Reflections on 'The Earth That Grounds Us' –26th May 2021 – prepared by Hazel

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 in our homes at 7.30pm on Wednesday. The tradition we meditate in is Centring 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:

> *God said,*
> *Come no closer!*
> *Remove the sandals from your feet,*
> *For the place on which you are standing*
> *Is holy ground"*
>
> \- Exodus 3:5



I have vivid memories from my childhood, of the many hours my father spent writing a book called 'Down to Earth' (now out of print). I can picture page upon page of typed and Tippexed draft going in the bin before the final version was submitting for publication. The title holds much metaphor and meaning for me in so many ways, with a common theme of grounding in the reality of life. In this reflection I will explore aspects of earthiness and grounding, and in so doing, perhaps find greater awareness of the deep holiness of the ground on which we stand. I include several references to a book by Benedictine oblate Christine Valters Paintner[1] on the four elements of water, wind, earth and fire in which she explores the elements through various forms of metaphor, imagery, prayer and meditation..

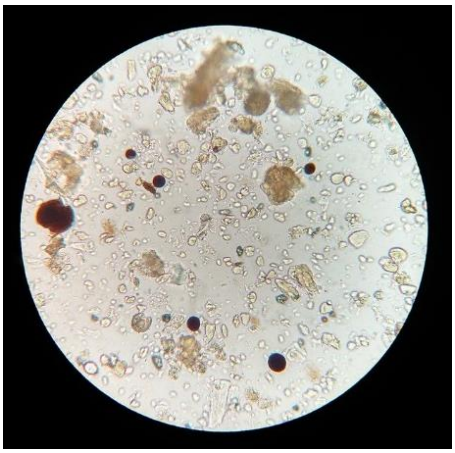
Earth as substance: Paintner defines earth as coming in many different forms including soil, rock, clay, sand, dust, mud, mineral and stone. In the dictionary, 'earth' is defined as the planet on which we live, but also as 'The substance of the land surface; soil'.

As a child, I was used to wallowing in mud and muck and the earthiness all around me in the big outdoors. I am told that on one occasion as a toddler, I was found eating worm casts in the garden! Connecting with the earth is instinctive. Bob Randall, Yankunytjatjara elder and teacher on Aboriginal land rights, talks about how, in his tradition, his people did not own the land, but as he says, "The Land Owns Us[2]. His people were naturally integrated with the land and in his words, "Being part of all that is was just the way you was".

Divine substance: As Trinity Sunday approaches, I am mindful of Christ's coming 'Down to Earth', having his feet on the ground, being of 'substance' as well as relationship - responding to the everyday lives of everyday people of all creeds, colours and track records. Celtish Christianity was very much grounded in nature and the concreteness of life as well as in relationship with it. A writer for the Consortium of Country Churches[3] reflects: 'The Celts of pre-Christian Britain, perceived both the natural world and divinity in Trinitarian terms: the threefold cycle of life (birth, death, and rebirth), the three elements of the cosmos (earth, air, and water), and the triple goddess (maiden, mother, and crone). Furthermore, this Trinitarian perspective was maintained within a sense of friendship, even intimacy, between the natural world and the divine.'

Paintner notes: 'When Jesus walked the earth, he used metaphors of soil and harvest to deliver his message, especially in his parables. Those listening to him would have been intimately connected to the earth, dependent on her fruitfulness. He used images of soil and seed, of sheep, of field and treasure, of pearl and trees, often to describe the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is telling us that this kingdom is not some far off, unreachable place, but here, to be discovered in the midst of everyday life.'

Exploring earth's substance: Much has been written on the composition of soil and there is a growing recognition of the importance of soil health for sustainable ecosystems and food production. Maintaining and improving quality and quantity of soil is also vital as a major means of carbon capture[4]. Viewed through a microscope, all the various components of soil can be examined and are fascinating. Typically they include bacteria, protozoa, fungi, nematodes, microarthropods, mineral elements, organic matter, air and water. These need to be in balance so that there is an intact food chain[5].





If we dig out a little soil sample with our fingers we might we notice its texture, temperature, colour and content. When planting in the garden, we might notice the soil profile, perhaps going down into clay or rock below if digging deep enough. Close contact with the soil, especially for those who are keen gardeners or farmers, can create the sense of friendship and intimacy felt by the Celtic Christians as described earlier.

Grounding our emotional state: The phrase 'down to earth', resonates for me with the concept of re-grounding ourselves in times of intense or overwhelming emotions such as fear or anger, through finding a sense of being held by, and intimately connected to, the earth. Our inner world sometimes needs to reengage with the reality of the physical senses. It can be very helpful to look at something in nature, or something that we feel attracted to, and then to feel our feet firmly on the ground, perhaps noticing a sense of being firmly rooted from our head, right down through our body, deep into the earth.



Re-grounding in humility: When tempted to venture too far into fantasy and an ungrounded spirituality, I recognise the need to come back 'down to earth', to the practical nitty gritty of everyday life, As James Finley[6] warns, there is a 'wound' that meditation practice can lead to if we are not aware of it, and that is a 'subtle form of escapism' from life's difficulties –perceiving that 'I have cracked it' and can use meditation practice as a way to escape the suffering of life. Finley describes a time after a spiritual awakening as a teenaged monk, when metaphorically, he asked for God's grace to lift him half an inch off the ground so that

he could 'glide down the cloister'. He describe how he was very soon brought down to earth when this escapism didn't work and he was humbled by his inability to conquer his struggles.



Grounding in meditation: Our position in meditation can be important and may vary according to how we feel, our preferred practice or the type of meditation or prayer we are drawn to at any particular time. Perhaps we might notice our contact with the 'holy ground' on which we rest. Paintner refers to the posture in *hatha* yoga called mountain pose. 'In it you stand with your feet firmly planted on the ground, hip-width apart and your arms by your sides, feeling the strength of being in this place.' She invites us to. 'Offer a prayer for the many gifts of nourishment the earth provides. Take a moment to ask what you need to feel more grounded in your life, and honour the response that stirs with in you.'

Paintner also offers a kinaesthetic meditation using a piece of clay. She suggests taking time to work it in our hands, getting to know its texture and recalling the Genesis creation story in which humans are formed out of clay and God breathes life into them. We might contemplate what it means to be created from the earth, of dirt and dust, and then to be breathed into, thinking of God as the potter and us as the clay, experimenting with finding the shape that feels most like an expression of our prayer experience. She writes, 'See if you can behold it without judgement, and bring a sense of wonder at this symbol – wonder at what it has to teach you about your connection to earth, wonder about a God who works with the earth to create life.'

Ashes and Dust: As I write this, earth and ashes are on my mind as I plan for both a burial and a scattering of ashes next month. These two losses bring a vivid and precious reality to the imagery around human bodies reuniting with the earth, and my own sense of time and place on this Earth. As Joseph Campbell [(7)] writes: 'If we think of ourselves as coming out of the earth, rather than having been thrown in here from somewhere else, we see that we are the earth, we are the consciousness of the earth. These are the eyes of the earth. And this is the voice of the earth.'

Wendell Berry [(7)]writes: 'We come from the earth and return to it, and so we live in agriculture as we live in flesh. While we live our bodies are moving particles of the earth, joined inextricably both to the soil and to the bodies of other living creatures.'

Paintner reflects that: 'Earth stands for what is material and solid in our being. It is the element our bodies are made of, breathed into, lit on fire, with blood and water flowing through our veins. It becomes the container for the other elements. Earth as an element symbolises the necessities and the commitments of our lives. It represents our limitations as well as our possibilities. The word *humility* comes from the root *humus*, which means *earth*. Humility means knowing both our limits and our gifts intimately. It means being in touch with our own earthiness. When we are deeply rooted, our branches can reach far and wide.'

Reflection before meditation: 'In Praise of Earth' by John O'Donohue[(8)] (excerpts)

Let us thank the Earth
That offers ground for home
And holds our feet firm
To walk in space open
To infinite galaxies.

The humility of the Earth
That transfigures all
That has fallen
Of outlived growth.

The kindness of the Earth,
Opening to receive
Our worn forms
Into the final stillness.

That we may awaken,
To live to the full
The dream of the Earth
Who chose us to emerge
And incarnate its hidden night
In mind, spirit, and light.

Preparation for Meditation: Let us take a moment to reflect and be still. When you are ready to find a comfortable position for meditation, you may wish to notice particularly your contact with the earth today,



or the sense of gravity drawing you towards the earth. You might bring your attention to your breath, and imagine a few in-breaths going all the way down through your body deep into the earth beneath you, and then allowing the out-breaths to release back up from the earth, letting go of any tension or pressure. You may wish to repeat a sacred word silently, or bring to mind an image, or simply focus on your breath as an aid to mediation.

Meditation for 25-minutes.

Poem – *'To be of the Earth'* by John Soos[7]

To be of the Earth is to know
the restlessness of being a seed
the darkness of being planted
the struggle toward the light
the pain of growth into the light
the joy of bursting and bearing fruit
the love of being food for someone
the scattering of your seeds
the decay of the seasons
the mystery of death and
the miracle of birth



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. Stay safe and well.

Resources: Pictures from Pixabay.com

(1) Christine Valters Paintner (2010). 'Water, wind, earth and fire: The Christian Practice of Praying with the Elements'. Notre Dame: Sorin Books.
(2) Bob Randall (2010) 'The Land Owns Us' (Online)
(3) Consortium of Country Churches (2017) 'Full Homily Divinity – Recourses for Anglican Parish Life – Trinity Sunday. (Online).
(4) Karen Wynne (2019), 'Stop treating our soil like dirt' TED talk (online)
(5) Meredith Leigh (2019) 'Assessing Soil Health Using a Microscope' (Online)
(6) Finley, J. and Myss, C. (2009*). Transforming Trauma: A Seven Step Process for Spiritual Healing* [Audio CDs]. Louisville: Sounds True, Inc.
(7) Campbell, J.; Soos, J.; Berry, W.; in Christine Valters Paintner (2010). 'Water, wind, earth and fire: The Christian Practice of Praying with the Elements'. Notre Dame: Sorin Books.
(8) O'Donohue, J. (2007). 'Benedictus: A Book of Blessings'. London: Bantom Press.



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