Meditation on 'Faith' – By Rob Wednesday 1st September 2021

Opening words: This week, we have a transcript. 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 7.30 pm on Wednesday in 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 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:

Friday is the feast day of Gregory the Great, and since it was he who dispatched Augustine to bring the Christian faith to England, I would like this evening to share some thoughts about faith. We speak of there being different faiths which are known by the particular beliefs which they invite us to share, the stories which they tell and the traditions which they foster. These are or can be helpful refuges on the way, but they are not the same as Faith. There is only one universal faith, and it is very different from belief; it is more based on our experiences, observations and inner knowing. I remember having a 'lightbulb' moment when it was first explained to me that belief and disbelief are not points on the Way. This is explained from a Christian point of view admirably by Rev Dave Tomlinson in his book *The Bad Christian's Manifesto*. I would like to share some passages from his Chapter called 'God is what grabs you deep down'.

From the Manifesto

Paul Tillich said that faith is the state of being 'ultimately concerned'; of being gripped and driven by something that we are convinced is of fundamental importance, and which demands our whole-hearted commitment…..Everyone experiences concerns for themselves, for loved ones, for the world in general. But beyond these, human beings have a unique and compelling concern to make sense of life, to establish meaning and value, to understand why we exist in the first place and to try to mould our world accordingly. When we get caught up with this, when we are gripped by our ultimate concern, Tillich argues that we experience faith – not in the specific sense of being a Christian, a Muslim or a Hindu, say, but in a universal or generic sense.

In a lovely old book entitled Living Philosophies: A Series of Intimate Credos, Albert Einstein wrote:

> The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom the emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand wrapped in awe, is as good as dead – his eyes are closed. The insight into the mystery of life, coupled though it is with fear, has also given rise to religion. To know what is impenetrable to us really exists,

> manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms – this knowledge, this feeling is at the centre of true religiousness.

"Einstein emphasised that he could not imagine a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation, whose purposes are modelled after our own – a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty. Yet what he describes and names as 'the mysterious' equates fundamentally with my understanding of the divine."

"All religions stress in some way that God is a mystery which cannot ultimately be put into words or reduced to human categories. Within Christianity the most profound understanding of God (known as the apophatic tradition or the via negativa) maintains that the closer we get to God the less we can comprehend or speak of God. To commune with the divine is in fact to enter a deep and deafening silence."

"Yet each of us is embraced by this mystery, whether or not we are religious. And we become aware of it through occasional mindful epiphanies that break through our normal inattentiveness, breathing hope and warmth into the soul."

"Einstein also said that the most important question facing humanity is, 'Is the universe a friendly place?'……he did conclude that the universe is friendly. 'God does not play dice with the universe', he affirmed; our lives do indeed have meaning and purpose."

"But is it true? Is the universe friendly? What about the 'unfriendliness' we experience in the world – not just the hostility too often found in human relations, but also the brutality of sickness and suffering, and the oft-times inhospitableness of nature itself – the storms and floods, the droughts and famines etc?"

"Perhaps it is more accurate to say that the universe is an ambiguously friendly place. We cannot deny that there is unfriendliness on all kinds of levels. Bu the greater truth is the triumph of the human spirit; people do find ways through even the most painful experiences, love does overcome evil; hope does rise in the most desperate of situations. Something embedded in the depths of human existence tells us that the mystery at the heart of the universe is trustworthy, and that our fulfilment lies in surrendering to it."

"Faith is the state of being 'ultimately concerned'; of being gripped and driven by something that we are convinced is of fundamental importance, and which places an unconditional demand on us. Faith is also the attitude of full-hearted openness to the mystery of life – entrusting the soul to life's immensity. And sometimes that takes courage as well as vision."

Confidence, Revelation and Insight

In the Buddhist tradition the Pali word for faith is Saddha which also means 'confidence'. Actually, faith is already present in that English word in the root fid from the Latin *fides* – faith. The point is that faith is not something which we take up blindly, but is a confidence arising from our experience – as Dave Tomlinson said the depth of human experience speaks to us of trustworthiness. If we follow the practice and example of our teachers we will, in time, come to realise that the practice works, that we gradually grow more joyous and contented, more deeply concerned and more involved in the 'mystery'. This gives us confidence and strengthens our faith and our practice.

Christians sometimes speak of 'revelation' but the experience of confidence, of trusting in the practice and the teaching does not come from outside but from within. It comes from those 'mindful epiphanies' which Dave Tomlinson describes in which we momentarily become one with the underlying truth of being and know for sure that it is good. And it comes from moments of reflection when we look back and see that in some, perhaps small way, we have changed, that transformation of the heart is indeed taking place. These are moments of insight.

Doubt

Of course doubts will arise; they are natural. In Buddhist practice doubt is regarded as one of the hindrances which impede our meditation and our spiritual progress. One of the Western novices studying with Ajahn Chah, my teachers' teacher in Thailand once approached him and said that he had heard some of the monks speaking at various times about subjects like rebirth and they all seemed to have a different view about them; so he asked Ajahn Chah which was the correct one. The wise old meditation master did not give him the kind of answer he expected. Instead, he said simply, 'I cannot resolve your doubts!' Resolving our doubts is something which we have to do for ourselves. We might be perplexed by some of the 'unfriendliness' which Dave Tomlinson describes and even more distressed by the suffering and injustices in the world. We might ask as many Christians have, 'Why does God allow such suffering?'

However, when we surrender to the mystery, there is no longer any doubt. We gradually develop understanding and wisdom and with it the total confidence of knowing that as Mother Julian of Norwich put it: "All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."

Preparation for Meditation

As we move into a comfortable position and relax the body for our formal practice, we may be able to enter that 'deep and deafening silence' which Dave Tomlinson speaks of. 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.

We will meditate together for 25 minutes.

Post Meditation Poem

I found this poem many years ago posted on the door of a little meditation room in Glastonbury. It is by Amatu'l-Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum who was born Mary Sutherland Maxwell in the United States in 1910 and was a mystic in the Baha'i tradition. For me it illustrates the overcoming of doubt when there are few positives and exemplifies the dynamic, passionate side of faith. Although the poem speaks of believing, it is from the perspective of trusting the universe rather than of believing specific facts as being true.

This is Faith

To walk where there is no path To breathe where there is no air To see where there is no light – This is Faith. To cry out in the silence, The silence of the night, And hearing no echo believe And believe again and again - This is Faith. To hold pebbles and see jewels	To say: "God, I believe" when others deny, "I hear" when there is no answer, "I see" though naught is seen – This is Faith. And the fierce love in the heart, The savage love that cries Hidden Thou art yet there! Veil thy face and mute thy tongue Yet I see and hear thee, Love, Beat me down to the bare earth, Yet I rise and love Thee, Love!

To raise sticks and see forests To smile with weeping eyes – This is Faith.	This is Faith.

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.







Resources:
The bad Christian's manifesto Rev. Dave Tomlinson – Hodder and Stoughton
A door in Glastonbury
Pictures from Pixabay

For meditation groups, prayer groups, spirituality, wellbeing, retreats, workshops and our labyrinth garden, please visit our website: **wisdomhouseromsey.co.uk**



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