## Reflections on 'Water that calls us' –30th June 2021 – prepared by Hazel

**Opening words:** This week, we have a transcript. 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 in the physical space of the meditation room at Wisdom Centre. 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**:

*As the deer pants for the water brooks,*
*So pants my soul for You, O God.*

*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;*
Psalm 42:1-2



Following on from previous meditations on the elements of *air* and *earth* in April and May, this reflection explores the element of *water* and our draw towards it, or is it more true to say that water's essence calls us to it? Through examining experientially our own physical, intuitive and relational experience with water, the individual meaning for each of us might become more conscious and integrated. I refer to books by Benedictine oblate Christine Valters Paintner(1) and by John O'Donohue(3) – both having studied the four elements from a mystical perspective.

**Water's call:** In my early years, I lived in an area of chalk downland, where there were no ponds or streams; rainwater soaked through free-draining soil into the underlying chalk aquifer. I used to love it when we visited a pond a few miles away. We rarely went to the coast and I knew no rivers. I was intrigued by all the creatures in the pond and later was given a pond study book and an old microscope that helped me explore further – I recall my delight and fascination as I once watched a magnified daphnia (water flea) give birth in a drop of pond water on a glass slide – later returned to the pond.

Like many people (perhaps simply as part of the human condition), I still feel very drawn to all forms of water in nature – ponds, streams, rivers, coastlines, and even heavy rainfall when out walking, especially after a dry period. The water's sounds, rhythms, powerful movements or stillness, the temperature and feel of the water, as well as the ecosystems around water features – they all have such a strong draw to them. As in the Bible verses above, it is not just a thirst, but a 'pant' for the water - a very deep, embodied longing, a call that seeks to be heard; and yet in the 'noise' of everyday life, often this call is drowned out (pardon the pun).

Herman Melville[2] observes the 'magic' of the presence of water and its call: 'Say you are in the country; in some land of lakes. Take almost any path you please, and ten to one it carries you down in a dale, and leaves you there by a pool in the stream. There is magic in it … Yes, as everyone knows, meditation and water are wedded forever.'



John O'Donohue[4] who was brought up near the Atlantic Ocean, concurs on the language of meditation: 'The presence of an ocean is so huge that it resembles the divine. Its contents, movement and soundings signal a powerful inner life. Surprising in such a huge force is its perfect sense of rhythm. The ebb and flow of the tide resembles in a strange way the ebb and flow of the human breath. This is not surprising, given that each of us came here from the waters of the womb and that primally we have all come out of the ocean at the beginning of evolution. Consequently, it is immensely healing to walk by the ocean in a meditative way. There is something profound happening.'

**Divine metaphor:** Let us explore this further. In his meeting with the woman at the well, Jesus demonstrates his awareness of this visceral 'pang' or inherent longing or thirst for water. He uses the metaphor of longing for connection with the Spirit of water, the water of Life:



> *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.'* (John 4:13-14).

In last week's meditation, Sr Marie wrote: 'Wisdom speaks—will I know how to hear what she says? Wisdom calls to us– will I/we know how to respond to her? Wisdom cries out-will she find me ready to echo her cries?' It feels to me that it is Wisdom calling us to deep places through her Spirit or divine Presence in water.

**An imaginative invitation to depth and flow:** O'Donohue[3] observes how water helps us to access our imagination and connect with our depths. He writes: 'Water has great generosity and humility. It insists on no particular shape. It takes on the shape of whatever contains it: jug, stream, well, river, lake, ocean, tears, rain, mist or moisture. In this sense, water holds a wonderful imaginative invitation in it. The imagination is always drawn to the hidden form of things. Through its patience it coaxes the form to emerge.



'For too long the Christian spiritual world has concentrated on the will as the primary spiritual faculty. This forced people to strain beyond themselves in order to reach the eternal. This strain led so often to their natural longing becoming thwarted and turning against itself in guilt or indifference.

'In contrast to the will, the imagination is a faculty that is oblique and indirect. It works to discover the forms of perception and possibility that we need for our journey. Imagination attends to the great flow of life, and in this way it elicits the form of one's identity as it emerges from the matrix of one's experience.

'God speaks in the depths of the soul. Individual revelation is listening to your thoughts, the voice of the Spirit of your life. Coming into God's presence and listening to God are profoundly imaginative activities. The greatest flow of presence comes from the depths within us. … [The] water element signifies the depths within us. It is here that the wells of emotion await us and in freeing these silted sources we may yet flow back into rhythm with ourselves.'

**Light and shadow sides:** As with all things, there is both light and shadow in the water and in our responses to it. Our relationship with it can be dulled through it coming to us in treated form via the taps in our homes, so we may value it less or take it for granted. Some people suffer from a fear of large or deep bodies of water (Thalassophobia). There is much conflict about water scarcity and water can be dangerous in many ways. It

requires respect as well as nurturing in this fragile world.



Even in the depths of fear or anger, there is meaning to be found in the relationship with the nature of water, both at small and large scales – from the water in our homes to the vast oceans and cloud formations. Light and shadow are not opposites though, as the shadow can support our exploration of the light. There is an energy in the fear or threat which, when noticed, can generate incentive to be courageously curious, to explore the shadows and work towards healing.

**Meditative practices:** Paintner[1] offers many suggestion for reflective or meditative practices and I pick out just a few: One that appealed most to me was the question, 'Is there a place of sacred water near you that might be inviting you to spend some time?' I came across a surprise when I did this recently, as shown in this picture. Two ponies and a foal had the courage to wade through deep water to an island in a large pond, the water coming up quite high on the foal; it was given encouragement by its mum. The reward for mum was the fresh longer grass on the island.



Paintner describes a Lectio Divina practice of reflecting on scripture or spiritual passages with a focus on water, and I have included her suggested preparation for that below as an option for our preparation for meditation today, as we seek to bring ourselves into stillness.

Another suggestion was to reflect on the water used for washing at the end of the day, and to perhaps notice gratitude for access to fresh water; also to remember our connection to people across the world who consider water to be a sacred element, such as its centrality to baptism and baptismal vows.

Finally, perhaps a less attractive suggestion initially, was to bring mindfulness to doing the dishes or washing the car or the floor, and yet this too is a path for the imagination towards depth. Simply looking into a glass of water and noticing our feelings towards it may be another option, particularly around feelings of thirst and noticing that experience. In last week's meditation, Sr Marie described how Wisdom was relational and how: '*In the midst of daily life, not just in the 'holy of holies', we meet her!'* Perhaps we form a relationship with the dishwater as well as the river, stream or ocean - a relationship with Wisdom.

For those people who find it hard to let in the love and care of other human beings or an authoritative human-like 'God image', such a relationship with nature can be profound and restorative. If God is Presence in nature, then kinship with nature is kinship with God. Through bathing in the draw to the water - the sounds, sights, feel of the water, such immersion is surely the experience of being held by God. Going back to the words of the psalmist, '*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God'.*

**Reflection before meditation:** *'In Praise of Water'* by John O'Donohue[4] (excerpts)

Let us bless the grace of water:

The imagination of the primeval ocean
Where the first forms of life stirred
And emerged to dress the vacant earth
With warm quilts of color.

The courage of a river to continue belief
In the slow fall of ground,
Always falling farther
Toward the unseen ocean

Tides stirred by the eros of the moon
Draw from that permanent restlessness
Perfect waves that languidly rise
And pleat in gradual forms of aquamarine
To offer every last tear of delight
At the altar of stillness inland.

*(Continued below)*

And the rain in the night, driven
By the loneliness of the wind
To perforate the darkness,
As though some air pocket might open
To release the perfume of the lost day
And salvage some memory
From its forsaken turbulence.

Let us bless the humility of water,
Always willing to take the shape
Of whatever otherness holds it,
The buoyancy of water
Stronger than the deadening,
Downward drag of gravity,
The innocence of water,
Flowing forth, without thought
Of what awaits it,
The refreshment of water,
Dissolving the crystals of thirst.

Blessed be water,
Our first mother.

**Preparation for Meditation:** You might like to follow your normal practice for meditation, or, if you wish, place a bowl of water next to you or recall an image that signifies 'sacred water'. When you are ready, find a comfortable position, shifting your body so you feel relaxed and open. Take as much time as you need to turn inward and settle into stillness. With the in-breath, breathe in an awareness of the fluid and flowing qualities of the Spirit; with the out-breath, breathe out all that distracts you. Allow your breath to gather your awareness and move you more deeply inward to a place of stillness. (1)

**Meditation for 25-minutes.**



**Prayer –** *'Celtic Prayer'* (2)

Deep Peace of the running wave to you,
of water flowing, rising and falling,
Sometimes advancing, sometimes receding…
May the stream of your life flow unimpeded!
Deep peace of the running wave to you!

**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 and author

(1) Christine Valters Paintner (2010). 'Water, wind, earth and fire: The Christian Practice of Praying with the Elements'. Notre Dame: Sorin Books.

(2) Poems and prayers included in Christine Valters Paintner's book as above.

(3) O'Donohue, J. (2010). 'The Four Elements: Reflections on Nature'. A Book of Blessings'. Transworld Ireland

(4) O'Donohue, J. (2007). 'Benedictus: A Book of Blessings'. London: Bantom Press.




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