality, fastens disease on the patient, and it may appear in a more alarming form. (*S&H* 395:21)

Even though the nurse isn't the one directly treating the case, he or she still follows these instructions for themselves. For if they ever believe they're working with a physical disease, they are liable to be drawn into accepting the evidence, and therefore be less fit to support the healing. This coincides with another statement on page 369:

We never read that Luke or Paul made a reality of disease in order to discover some means of healing it. Jesus never asked if disease were acute or chronic, and he never recommended attention to laws of health, never gave drugs, never prayed to know if God were willing that a man should live. He understood man, whose Life is God, to be immortal, and knew that man has not two lives, one to be destroyed and the other to be made indestructible. (*S&H* 369:14)

The marginal heading for the paragraph I've just read is "The Christ Treatment." Once again, our Leader is instructing us to avoid all inquiry into the human scene. We can only

“Thou Gentle Beam...” Annual Meeting Talk *continued*

maintain such an approach through the power of the Christ.

Is there anything we can do to bring more of that gentle Christly beam into our lives? In her article “The Way,” Mrs. Eddy names three necessary steps to better healing: Self-knowledge, humility, and love. Self-knowledge includes recognizing what claims to be our human personality or story, and replacing it with our true spiritual identity.

As our textbook says, “The mortal mind through which Truth appears most vividly is that one which has lost much materiality—much error—in order to become a better transparency for Truth. Then, like a cloud melting into thin vapor, it no longer hides the sun” (S&H 295:14).

Finding our true selfhood in our spiritual identity leads naturally to humility. Jesus knew that the gentle beam didn’t originate with him; it originated in God. His humility was rooted in his recognition of his true identity, when he said, “I and my Father are one.” He had no separate will or mind apart from God, and he only did what he saw the Father do.

I found another aspect of humility on a YouTube “Ted Talk” that I think is especially pertinent to Christian Science nursing. A Scottish woman named Caroline McHugh said her mother told her that: “Humility isn’t thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself *less*.” Isn’t that wonderful? Jesus exemplified selfless service and taught his followers to do the same. I think it goes without saying that that’s also exactly what Christian Science nurses do. They think of themselves less and of others more.

Our Leader writes, “Whatever holds human thought in line with unselfed love, receives directly the divine power” (S&H 192:30). And that’s the third step in “The Way” — Love. That’s the way of the healing Christ, that’s the gentle beam, the God-idea, the dear Christ, forever here and near, our saint, “our stay, always.”

Mrs. Eddy expressed this unselfed love to a remarkable degree. I’m sure you’re all familiar with the healing of the little girl with the boil on her head. As with countless other cases healed by Mrs. Eddy, not a word was spoken, but that gentle beam was shining clear and strong. The mother wrote,

I wish I could make the world know what I saw when Mrs. Eddy looked at those children. It was a revelation to me. I saw for the first time the real mother Love, and I knew that I did not have it. I had a strange, agonized sense of being absolutely cut off from the children. It is impossible to put into words what the uncovering of my own lack of real mother Love meant to me.

As I turned in the procession and walked toward the line of trees in the front of the yard, there was a bird sitting

on the limb of a tree, and I saw the same love poured out on that bird that I had seen from Mrs. Eddy to my children. I looked down at the grass and the flowers, and there was the same love resting on them. It is difficult for me to put into words what I saw. This Love was everywhere, like the light, but it was divine, not mere human affection.

I looked at the people milling around on the lawn, and I saw it poured out on them. I thought of the various discords in this field, and I saw for the first time, the absolute unreality of everything but this infinite Love. It was not only everywhere present, like the light, but it was an intelligent presence that spoke to me, and I found myself weeping as I walked back and forth under the trees, ...saying out loud, “Why did I never know you before? Why have I not known you always?” (Mary Baker Eddy, *Christian Healer, Amplified Edition*, p. 356.)

This narrative reminds me of an entry in William Rathvon’s memoirs in which Mrs. Eddy said, “Every leaf upon every tree virtually declares, ‘God is Love.’” If we wonder how Mrs. Eddy did such work, she gave this description to Abigail Thompson:

I saw the love of God encircling the universe and man—filling all space—and that divine Love so permeated my own consciousness that I loved with Christ-like compassion everything I saw. This realization of divine Love called into expression “the beauty of holiness, the perfection of being,” which healed, and regenerated, and saved all who turned to me for help. (Mary Baker Eddy, *Christian Healer, Amplified Edition*, p. 522.)

So that’s what we’re shooting for.

In a message dated July 17, 1904 Mrs. Eddy wrote, “To live so as to keep the human consciousness in constant relation to the divine, the spiritual, and the eternal is to individualize infinite power, and this is Christian Science” (My. 160:5).

Keeping consciousness “in constant relation to the divine” is to be at one with the gentle beam of Christ. It lifts our thought to see what God sees, and to bring hope and courage to those we serve. We may not all be nurses, but we can all practice nurse-like qualities. And we can be grateful that the visiting Christian Science nurses serving the greater Chicago area are on the job, lighting the path to healing through that gentle beam of living Love.

