Contemplating God in the Beauty of Nature: 21st July 2021 Fiona

Opening words: This week, we are meditating in person again and have a transcript for those unable to join us. 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 7.30pm on Wednesday in Wisdom Centre/ our homes. 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 Centring 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, peace and justice making. **Amen**



This meditation follows our quiet day, 'Contemplating God in the Beauty of Nature,' a theme which works well as a follow on Sr Marie's meditation on Summer last week. If you came to the quiet day you may recognise the theme although making use of the material for a meditation session uses the material in a different way. Here we reflect on 'friendship with God' using nature. There were two other themes for the quiet day, and I may introduce another one in August.

Our Gardeners have been very busy over these last 18 months. The Gardens at the Centre have become an important place for meeting God outside, for just being, and for meeting friends or support groups. You might like to silently give thanks for any outdoor spaces you might have enjoyed over these last months, your own garden, a bunch of flowers or even a magazine article featuring outdoor spaces are all ways we may have enjoyed God's creation.

The Bible tells us to 'till and keep' the garden of the world (Genesis 2:15). "Tilling refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while 'keeping' means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. Gardens are important in scripture, and in the Bible, they offer revelations for our ecologically- endangered times. Eden is described in all its beauty: God pulls out all the stops for humankind, and walks there in the cool of the evening, hoping to meet with Adam and Eve. This garden – paradise in Greek – is given into their care but they soon mismanage it by plucking fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In this sense we might

say that our 'original sin' is to spoil the handiwork of God in nature. But it was in a garden that Mary of Magdala met her risen Lord in the disguise of a gardener…The Lord still walks in our earthly garden and wishes to encounter us there…'Finding God in a Leaf' by Brian Grogan SJ.

People often approach Genesis 2 and 3 as the creation narrative, the primacy of man over woman, and the backstory to 'the fall.' Today I would like to suggest that we reflect on the friendship of humanity with God, evident in both passages, putting aside the 'fall.'

Adam and Eve enjoyed a relationship with God, and with each other. The Bible even indicates that God may have taken on a physical form in order to walk with Adam and Eve in the garden (Genesis 3:8). What an amazing thing to be able to do. Imagine (perhaps while walking in the grounds of Wisdom Centre) what it might be like to be one of only two people on earth, or maybe just yourself alone with God. Imagine what it might be like to meet and commune regularly with the Creator of the universe!! Some people believe this was only possible because no sin was present to prevent this kind of relationship. The fellowship they enjoyed with God was unhindered by anything (Genesis 2:25).

Perhaps we can have a gentler idea of sin? Initially, Adam and Eve lived among the plant and animal kingdom in perfect peace. Since the so called 'fall,' the 'new heaven and new earth' spoken of in the book of Revelation (21:1) is thought by many to be a re-creation of the universe. A future place for those who have put their faith in Jesus.

In the contemplative tradition, there is a belief in union with God in this life and less emphasis on 'sin' and the 'fall.' Contemplation is relational. It is a description of a dimension of relatedness between God and the contemplative (the human being who is contemplating God). Indeed, many mystics suggest that contemplation takes us to the place where God and the self are no longer 'two.' So we can speak of a 'contemplative life' or perhaps 'contemplative living' in the general sense of orienting one's entire life toward a habit of meditation, beholding, wondering, and observing.

'And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east…the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden…A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches…The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.' (Genesis 2)

Now returning to the 'Fall'. 'They (Adam and Eve) heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.' (Genesis 3:8)

I would like to return now to Eve's sin and how I understand it. Adam and Eve had disengaged with God (had stopped beholding) and had then become fixated on the 'apple' which was perhaps 'knowledge' (Sakal in Hebrew). By hiding from God, Adam and Eve broke their gaze on the Divine and instead became fixated on things.

Only after the 'fall' were Adam and Eve clothed with 'skin' '(ō·wr Hebrew), i.e. became earthly beings rather than heavenly ones, which implied the Garden was previously a heavenly domain. God said, '[humankind] has now become like 'one of us;' the persons of God were not acting alone which meant that friendship and company were always present in God's plan. (2:22-24). Eve had taken what was attractive to her without doing the necessary spiritual work to acquire it, she had taken a short cut and upset the heavenly friendship. In the King James Version of the English Bible the text reads: The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. (Matthew 6:22. Eve had allowed her attention to drift away from her friendship with God and instead fall on her desire for the apple, her eye was no longer single and her heart had become divided. I don't know about you but I have a whole basket of apples to distract me from the presence of God in my personal spiritual garden…

Meister Eckhart proclaims, “The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me. My eye and God’s eye is one eye, and one sight, and one knowledge, and one love.” (Sermon 16)

Sometimes we see or experience two people who appear as one. Friendship in God is sitting together at the table and serving each other. Eve forgot to do that. Seeing with a single eye is a way of being and also a way of Wisdom, this is evident in Proverbs where Wisdom (a woman) was created at the very beginning of God’s work. Wisdom is an exemplar of the ideal relationship with God which Eve forgot about. Wisdom is with God at the beginning, a friend, companion or a feminine attribute of God. Wisdom gives us an insight into the perfect relationship with God and how we might find friendship with God in creation.

Woman is a ray of God. She is not that earthly beloved: she is creative, not created - Rumi

Wisdom’s Part in Creation

22 The Lord created me (Wisdom) at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
23 Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
24 When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
25 Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth—
26 when he had not yet made earth and fields,[c]
or the world’s first bits of soil.
27 When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
28 when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
29 when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
30 then I was beside him, like a master worker;[d]
and I was daily his[e] delight,
rejoicing before him always,
31 rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race. (Proverbs 8:22-31)

Solomon’s Love for Wisdom

She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other,
and she orders all things well.
2 I loved her and sought her from my youth;
I desired to take her for my bride,
and became enamoured of her beauty.
3 She glorifies her noble birth by living with God,
and the Lord of all loves her.
4 For she is an initiate in the knowledge of God,
and an associate in his works. (Wisdom 8, Apocryphal books of the Bible)

Beginning Meditation:

As I come to meditate, I take a brief look at my garden in all it’s joyful aspects. How am I an associate with God in all his works? What is unhelpful in my own basket of apples, or perhaps I experience a lack of apples? What is a distraction from me enjoying God’s garden?

“Everything that is made beautiful and fair and lovely is made for the eye of one who sees.”

— Rumi

25-minute meditation begins

Post Meditation Prayer: The Beauty of Nature

O God, we thank you for this earth, our home;
For the wide sky and the blessed sun,
For the salt sea and the running water,
For the everlasting hills
And the never-resting winds,
For trees and the common grass underfoot.
We thank you for our senses
By which we hear the songs of birds,
And see the splendour of the summer fields,
And taste of the autumn fruits,
And rejoice in the feel of the snow,
And smell the breath of the spring.
Grant us a heart wide open to all this beauty;
And save our souls from being so blind
That we pass unseeing
When even the common thorn bush
Is aflame with your glory,
O God our creator,
Who lives and reigns forever and ever.

- Walter Rauschenbusch

That which God said to the rose, and caused it to laugh in full-blown beauty, He said to my heart, and made it a hundred times more beautiful.

Rumi

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…Take some time for your personal prayer …**Amen**

Thank you for meditating with us, please join us again soon.

Resources: Images: Fiona’s own.



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