Reflections on Living Water/ Faith – Led by Rob - 4th November 2020

Opening words: This week, we have a transcript. We are no longer providing video resources every week but may continue to create these important seasons of the year. We have included some pictures/ resources to help you in your meditation.

If you are meditating alone but would like to feel 'with us' we meditate at 7.30pm on Wednesday. Due to the recent 'second lockdown' we are meditating at home. The tradition we meditate in is Centering Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centering Prayer Tradition: A very warm welcome from Fiona, Marie, Rob, Hazel and Paul, the leaders of the Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre, Romsey. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate beginning with an opening prayer followed by reflections and then 25 minutes of silence. We hope you enjoy your meditation with us.

Opening Prayer: Eternal God, through our meditation may the ears of our hearts be attentive to your Word. May we seek and find You. Awakened to Your presence may we be joyful, embodying peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self awareness. May we follow Your teaching, seeking also, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and Mothers. May we, therefore, commit to community, love of earth, stability, peace and justice making. **Amen**

Introduction: This season with its recollection of All Saints, All Souls, its bonfires and later remembrance of conflicts is about endings and beginnings – what the Tibetans would call a Bardo time. In the old agrarian times, November was the beginning of the farming year and the old Celtic feast of Samhain literally means "Year's End". It is also a time of wetness – wind and water, as we have been experiencing. Water was our beginning, as all life emerged from water. It has the properties of binding together and of penetrating deeply. Those two qualities are also qualities of faith, which is also a beginning – the starting point of the spiritual journey.

I would like, tonight to share two stories, one from the Christian and one from the Buddhist Scriptures, in which, I believe the concept of "Living Water" is used to signify faith and establishing new beginnings through faith.

Reading 1: The meeting of Jesus with the woman at the well in Samaria

But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you

have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the man you are now living with is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

— John 4:4–26

Reflections: There is a Buddhist resource known as the Dhammachakra – literally the “wheel of truth” which shows amongst other things six realms of being, or states in which we can be in this life, and in each realm there is Loka Buddha or Buddha of the world who holds out what is needed to bring healing to that state. What is held out is always what is in most abundance in that state of being but with a spiritual dimension. One of the 6 states is that of hungry ghosts or “Petas” who have large appetites, and live in a world of good things but have very thin and restricted throats so they cannot consume them or get satisfaction. In that realm the Loka Buddha holds out spiritual food and living water.



I have always thought of the woman at the well as someone whom Jesus with his insight recognised as a person with many unfulfilled desires; in effect a hungry ghost. She had, after all had five husbands and was living with someone who was not her husband! But his understanding, like the understanding in Buddhism was that someone with such hunger should not just be dismissed as ‘greedy’, but on the contrary, steered in the right direction they can exhibit enormous faith and devotion. And he, like the Loka Buddha, was offering her Living Water and a new beginning of faith and spiritual growth. In Eastern Christian traditions, she is in fact recorded as having gone on to fulfil that promise. She was later baptized as "Photini” and is celebrated as a saint of renown whose continuing witness is said to have brought so many to the Christian faith that she is described as "equal to the apostles".

Reading 2: This story is taken from the account of the events leading up to the Buddha’s death – known as “parinibbana”, when he was 80 years old, becoming quite frail and his disciples including his attendant, Ananda were becoming worried about what would happen to the community and the teaching after he was gone.

The clearing of the waters by the Buddha

24. Now on the way the Blessed One went aside from the highway and stopped at the foot of a tree. And he said to the Venerable Ananda: "Please fold my upper robe in four, Ananda, and lay it down. I am weary and want to rest awhile."

"So be it, Lord." And the Venerable Ananda folded the robe in four and laid it down.

25. And the Blessed One sat down on the seat prepared for him and said to the Venerable Ananda: "Please bring me some water, Ananda. I am thirsty and want to drink."

26. And the Venerable Ananda answered the Blessed One: "But just now, Lord, a great number of carts, five hundred carts, have passed over, and the shallow water has been cut through by the wheels, so that it flows turbid and muddy. But the Kakuttha River, Lord, is quite close by, and its waters are clear, pleasant, cool, and translucent. It is easily approachable and delightfully placed. There the Blessed One can quench his thirst and refresh his limbs."

27-29. But a second time the Blessed One made his request, and the Venerable Ananda answered him as before. And then for a third time the Blessed One said: "Please bring me some water, Ananda. I am thirsty and want to drink."

30. Then the Venerable Ananda answered, saying: "So be it, Lord." And he took the bowl and went to the stream. And the shallow water, which had been cut through by the wheels so that it flowed turbid and muddy, became clear and settled down, pure and pleasant as the Venerable Ananda drew near.

31. Then the Venerable Ananda thought: "Marvellous and most wonderful indeed is the power and glory of the Tathagata!"

32. And he took up water in the bowl and carried it to the Blessed One, and said: "Marvellous and most wonderful indeed is the power and glory of the Tathagata! For this shallow water, which had been cut through by the wheels so that it flowed turbid and muddy, became clear and settled down, pure and pleasant as I drew near. Now let the Blessed One drink the water. Let the Happy One drink." And the Blessed One drank the water.

Mahaparinibbana Sutta Part 4

Reflections: This story is not about the Buddha performing a miracle and must not be viewed in that way. These stories are spiritual and allegorical teachings. I think what the Buddha was doing here, was acknowledging Ananda's fears and anxieties and demonstrating to him that all will be well. Just as water which has gone muddy and foul can become pure, so too, things which seem bleak and hopeless can be transformed – by Living Water. What was important was not the continued presence of the teacher, but the teaching itself and the faith and devotion which it inspired.

At that time Ananda had not in fact attained the highest state of understanding and sainthood, but he was to do so shortly after the Buddha's parinibbana through the Living Water he was offered.

So, faith is very different from belief. Like water it binds and brings us together and is penetrating and deep. As such it is shared across the traditions and dispels our differences – Living Water.

Preparing for Meditation: So let us find and move into a comfortable position, relaxing the body, noticing its contact with the chair or cushion and with the floor. Letting go of the efforts, difficulties and worries of our day, and bringing ourselves into the peace of the present moment. Noticing our breathing as it slows and deepens. Giving attention to any points of tension or discomfort. If you use a sacred word you might notice its rhythm, perhaps co-ordinating it with the breathing, or simply

focus on the candle or on the breathing, returning to the point of focus whenever you are aware of the mind wandering off, in a spirit of non-judgmental acceptance. Noticing where we are, the place and the time and the friends here with us and those we know are meditating with us remotely, and knowing that we are blessed and refreshed by the Living Water of faith. The meditation will last for 25 minutes and will begin and end with the sound of the bell.

Post Meditation Poem: Water Water Water

Water water water and water
Give me water in this hot summer.
And water has atom, water has favor,
And water water water and water
Water as cloud, and water drops
In action, in creation and
Water is the symbol of supreme devotion.
Water, water. water and water
And in water there is true love
That is flowing within and outside.

- *Gajanan Mishra*



Closing prayer: Loving and Eternal God, we thank you for the gifts of prayer, meditation and contemplation. We thank you for being with us and for this community. May we, therefore, pray with all others, as one community, one world and one spirit to One God…Moments of your personal prayer follow…**Amen.**

Thank you for meditating with us, please join us again soon.

Resources: Pictures from Pixabay.com and Mike Moyers (Samaritan Woman at the well)







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