

*Come Holy Spirit
Use me to Your glory*

Precious Pilgrim,

"The wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round. The wheels on the bus go round and round all through the town."

This is the children's tune that is constantly playing in my brain. I think it has climbed back up the charts to the top ten in my psyche because of my weekly activity. Right now I am living with my husband in Long Hanborough, England. It is a village located about 30 minutes away from Oxford. Usually four days a week I ride the bus into Oxford where we meet. My husband is a tutor, lecturer, and fellower at the University and his expertise is in American History. He has one more term and then he's retiring to the U.S. and hopefully will be my personal tutor.

For the well-being of the world, this country and the community, my family and friends -- I've chosen not to drive in this country. I do know some of my limitations and driving on the wrong side of the road is definitely one of them. Besides, we'll be moving to Alabama in about two months, so bus riding seems to be the sensible mode of transportation when I'm left to my own devices to get around. I have really enjoyed this world. Each one-way trip costs £1.80 and takes about 30 minutes. The make up of the passengers varies in number and age, depending on the time in which I ride. Early morning and mid afternoon is crowded with chatty students and mid morning and late afternoon is filled more

with professionals, an occasional parent and child and the elderly.

The English, as a rule, seem more reserved. Maybe it's being stuck on an island all together, they had to build personal persona barriers for privacy. When you pass people on the street, it's been my experience that there is seldom any eye contact and when you stand at the bus stop for 15 minutes, there might be no conversation between those waiting. The only exception I've run into was one day a stylish-looking elderly lady dressed in short skirt, heels and lime green coat started talking. I noticed and mentioned her clothes to you, Pilgrim, because she was dressed remarkably different than the rest of us. We were in sensible dark shoes, sensible dark pants, and sensible dark raincoats. I know, for I've been working at this look over the past year. I've been working at trying to blend in and not look like a foreigner. My goal must have been reached, for just yesterday I was actually stopped on the street in Oxford and asked directions to the train station.

Anyway, where was I? Oh yes, the lady in the green coat started talking first to one and then to another, and by the time the bus arrived, all five of us were in a circle carried away in conversation. It was really fun. She and I were the last to board. As we climbed the stairs, I mentioned how I'd enjoyed the talk and how unusual it was. Having noticed her faint accent, I asked where she was from. "Milano, Italy," she responded. She commented on the English being reserved and we just smiled in silent agreement. It was like a Mediterranean sunbeam had shown its ray through the clouds of merry Old England. Merry ole England - yes. It is rightly

nicknamed. I've been attracted to this fair land for a very long time -- in fact, almost 30 years when I visited as a teenager and now to have actually had the privilege of living here for a year has been quite a treat. What I love the most, rings true to my being, is the balance, especially in the small things. Taking time for mid-morning coffee or afternoon tea. It reminds me of a quote I read in a church in Wales last Sunday. It was attributed to St. David whom I know nothing about but is called the Patron Saint of Wales -- anyway, the quote says:

*"Be joyful brothers and sisters,
Keep your faith
And do the little things
You have seen and heard
With me." (Hmm -- the little things!)*

I don't want to romanticize the world and I'm sure being madly in love with this glorious Englishman, my husband, does color my perspective -- but even before our coming together, this world has felt good -- better -- best -- in many ways. It's as if some of my genetic makeup has drawn me to the green rolling hills of the Cotswolds. I felt like I'd arrived home from the moment I set foot in this particular area of England (over 12 years ago). It's moderate, not drastic, more middle of the road, rather than extreme. There are little honey-colored stone houses with hidden gardens on slow winding roads. The show and tell of the people is behind walls instead of out front for all to see. This reality seems to be fleshed out even on the bus. One of the most delightful aspects besides viewing

the glorious countryside is viewing the glorious companionship between elderly friends, ones you can tell share a history. There seems to be an easiness, a comfortableness, a settling down into sharing themselves with each other that I find quite appealing. It's as if two little house wrens have perched themselves next to each other and in their brown fluffiness go chirping away in celebration of their companionship -- their friendship. I can't and don't eavesdrop, that wouldn't be nice and I couldn't add anything anyway. Their world at that moment is complete. I can, however, sit back and recognize and appreciate the sweetness of their shared exchange, for I've experienced such a relationship myself, especially with my dearest of friends, Mary Barwick. It is to her that my memory bank turns for, you see, it is her birthday today. Over the years she has offered me many a cup of coffee. She makes the very best. We've sat at her kitchen table and opened our lives up to each other -- our hopes, our fears, our joys, our sadnesses. We've laughed and cried. We've celebrated our Lord, our families. We've gone shopping many a day. We've eaten many a salad, that's Caesar, and had many an adventure, that's fun. She paints, I write. I write, she paints. And sometimes by the grace of God we've been known to collaborate these gifts. She is my soul sister and I thank the dear Lord for her.

I opened up a prayer book this morning and in the middle inside cover I read:

"A gift from Mary Barwick 3/31/00" to me."

"A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter; he that has found one has

found a treasure.

There is nothing so precious as a faithful friend and no scales can measure its excellence.

A faithful friend is an elixir of life. And those that fear the Lord will find him. Whoever fears the Lord directs his friendship aright for as he is, so is his neighbor also."

Sirach 6:14-17

Today I'd like to return her gift with love and add Proverbs 18:24. "Some friends play at friendship, but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin" and Proverbs 17:17, "A friend loves at all times."

Happy Birthday, Mary. You are the most precious of gifts and today even though our worlds are thousands of miles apart, you in Alabama and me in England, we are united in love -- love for the Lord and love for each other. When I get off this bus, I think I'll go have a cup of coffee and toast you, but first I might even get up my nerve enough to tell those two precious house sparrow-like ladies -- "Thank you, thank you, ladies, for reminding me of a dear friend and the rarest of all gifts -- "friendship." "The wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round." Mary, see you in two months. The bus is getting ready to stop and I'm going to go have my coffee.

And, Precious Pilgrim, have you experienced such a gift -- a gift of a true friend? If you have, I recommend getting on your knees and thanking the Lord. I am. Peace.

Your sister in Christ,

Lucy

God bless.