Reflections on 'Stillness' –25th August 2021 – prepared by Hazel



Opening words: This week, we are meditating in person again and have a transcript for those unable to join us. 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 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**

Introduction:

'The times are urgent; let us slow down' (African saying[1])

For many of us, to 'slow down' does not come easily, let alone to enter into stillness, and when we are in a state of reactivity it can be frightening to let go of the mind's tendency to continually scan for current or future threats. This can be exacerbated in an environment of collective crisis and upheaval. The above African saying inspired this reflection on the nature of stillness and how we might experience it in our daily lives and in meditation. What is inner stillness of mind, of emotions or of the sacred? We will all have our own unique experiences and perspectives. James Finley[2] refers to inner stillness and inner silence as a 'Deep, attentive receptivity to the ineffable mystery that is the very heart of all that is real, the very heart of all that we really are'. He reflects that we can only experience this stillness through our ineptness in it, humbling and surrendering ourselves in our 'poverty' in stillness and silence. We cannot make it happen. It arises in us through no achievement of our own.

Stillness Surprises: When storm Evert passed through recently, I was sitting on the ground by a pond watching the waves on the water at a height and speed I'd not seen before; the trees were bending over, branches swinging and swirling, clouds sweeping across the sky and the deafening blasts of wind masked all other sounds. As I sat there two foals came over inquisitively, and one plucked up courage to get close enough to sniff me. I could feel its soft, warm breath and velvety nose on my hand. This lasted for only a minute or so, but it felt like a timeless presence as this delightful creature looked down on me. It was a moment of encounter, a moment of stillness in the midst of a storm, where two souls met - connected. I took some video and photographs and noticed how the photographs captured stillness. A single frame of the video did the same, betraying the movement and sound that the full video held. The angles of the trees and the patterns of the waves indicated movement, but each photo was just of that moment. It was 'still'.

By definition the present moment has to be still. It has no start or end. It just is. It has a certain 'thisness' as Duns Scotus[3] called it (in Latin *haecceity*); and each creature or thing present, Duns Scotus observed, is a 'unique aspect of the infinite Mystery of God'.

I was surprised and changed by this experience and came to perceive stillness in a subtly different way. In connecting with the external encounter of stillness within a storm, I became more conscious of how, in sitting within an inner storm of mental and emotional 'rush hour' and expecting nothing, a hidden stillness sometimes emerged to surprise me.

Let us pause for a moment and be

… still …

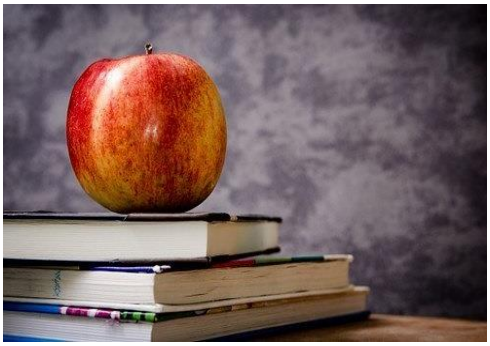
Exploring imagery: Much of our perception is visual, and in meditation we might lower our gaze or close our eyes to help enter stillness, but we think in images too. You may wish to notice what comes into awareness as you look at the following pictures.



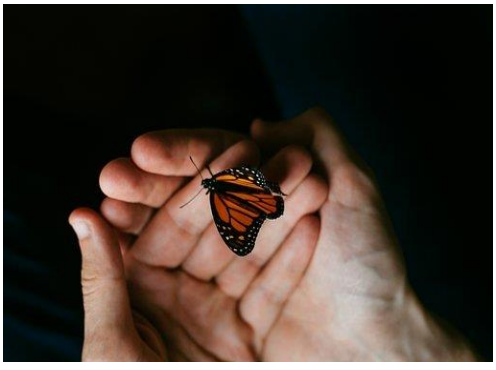


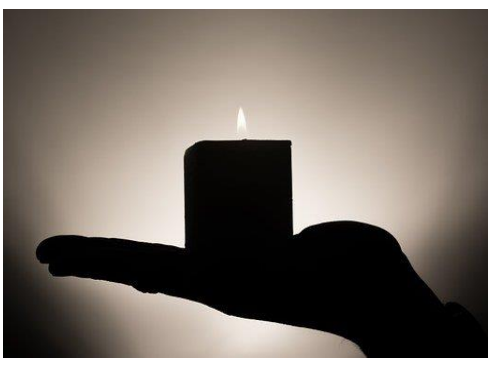












As you will probably have recognised, the first four images were intended to illustrate busyness or motion and the second four to illustrate stillness or presence. On further reflection though, can we imagine other perspectives and find stillness in the motion and busyness and rush in the stillness? For example, the candle picture might be taken by a photographer on an art course, rushing as for a late submission, and the photographer's stress is being felt by the person trying to hold the candle perfectly still. The wave picture might be on a website illustrating relaxing wave music, bringing soothing and stillness to its many listeners.

Biblical imagery: We find in the Bible a range of passages that contain not literal, behavioural instructions or rules, but words of great depth of meaning if we take time to enter fully into them in context.

We are invited to be still:

> *'Be still, and know that I am God'* (Psalm 46:10)

… to stay present to the now and not worry about tomorrow (Matt 6:25-34):

> ***28*** *'See how the flowers of* the *field grow. They do not labour or spin.* ***29*** *Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.'*
>
> ***34*** *'Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.'*

… to stay present to the now and not look back" (Luke 9:62):

> *'And Jesus said unto him, "No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God."'*

Invitation to 'stillness': The following practice is offered by the Centre for Action and Contemplation[(4)]:

'Each day at the CAC we begin our morning sit by repeating a line from Psalm 46:10: "Be still and know that I am God." With each repetition, we drop a word from the verse until we finally say only "Be," before entering the silence together. It is a reminder that no matter how we arrive that day, we are called to be, and be still, before God. Barbara Holmes[(4)] affirms that stillness is important for all who want to transform their pain instead of transmit it: "Stillness is a state of wholeness. . . . Sitting in stillness may allow the pieces of us to reassemble."

'Meditation teacher Eckhart Tolle offers this insight: Silence is helpful, but you don't need it in order to find stillness. Even when there is noise, you can be aware of the stillness underneath the noise, of the space in which the noise arises. That is the inner space of pure awareness, consciousness itself. . . .

'We have forgotten what rocks, plants, and animals still know. We have forgotten how to be—to be still, to be ourselves, to be where life is: Here and Now.

'Whenever you bring your attention to anything natural, anything that has come into existence without human intervention, you step out of the prison of conceptualized thinking and, to some extent, participate in the state of connectedness with Being in which everything natural still exists.

'To bring your attention to a stone, a tree, or an animal does not mean to think about it, but simply to perceive it, to hold it in your awareness.

'Something of its essence then transmits itself to you. You can sense how still it is, and in doing so the same stillness arises within you. You sense how deeply it rests in Being—completely at one with what it is and where it is. In realizing this, you too come to a place of rest deep within yourself.

'… If we keep breathing consciously, in connection with all that surrounds us, we will know that we are connected to all of humanity from cave dwellers to cosmonauts, to the entire animal world, and even to the trees and plants. As Barbara Holmes often reminds us, even the atoms we breathe are physically the same as the stardust from the Big Bang. Oneness is no longer experienced as merely a vague mystical notion, but rooted in scientific and embodied fact.'

Reflection before meditation:

'Start just here. Tune into your heart. That is where love, wisdom, grace, and compassion reside. With loving attention, feel into what matters most to you. Yes, there are anxious thoughts, grief and trauma, but don't let your heart be colonized by fear. Take time to quiet the mind and tend to the heart. Go out and look at the sky. Breathe in and open yourself to the vastness of space. Breathe out and dwell in loving awareness. Practice equanimity and steadiness. Learn from the trees. Become the still point in the center of it all. Then step toward difficulty with courage and love, and touch pain with healing rather than fear.' Jack Kornfield [5]

Preparation for Meditation: James Finley[6] offers the following guidance which you may wish to follow or just stay with your normal practice if that feels right today.

Sit still. Sit straight. Place your hands in a comfortable or meaningful position in your lap. Close your eyes or lower them toward the ground. Breathe slowly and naturally. With respect to your mind, be present, open, and awake, neither clinging to nor rejecting anything. And with respect to attitude, maintain non-judgmental compassion toward yourself—as you discover yourself clinging to and rejecting everything—and maintain non-judgmental compassion toward others in their powerlessness that is one with yours.

Meditation for 25-minutes.



'The times are urgent; let us slow down'

Prayer – Psalm 46:10 [7]

Be still and know that I am God
Be still and know that I am
Be still and know
Be still
Be

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) African saying, from 'A Network of Grateful Living' https://gratefulness.org/?searchterm=urgent
(2) James Finley 'Thomas Merton's Path to the Palace of Nowhere – Levels of Silence. YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Znxn-Z14CT8
(3) Duns Scotus in CaC Daily meditation, 15 Aug 2021 'An Appreciation for Art' https://cac.org/an-appreciation-for-art-2021-08-15-dm-nv/?utm_source=cm&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=dm-new-voice&utm_content=new-voice-summary
(4) Richard Rohr and Barbara Holmes, CaC Mediations 'Crisis contemplation - Weekly summary, 31 July 2021 – Stillness practice' https://cac.org/crisis-contemplation-weekly-summary-2021-07-31/
(5) Jack Kornfield 'Freedom Amid Challenging Times' https://jackkornfield.com/freedom-amid-challenging-times/
(6) James Finley CAC Daily meditation 23 Feb 2017 'How to Meditate' https://cac.org/how-to-meditate-2017-02-23/
(7) Richard Rohr, CAC, short video on 'Stillness' . https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBV8xfCzOLc .



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