## Reflection on: Wisdom for World Children's Day by Paul with Fiona

**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 attached some pictures/ resources to help you in your meditation.

If you are meditating alone but would like to feel 'with us' we meditate at At 7.30 pm on Wednesday in the physical space of the meditation room at Wisdom Centre. 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**: "Sometimes,' said Winnie the Pooh, to his friend Piglet, 'the smallest things take up the most room in your heart." Like for instance when "Piglet noticed that even though he had a Very Small Heart, it could hold a rather large amount of Gratitude," or that "Weeds are flowers, too, once you get to know them." (Extracts from Winnie the Pooh by A.A. Milne)

Reading Winnie the Pooh as an adult reminds us that a child is naturally always in motion, has something to do, has creative ideas, wants to do new things, to meet new people and see more. World Children's Day was first established in 1954 as Universal Children's Day and is celebrated on 20 November each year to promote international togetherness and awareness of children worldwide. In this meditation Paul reflects on the Christian background of Children's Charities which were founded in the 19th Century and Fiona has included some popular children's literature from the early 20th Century, a period when Children's literature became a genre in its own right.

One young Irish Doctor's humanitarian principle gave rise to a standard for child welfare which is now recognised all around the world. Dr Barnardo, who founded his first Children's home in 1867 on Christian principles did not discriminate based on faith, background or wealth. He sought to give shelter and care to all children in need. Although not perfect or above criticism, Barnardo's original intention became a standard of hospitality which we are all called to give our neighbour whether child or adult.

Through pioneers like Barnardo, the 19th Century was a time when Children became 'noticed.' literature written for Children invokes playfulness, gratitude for simplicity and companionship across generations. Today Winnie the Pooh (1926), and the Velveteen Rabbit (1922), are almost thought of as spiritual classics in mindfulness practice. An attitude around childlike qualities and enrichment are very different from (as Paul identifies), the cynicism of William Shakespeare in the 17th Century - portrayed in 'As you like it'

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms;
And then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel…

How different is Shakespeare's 'whining schoolboy' from A.A. Milne's Winnie the Pooh who says "It is more fun to talk with someone who doesn't use long, difficult words but rather short, easy words like, "What about lunch?" and "As soon as I saw you, I knew an adventure was going to happen."

Paul reflects that Shakespeare's view, although unpleasant, does reflect a picture that was prevalent of adults towards children up until the late 19th Century. It seems unthinkable and shocking today that Children, especially peasant children, were expected to die and were seemingly expendable: if Children survived infancy, it was unlikely they would reach adulthood, whether rich or poor: in English history, there has been many a story of an inheritance crisis caused by the untimely death of a young heir. Regardless of the frequency of infant mortality, the effects, to be sure, were no less devastating. Parents in old times often had to face the heartache felt time and time again when yet another young one died.

In Paul's (and Fiona's) Parish church, our local Abbey, there is a beautiful memorial to the young daughter of a local doctor: she died of scarlet fever, the inscription reads: "Is it well with the child? Aye, it is well."
In such a poignant few words, faith in a heavenly future for the young one lost to this world rings through. And that is where we need faith. "But Jesus said, suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. "

Through Universal Children's Day, Paul looks backwards to the historical and theological reasons, as to why children, viewed with disdain by Shakespeare became so important in British society through the 19th Century to the point of having literature especially written for them in the early 20th Century.

Paul believes we have to thank Charities for "the poor." Although these had existed since the middle ages, there was a growth of philanthropy in the Victorian era, coupled with the appalling conditions

of factory child, workhouse and rural workers. This led to a well-meaning (but not always a perfect and well-motivated) effort to alleviate destitution. There were over 140 charities in 1890 in London alone dedicated to improving the lives of working-class children.

Thomas John Barnardo was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1845. As a young man, he moved to London to train as a doctor. When he arrived, he was shocked to find children living in terrible conditions, with no access to education. Poverty and disease were so widespread that one in five children died before their fifth birthday. When a cholera epidemic swept through the East End, leaving 3000 people dead and many orphaned children, the young Barnardo felt an urgent need to help.
His first step, in 1867, was to set up a 'ragged school' where children could get a free basic education. One evening a boy at the mission, Jim Jarvis, took Barnardo around the East End, showing him children sleeping on roofs and in gutters. What he saw affected him so profoundly he decided to abandon his medical training and devote himself to helping children living in poverty. In 1870, Barnardo opened his first home for boys.
To begin with, there was a limit to the number of boys who could stay there. But when an 11-year-old boy was found dead — of malnutrition and exposure — two days after being told the shelter was full, Barnardo vowed never to turn another child away.
Barnardo's work was radical. The Victorians saw poverty as shameful, and the result of laziness or vice. But Barnardo refused to discriminate between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. He accepted all children, regardless of race, disability or circumstance. Barnardo believed that every child deserved the best possible start in life, whatever their background.

Paul observes that these tenants are as important as ever to us today. In the UK, 30 per cent of children are said to live in relative poverty. While this is not the deprivation that called Dr Barnardo to action, poverty is nevertheless still with us and growing. The recent Children's lunch crisis is testament to this fact. Worldwide around 30% of children live in relative poverty with around 10-15% living in absolute poverty, meaning they lack necessities as essential as nutrition or clean water,

Fiona reflects that because the world is never populated entirely by adults' children are unfortunately affected by poverty but without the resources to change their situation. The present environmental crisis has been created by adults but will affect the worlds current and future children disproportionately.

As a person who has travelled a lot, I still marvel at the ability of children in the most impoverished circumstances to live right now with no opportunity to think of what comes next. Poverty in the west is very real in relative and absolute terms. All of us who are more fortunate are impoverished by overthinking, which is the opposite of what Jesus teaches. Matthew 6:25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?"

In affluent western society, we impoverish children differently. High expectations at a young age have caused high levels of anxiety. Basic needs and safety are also about fighting emotional poverty. Adults sometimes neglect to honour the personal gifts of the child as they are, wishing to change these gifts into what we as adults might prefer. By accepting people, both young and old as they are is the only way to enjoy the true nature of what God has given us in the other. Living this way is the practice of living in the presence and encountering God. The Velveteen Rabbit teaches such Wisdom:

“It doesn't happen all at once,' said the Skin Horse. 'You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out, and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real, you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.”
*— Margery Williams, The Velveteen Rabbit*

**Beginning Meditation:** This is often a relaxation followed by some words to guide the meditator into silence, suggest the use of a sacred word, use of breath etc

**Bell Sounds…25-minute meditations begins…Count down timer starts (this may be your own watch or meditation timer app)**
**Bell Sounds…Meditation ends**

**Post Meditation reading:**

“Weeks passed, and the little Rabbit grew very old and shabby, but the Boy loved him just as much. He loved him so hard that he loved all his whiskers off, and the pink lining to his ears turned grey, and his brown spots faded. He even began to lose his shape, and he scarcely looked like a rabbit any more, except to the Boy. To him, he was always beautiful, and that was all that the little Rabbit cared about. He didn't mind how he looked to other people, because the nursery magic had made him Real, and when you are Real shabbiness doesn't matter.”
*— Margery Williams, The Velveteen Rabbit*

**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.

**Images/ resources:** Winnie the Pooh image by Ernest Howard Shepard (Public Domain)



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