Reflections on the 3rd Week of Advent – by Fiona 16th December 2020



Photo: Fiona's Family Advent wreath, icon and Crib

Opening words: This week, we have a transcript. We are no longer regularly providing video resources. 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 usually meditate at 7.30pm in our own homes (at present). 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:

"Faith is a dark night for man, but in this very way it gives him light." (Saint John of the Cross) [1]

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him…" (John 1:6-7)

Lighting of the Advent wreath (at Home or reflecting on the picture above) 'He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said….' John 1:6-8, 19-28

Reflection*:* During The third week of Advent, on the 14th of December we celebrate the feast of John of the Cross, as the above quotation shows, the commemoration of John of the Cross is well placed in the Christian Calendar. The third week of Advent begins on Gaudete Sunday and is signified by the lighting of the pink candle on the Advent wreath which represents 'joy' and 'light' in the Christian tradition, a moment on our Advent journey when we rejoice with all our hearts and look to shine light or magnify what is greater (or of greater importance) than ourselves.

As Pope Francis said in his homily on Sunday that arriving at Christian joy is no cakewalk, but if we put Jesus at the centre of our lives, it is possible to have a joyful faith. "The invitation to joy is characteristic of the season of Advent." In his address the Pope reflected on the day's Gospel reading from St. John and encouraged people to follow the example of St. John the Baptist -- in his joy and in his testimony to the coming of Jesus Christ.[2]

Amidst the ongoing virulence of the Pandemic, and a gloomy outlook for post-Brexit trade talks in the U.K and a struggling economy Advent looks different; man this year. Many of us may feel lonely, overwhelmed or scared by the darkness of almost a year of fearing infection and facing uncertainty. The reading for today from 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 calls us to "Rejoice always" to "Pray without ceasing" and to "give thanks in all circumstances." In Luke 1:46 we are asked to follow Mary with our souls joyfully magnifying the Lord. Such grace may of course come readily to the Pope, but for the rest of us may be easier said than done. In such inclement circumstances how do we pray? For many of us this may be 'a cry in the wilderness.' The joy, gratitude and hopeful anticipation we are supposed to feel in the third week of Advent may be difficult to muster. To help us, this week we are introduced to John the Baptist:

John was not the light, but came to testify to the light. In the time of the last prophets both religious leaders and governments were corrupt, fighting among themselves. Perhaps not unlike today there was a darkening discontent and unrest. Yet, regardless, John had the Wisdom and courage to testify to the coming light of Christ. He calls out the leaders of his time for their corruption, reveals the darkness and enlightens others.

In John 1:21 John the Baptist denied to the authorities that he was the revered prophet Elijah, instead he said he was fulfilling the prophecy of Issiah" as the VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, to 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,' as Isaiah the prophet said." (John 1:23). For sure, John the Baptist functioned like the Prophet Elijah and had Elijah-like characteristics. John like Elijah was called into a lifetime of service to God, and was prepared to hear the small voice of God in the most humble of circumstances. Elijah and John were unlike most of us who pray that God's will be done, and then promptly disobey it when called into uncomfortable and humble service.

Despite the spiritually impoverished state of the world there are those who are testifying to a greater light, and a changing wiser world and these are not always 'religious' proclamations. In the Banking industry women are inspiring others in a male-dominated industry. One Female Banking CEO said, "In this day and age, collaboration is more important than competition." Also, in issues of business and environment there is a growing movement of people who think the Circular Economy is the future for business and society. I agree with both collaboration and the circular principles of good environmental and other stewardship, perhaps as Isaiah says shoots will come forth from what has been sown, however small this may be at first. (Isaiah 61:11)

Perhaps it is through our crisis made from past pride, arrogance and misuse of resrouces that Wisdom will take her stand at this crossroads of life calling for the noble virtues of prudence in those who truly want to live (Proverbs 8:2-21). The Advent of the Kingdom, is the light which occurs most powerfully in the human heart, a change which is called metanoia in Biblical Greek. In the original context it meant belief in Jesus as the Messiah, it could also mean for us an advent of new behaviour, more compassion, patience, generosity and love of neighbour. Who calls us to open our eyes and look for the light today? How can we be more attentive to where light might be calling us amid darkness? As St John of the Cross said: "In the twilight of life, God will not judge us on our earthly possessions and human successes, but on how well we have loved."

Who is the "least" in our neighbourhood? In our country or city or the world. Close to home, who is the "least" among us? Do we see these individuals who may be greatest in the sight of God, or are they simply people we overlook? Throughout the Gospels, Jesus sees the lost and the "least" and He is attentive to them. Jesus also wants us to have eyes and a heart that we will see 'the poor in spirit, the "least" who are near us. Do we look for them? Are we attentive to them? Do we truly see them and help them?

It is no accident that the coming Christ was born in the most impoverished and humble of circumstances. Like the three Wise Men of epiphany, will we have the wisdom to seek out and minister to the poor, paying the least and little ones among us great homage? – reflecting on these things is for me the meaning of Advent.

A reading from Wisdom for the third week of Advent

…For she is a reflection of eternal light,
a spotless mirror of the working of God,
and an image of his goodness.
Although she is but one, she can do all things,
and while remaining in herself, she renews all things;
in every generation she passes into holy souls
and makes them friends of God, and prophets;
for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.
She is more beautiful than the sun,
and excels every constellation of the stars.
Compared with the light she is found to be superior,
for it is succeeded by the night,
but against wisdom evil does not prevail….(Wisdom 26-30)

In Proverbs 1-9/ Wisdom 6-9 Wisdom is personified as a female figure existing before creation, present at creation and involved in creation. Authorship of Wisdom was in the late Old Testament period. Learned commentary on Wisdom makes three basic assertions: (1) Wisdom is an attribute of the three persons of the Trinity and an essential part of emerging Christology. (2) Wisdom is available to people in their daily lives; Wisdom is Christ in the world and through lived human experience (3) Wisdom is built into the Godhead and is thus within the fabric of the very structure of the universe. Two principles here are Wisdom's invitation to act in the world, calling out and changing what is unjust, unrighteous, inequitable and lacking in equality. The other is honouring the Wisdom principle at the heart of the universe before creation and considering what this means for ourselves as stewards of God's planet.

Beginning Meditation: Let us prepare now for our meditation. Notice any tightness in your shoulders and neck and allow any tension in your muscles to relax. Allow your back to rest upright. Be conscious of where your body is touching the chair. Allow your breathing to settle, allow your body to slow down. You may wish to silently repeat a sacred word, bring to mind an image or simply focus on your breath as an aid to mediation.

25 mins silent meditation

Post Meditation Poem

This poem comes from ***A Tree Full of Angels, Seeking the Holy in the Ordinary***, by Macrina Wiederkehr, OSB

Climbing down through the stars
to the stars on earth
The divine face meshing with the human
Heaven touching earth
We call it Incarnation!

You came as a star
led by a star
through the stars
to the stars
We never knew we were stars
until you came.

O God, we welcome you
We lovingly share our frail human flesh
and our starry planet with you
We wrap you in our flesh
We embrace you with joy
as you reach out your hands and your heart
to become one of us.

It was Mary who first wrapped you
in our human flesh
Her womb, the first altar
consecrated from all eternity
to be your first earthly home.

How holy is this earth!
Your glory streamed through our lives
like stars
the day you leaned from heaven
You came to help us see our glory
Following the star, we lean into your glory
In your light, we see the light

We never knew we were stars
until you came.[3]

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:

(1) Saint John of the Cross (1979). "The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross", I C S Publications, Institute of Carmelite Studies
(2) atholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-on-gaudete-sunday-christian-joy-is-not-easy-but-with-jesus-it-is-possible-48618
(3) https://benedictinewomen.org/blog/advent-meditation/



Our peaceful outdoor spaces promote wellbeing and are open to all, free of charge.