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identity

Who are you when your job and place in society are taken away - what's left that can't be taken away? What is the irreducible hardcore you? What is the you of you?

Is all we have the identities that society has given us - our style tribes, our clothing labels, our jobs, our cars, our political choices? Are these like clothes that we pull around our naked selves? Will we shiver and catch cold without them, or be arrested for indecent exposure of the soul?

So who are you going to be today? We're lost in a world full of choices. In the past, who you were was given to you by birth and occupation, and few escaped their place. Now 'who am I?' is a decision we have to make for ourselves every day, and a lot of the time we don't know where to begin...so we drift through identities, always acting, reinventing ourselves on the outside but never able to change ourselves on the inside; or we live and die by who other people say we are. We don't know how to define ourselves except by the categories that our society offers us, so we shoehorn ourselves in, grateful for the security of a label, grateful to belong, even if we have to cut off bits of our inner selves to fit in the box...

A lot of us are told we're worthless, and that becomes our identity, tainting everything we do with the stench of failure, making even our virtues or successes seem provisional and temporary in the face of our fundamental loserdom.

Those that have success find that it isn't enough to fill a heart, unless you shrink it...

and when the rest of us find that we don't have the talent for the premier division, or the head office, or the A-levels, we know that we are failures, because success is the only success, and we live out our lives knowing that we were not good enough...

At the beginning of his public ministry, after he had been baptised by John the Baptist, Jesus went into the desert to find out who he was if he wasn't going to be a carpenter anymore. Interestingly Luke, in his gospel, puts in Jesus' genealogy, his family tree, at this point - this is how Jesus' fellow Jews defined who he was - later, when Jesus starts preaching in the synagogue in Nazareth, his fellow Nazarenes are outraged at his presumption - who does he think he is, they say, isn't he just Joseph's son? In their society, where family defines who you are, they think they know all about him by knowing his family.

So Jesus goes out into the desert, away from the pigeonholes of job and family, to ask God who he really is. And by the end of the 40 days, Satan's repeated question 'if you are the son of God...' tells us that Jesus had found out.

So who does God think you are?

In the desert all the things that we use to define our identities are missing, and we are left with nothing except what we have inside. A lot of us fear that we would find we had nothing inside, or only fear and pain, and so we never venture into the desert. In the desert there is nowhere to hide, if God comes to us, as he came to Jesus, as he came to Moses, as he came to Jacob, to show us who we really are to him. And we clutch our thin rags of identity to us like armour, and shrink back from his touch - better the little we have, we say, than risk even that being taken away as well.

But those who try to save their life will lose it all, and God needs to strip us naked, in spite of our fear and embarrassment - and if we let him remove these filthy rags, and wash the festering wounds, he will reclothe us as something we never imagined, or only caught glimpses of in dreams and ran after down the High Street, but found that the things we bought could never quite get us there, because we were still wearing the same old stinking underwear underneath - and when we put on the identity God offers us - the one he sewed himself, until his hands bled - we will know that we have become our real selves at last, we have found out who we really are, that we are free, and need never search, lost, through the world again...

and maybe the desert turns out to be a beach, after all, so we make a bonfire of those old rags and watch the sun rise over the ocean...

steve collins



grace top tunes no. 1

easter song from cafe del mar vol. 2

you're bringing me back to life  
i walk on the line that you wrote in the sand  
put myself in your hands completely  
you're bringing me back to life  
how i am blessed on this day today and everyday  
now that your light is in my heart i shall hunger and thirst no more  
you're bringing me back to life

We must only leave the world  
in order to learn to love it more.

We must only leave behind needy people  
in order to become more committed to serving them.

We must only embrace celibacy  
in order to deepen our love for men and women and ourselves.

We must only vow poverty  
as a way of learning to see the true value in the world.

We must only 'waste time' with God  
as a way of discovering what the time of our lives is for.

Thomas Merton

# St. Stephen's it may not be in a church. another city

During 1998 & 1999 five of London's leading alternative worship groups are joining forces to bring you a series of events marking the Millennium.



Grace Epicentre

Host

it may not stay in one place.

it may not be on a sunday.

Christmas 1998  
Lent/Easter/Pentecost/Harvest/Advent 1999

another city - from the tourist image of London.

another city - from the one where time is money

These events will be aimed at both Christians and non-Christians to show an alternative vision of Church and Christianity.

another city - from the official version

LOPE

it may not be over in an hour or so.

We anticipate a contrast with the official celebrations by Church and State

another city - from the one mapped out for you

it may not be a service.

Abundant

another city - from the one of triumphalism & the Dome

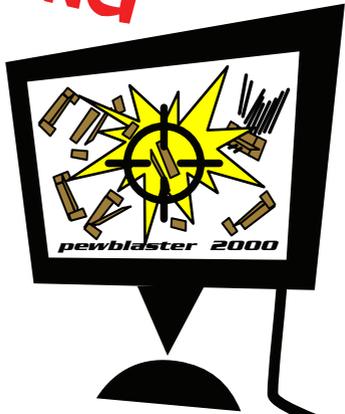
another city - from the one where self is all that matters

another city - the Unauthorised Version

at a variety of venues all over London  
look out for further details

Hebrews 13:14 Here we do not have an enduring city -  
we are looking out for the city that is to come.

REIMAGINING



WORSHIP

A

B

OO

the fourth  
New Worship Gathering

Friday 8th May  
to Sunday 10th May

Venue:  
The Host Community,  
The Round Chapel,  
Powerscroft Road,  
London E5 OPU

Cost: £10

In 1991 various 'alternative worship' groups met at Greenbelt to network, share stories, struggles, ideas, hopes and dreams. This spawned two weekend gatherings in York and one in Glasgow. We figure it's about time for another so come and join us in London. We'd love to see as many groups as possible, to catch up and to reflect on where we're heading. If you're on your own, come and we'll introduce you to some others. If you're not in a worship community, but wanting ideas or to get started, come along too.

We begin Friday night from 6pm with a cafe, some laid back sounds with DJs spinning the wheels, and some alt. worship. If you're travelling, try and make it by 9pm when we'll get started properly. The weekend will finish at 4pm Sunday after a final act of worship.

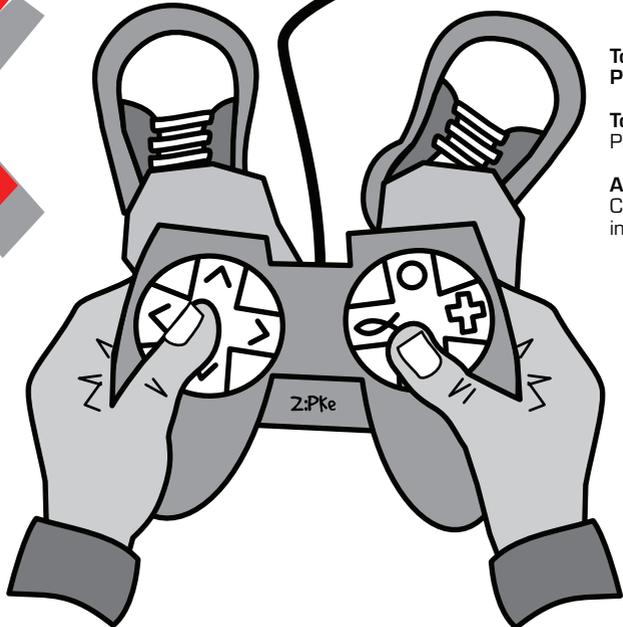
Please bring vinyl/cds/videos/slides/liturgies/rants/meditations/rituals/artwork/any other resources that you would like to share. [It might be worth bringing a blank video tape to copy others' loops if they are willing....]

To book places, or if you require further information please leave a message on the Epicentre Network's automated service 0181 488 0953. Please book in advance if possible so that we can gauge numbers attending.

To pay for the event, and for questions about how to get to the venue please phone 0181 533 9676. Please send cheques (made payable to 'The Host Community') to: The Gathering c/o The Round Chapel, Powerscroft Road, London E5 OPU

Accommodation: We would encourage people to stay with contacts they have in London, but if you are really stuck then please contact the Host Community 0181 533 9676 or Epicentre 0181 488 0953. If you have a fax, then from 1st April Epicentre will be offering a fax-back service providing information on cheap Central London accommodation - phone 0181 488 0953 (you will need a touch-tone phone and manual fax button).

K



M!



## have you ever encountered an angel?

Imagine yourself at home  
 Picture where you are and who is with you  
 Imagine other people in your home with you  
 Look around - what is it like?  
 Imagine that relaxed feeling when you don't feel you 'have' to talk  
 Enjoy the atmosphere  
 How do you feel?

## what are angels?

**See that you do not look down on little children.  
 For I tell you that their angels in heaven  
 always see the face of God.**

**Matt 18:10**

Now imagine the doorbell rings  
 You answer it and outside are some people you have never met before  
 But they seem to know you  
 What are you going to do?  
 Do you want to invite them in?  
 How are you going to react to them?

**Do not forget to entertain strangers,  
 for by doing so some people  
 have entertained angels without knowing it.**

**Hebrews 13:2**

## what's their job?

You invite them in and the atmosphere becomes tense  
 They obviously know things about you but you still don't know who they are  
 Your mind is racing and you feel a sense of panic

**The angel of the Lord  
 encamps around those who fear him,  
 and he delivers them.**

**Ps 34:7**

## do we have guardian angels?

Now you find out that they are angels?  
 And they tell you something amazing and seemingly impossible was going to  
 happen to you  
 What might that amazing and impossible thing be?  
 Would you believe them?  
 How do your friends react?

## have you unknowingly entertained an angel?

## learning the music of god

My brother is a brilliant jazz pianist, and one day when I was about 15 he invited me to accompany him while he played. I mustered my four chords and stumbled along trying to follow him. Without my really noticing, when I slowed down he slowed down, when I played off-key he somehow incorporated it into his own music, and at the same time what he was doing was pushing me and I was learning without realising it, until soon I was feeling pretty fluent and thinking, "hey! I'm a better player than I thought..."

And the Bible is the history of God trying to teach us his music, and to begin with people are pretty hopeless and can't keep in time or tune, and He has to go over and over the same things, slowly. And then some people are picking up the right melody. They stumble, but it doesn't matter as long as they keep listening and playing until they become more fluent. Sometimes people are playing the wrong tune entirely, and God has to tell them "Stop! You can't play that with us. Try this instead..." And some people begin to get a sense of the structure of the whole symphony and how the players in the orchestra fit together. But we still can't hear the tune properly.

And then God sends His Son to play it through perfectly for us. Now people know what the song is, and start to teach it to each other. No-one is good enough to play it without mistakes, but God is a patient teacher. He even incorporates our improvisations, if we have understood his themes well enough. And when everyone who wants has joined the orchestra, He will bring the rehearsals to a close and the great concert will begin at last...

Andy Thorton

## the shakertown pledge

Recognising that the Earth and the fullness thereof is a gift from our gracious God, and that we are called to cherish, nurture, and provide loving stewardship for the Earth's resources, and recognising that life itself is a gift, and a call to responsibility, joy and celebration, I make the following declarations :

I declare myself to be a world citizen.

I commit myself to an ecologically sound life.

I commit myself to lead a life of creative simplicity and to share my personal wealth with the world's poor.

I commit myself to join with others in reshaping institutions in order to bring about a more just global society in which each person has full access to the needed resources for their physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual growth.

I commit myself to occupational accountability, and in so doing I will seek to avoid the creation of products which cause harm to others.

I affirm the gift of my body, and commit myself to its proper nourishment and physical well-being.

I commit myself to examine continually my relations with others, and to attempt to relate honestly, morally, and lovingly to those around me.

I commit myself to personal renewal through prayer, meditation and study.

I commit myself to responsible participation in a community of faith.

front cover image derived from spoof Universal Identity Card by William H. Whyte, shown in his seminal book on corporate capitalism 'The Organisation Man' (1955)

so come you who have much faith and you who have little  
you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time  
you who have tried to follow and you who have failed

**grace. be yourself.**



**fresh vital worship**

**relaxed funky ambient & reflective  
visuals\* meditations\*tunes**

**8pm@st mary's church, st mary's road, ealing w5  
second sunday of every month.**

**info jonny 0181 567 6926  
mike 0181 567 3466**

**grace.london@btinternet.com  
<http://freespace.virgin.net/adam.baxter/grace>**