Reflections on 'Daily Life Practice' –5th May 2021 – prepared by Rob

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

The Celtic feast of Beltane which falls on Mayday is a feast of renewal of intentions and commitments in daily life. Whilst it is usually focussed on relationships, symbolised by the Green Man and his lady the Queen of the May, it is actually wider than that and encompasses all kinds of commitments and resolutions. Individuals or couples leap between the two fires of Beltane renewing commitments or making new ones.

Reflecting on this ancient feast encouraged me to ask what the true purpose of our meditation practice is. Whilst it may help us to become more relaxed and centred, that is not its real purpose. Nor is its real purpose to learn to focus on a mantra or the breathing to the exclusion of other thoughts, although training the mind is undoubtedly helpful for us. Christians might say that the purpose is to allow God or Christ into our hearts and to form a closer relationship with Him. But this can be misunderstood; that relationship is not like the ones we form with other people or with animals or other aspects of our environment – it is not a cosy mutually supportive "one-to-one". In some ways it is the very opposite, which is why it is mistaken to dismiss meditation as "self-absorbed navel watching" which is sometimes done. Opening to God actually means opening to the whole of reality in all its forms and manifestations whether comfortable or uncomfortable and letting go at least a little of ourselves in order to connect organically.

So it is important not just to observe our formal periods of practice and feel self-righteous about them, but to open our hearts and to take that openness, joy, kindness and wonder into

our daily lives in the world. We don't stop practicing when we rise from our cushion or chair, but start our daily life practice, and it was reflecting upon our daily life practice and its authenticity that the feast of Beltane was essentially about.

Mindfulness

The first step into daily life practice is mindfulness. Meditation helps with this because it brings us into the present moment and gives us space to notice what is actually happening here and now, rather than being carried away with plans, fantasies, memories or regrets. Mindfulness is something which we can practice all the time by being fully conscious of where we are, what we are doing and what thoughts or feelings are present. We can notice our posture, how we stand up or sit down and how we carry ourselves as we walk. We can notice bodily sensations such as the contact of our feet with the ground or floor, and all the smells, sounds and tastes that are around us. Stopping to take in and appreciate a beautiful tree or plant or to listen to the wonderful birdsong, such a feature at this time of year, and heightened in its richness by the lessening of human activity during lockdown. And we can notice and appreciate one another, reflecting on our differences and our similarities and developing responsiveness to needs and to suffering.

Everyday Enlightenment

His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa subtitles his book Everyday Enlightenment "walking the path to happiness in the modern world". He emphasises 'enjoying the journey , being grateful to our bodies, appreciating and sharing happiness, walking together, stepping lightly, slowing down and developing compassion, kindness, generosity, patience and fearlessness. He writes: "We can sit in caves, hide in retreats and spend hours meditating, which is supposed to help us in developing our understanding or give ourselves some knowledge about our experiences within ourselves and in our mind, but if we do not put this sort of understanding and knowledge into action, then all we have learnt and practised are only empty words. We have to go out and help, little by little, every day, so that we will also be able to know how much strength we have. At the same time, this type of living will help us develop that strength. We will feel more relaxed about life, but with a stronger purpose too. We will have the confidence and acceptance to know ourselves and know that we are good enough. We will stop putting others and ourselves into boxes, and instead give ourselves room to breathe and grow. We will be able to adapt to change, be flexible and easy-going. We will have the confidence to try our best. We will be free.

"I don't have any special recommendation but I just want to say, be there in your day-to-day life with some understanding. Because the path is there, a beautiful path, the practice will flourish. Human life is precious, but it has to be cultivated. I encourage you to cultivate your natural energy and to constantly check yourself and investigate your thoughts. We are very stubborn and not easily influenced but I think now is the time to do good. We can take our blinkers off, we are strong enough, and I know there is enough love to go round. Be compassionate to yourself, even as you look at your mistakes and mishaps. Then, if others are less than perfect too, use your compassion to kill your anger and frustration. Practice every minute. Life is the practice. As the Buddha said, 'Now, everything is totally in your hands.'"

Bad Christians

The Revd. Dave Tomlinson makes similar points in his book: "The Bad Christian's Manifesto". The actual manifesto is as follows:

- To follow the way of Jesus rather than rules and conventions.
- To doubt and question WITHOUT fear, and never be daunted by orthodoxies and authority figures.
- To make a priority of kindness and compassion, and pursue justice for all people.
- To embrace messiness and imperfection while aspiring to be all that we can be.
- To live courageously, and resist being motivated by guilt or fear.
- To love the world and honour it as God's body.
- To have parties, laugh often, enjoy friends and welcome strangers.
- To resist passing judgement, and befriend people in the margins.
- To look for God in every person and situation.

He describes what he calls the "alchemy of community" and after speaking of Church communities goes on: "However, there is a greater vision; the alchemy of community is not limited to churches or religious establishments. Anyone can begin a group in a pub, or a front room, to set up deep conversations and see where it leads. Or there may be groups already in existence that you can join – a philosophy club in a local pub, a 'deaf café', or some other group that organises talks or discussions about things that matter. I want to do everything I can to nurture and cultivate deep conversations – in churches, pubs, living rooms, coffee shops: networks of transformation.

"The real point is that, while you can be a bad Christian all on your own, it is much better to share the journey with others, to activate a network of fellow travellers, to benefit from the alchemy of kindred spirits."

Preparation for Meditation

So we approach our formal practice with a renewed vision not just for religious observance but as enrichment of daily life and our engagement in it. Finding a comfortable position, relaxing the body, noticing its contact with the chair or cushion and with the floor. Letting go of the efforts, difficulties, triumphs 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 in the body. If you use a sacred word you might notice its rhythm, perhaps co-ordinating it with the rhythm of the breathing. Or you may wish simply to focus on a candle or to follow the breath. Returning to our meditation object or point of focus whenever we are aware of the mind wandering off, in a spirit of non-judgmental acceptance. Opening to God or the divine – however we conceive Him and understanding our relationship with Him not just as our own but as drawing us into a connection with the whole of creation.

We will meditate together for 25 minutes.

Post Meditation Chant

I would like to end by sharing words which in my more hippy days we used to chant whilst dancing together at the feast of Beltane before leaping between the twin fires:

The fires of Beltane illumine the night

Reflecting the Green Man's glance.

His lady, the Queen of the May, delights

Us all with the spiral dance.

"Follow me!" he cries "into eternal fire!"

"Come with me" says she, "I will show you your heart's desire!"

The "eternal fire" of transformation and "your heart's desire" are two aspects of the same thing. Perhaps only a "bad Christian" would leap between the fires of Beltane, but it is certainly an "alchemy of community" and a joyous celebration. Let us also practice to make our lives a joyous celebration!

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: Image found at: https://beltanefiresociety.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/socmed-20180501001155049scott-miller.jpg?w=775&h=513



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