Reflection on St Hildegard of Bingen OSB: 15th September 2021, prepared by Fiona

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 7.30pm on Wednesday in the 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:

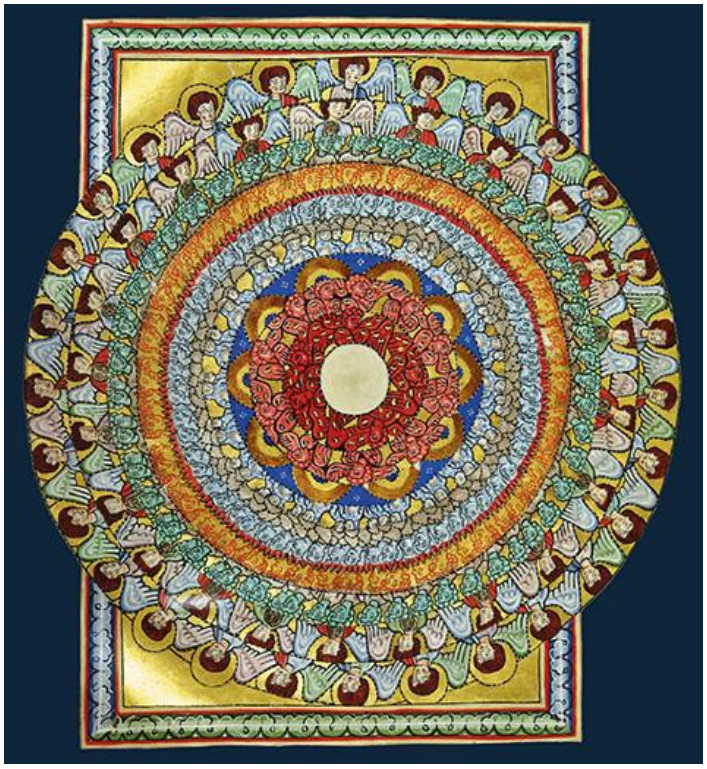
This week, on the 17th September, the Church commemorates the feast day of the Benedictine Abbess and polymath Hildegard of Bingen (1098 – 1179). Abbess, artist, author, composer, mystic, pharmacist, poet, preacher, theologian—where to begin in describing this remarkable woman?

Born into a noble family, and entering enclosed life as a young child, she was instructed for ten years in a hermatige by the Blessed Jutta, an older woman charged with the care of the young Hildegard. When Hildegard was 18, she became a Benedictine nun at the Monastery of Saint Disibodenberg, Rhineland, Germany. Ordered by her confessor to write down the visions that she had received since the age of three, Hildegard took ten years to write her Scivias (Know the Ways). Pope Eugene III read it, and in 1147, encouraged her to continue writing. [1]

The Biblical background, through which Hildegard experiences the feminine Mother Wisdom is the Jewish Wisdom Tradition. As Wisdom literature teaches: 'I (Wisdom) came forth from the mouth of the Most High…and like mist I covered the earth…'(Sir 24: 5-8); and 'In her is a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, agile, clear, unstained [and] certain…And she, who is one, can do all things, and renews everything…'(Wisdom of Solomon 7:22-27). For Hildegard, Wisdom appears as a mother of creation, an attribute of God, the origin of creation and source of Christ. For Hildegard, Wisdom longs to incarnate and appears in the figure of Jesus.[2]

Hildegard's visions caused her to see humans as 'living sparks' of God's love, coming from God as daylight comes from the sun. For her, sin destroyed the original harmony of creation; Christ's redeeming death and resurrection opened up new life. The fiery force of 'God's love' is the metaphorical figure named Caritas (meaning grace), used here as an allegorical representation of the son of God. For Hildegard, Caritas, 'God's love' delineates the three persons of the Trinity as Eternity, Word, and Breath (for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). Though these different representations of the Trinity are each separate entities, they are also a single entity, with Wisdom an attribute of each and all.

[1] https://jimfriedrich.com/tag/hildegard-of-bingen/
[2] https://www.academia.edu/23424989/Meditations_with_Hildegard_of_Bingen_Including_an_analysis_of



Like many mystics, Hildegard saw the harmony of God's creation and the place of women and men in that. Virtuous living and the reflection of Caritas, 'God's love' shown in humanity and nature, reduces the estrangement from God and others and is active Wisdom.

This united Wisdom love was not apparent in the same way to many of her contemporaries. However, Hildegard was a great inspiration to the contemporary Benedictine writer, Sr Macrina Wiederkehr who Sr Marie reflected on in last week's meditation. Sr Macrina cites Hildegard in her book *Seven Sacred Pauses: Living Mindfully through the Hours of the Day*.

Hildegard's Spirituality

For Hildegard, the noonday surplus of earthly light both images and ignites an inner fire. 'Be ablaze with enthusiasm,' said Hildegard of Bingen. 'Let us be an alive burning offering before the altar of God,' (cited by Sr Macrina), which puts us in mind of the Caritas spoken of earlier. Let us not forget that it was beneath the midday sun that St. Paul was brought to his knees by 'a bright light from heaven' (Acts 22:6). Indeed, Hildegard was always mindful of the source of her creativity:

The marvels of God are not brought forth from one's self.
Rather, it is more like a chord, a sound that is played.
The tone does not come out of the chord itself,
but rather, through the touch of the musician.
I am, of course, the lyre and harp of God's kindness.

Hildegard's entire theological project was a recognition that the fundamental human vocation is to understand both ourselves and all creation as the work of God, and our place as cooperative agents of that work. As such the relationship between humanity and the rest of creation is at once microcosm and macrocosm. For Hildegard, the eternal and incarnate Word of God erupts into the created world and unfolds through time, as revealed in both Scripture and the life of humanity, creation and the Church.

Hildegard's Spirituality is perhaps best expressed in her term viriditas, or greening power, a concept which connects closely with creativity and understanding nature as incarnate of the Divine, an expression of caritas or God's love. Hildegard says: 'the earth exudes freshness,' 'earth swells with living green,' 'the earth sweats out green things growing,' and, 'washing the evergreen globe.' This variety of translations stems from viriditas,

It was in this Divine power of nature and the transfer of energy from plants to humans, that she saw as a principal means to embrace the power of the earth in her work as a pharmacist and healer. Hildegard believed humans and nature are inextricably bound together in a sacred relationship, a relationship that needed to be tended in order to feed our spirit, mind, and body. Just as we need to tend our gardens to feed our bodies. Her ideas of connectivity with nature were what inspired her to become one of the first mystics to advocate the stewardship of nature. We are responsible for caring for nature, and in turn, nature will always provide everything we need.

Hildegard said: ‘With nature’s help, humankind can set into creation all that is necessary and sustaining’– Hildegard, (Book of Divine Works)



Reflection:

While Hildegard’s notion of Viriditas came 800 years before modern science began to explore the inner workings of our minds, her ideas about nature and wellness — namely our need to directly experience nature on a regular basis — are proving, as modern science shows, the relationship between nature and our well-being. As we know, walking outside, or even just being able to gaze outside through a window is linked to many physiological and psychological benefits. Of course, the inverse is also true, which is that by depriving ourselves of contact with nature we are disconnecting from what Hildegard described as the flow of viriditas.

Hildegard would call this deprivation of nature a condition ariditas, the opposite of viriditas, which is characterized by dryness. Unchecked, this can lead to a barren, arid condition that invites disease and spiritual distress. Hildegard envisioned the duality of the verdant freshness of viriditas, and the arid, barren properties of ariditas as the two forces moderating wellness and illness. Much of her work focused on this duality and the need to cultivate our connectivity to the healing powers of nature. Luckily, we have one simple solution to help you engage in viriditas: go outside.

‘The truly holy person welcomes all that is earthly.
Glance at the sun. See the moon and the stars.
Gaze at the beauty of earth’s greenings.
Now, think.
What delight God gives to humankind
with all these things. . . .
All nature is at the disposal of humankind.
We are to work with it. For
without we cannot survive.’

‘Holy persons draw to themselves all that is earthly. . . .
The earth is at the same time mother,
She is mother of all that is natural,
mother of all that is human.
She is the mother of all,
for contained in her
are the seeds of all.’ [3]

‘Most noble evergreen with your roots in the sun: you shine in the cloudless sky of a sphere no earthly eminence can grasp, enfolded in the clasp of ministries divine. You blush like the dawn, you burn like a flame of the sun.’

[3] https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/quotes/features/view/20274/quotations-by-hildegard-of-bingen

Beginning Meditation:

You are invited to take up a comfortable position. Bring loving attention to your body. After taking a couple of deeper breaths, let your breath find its own relaxing rhythm. Allow your mind to settle and wander for a short time, perhaps reflecting on an outdoor space, walking outside, or imagining gazing outside through a window. Wander in your mind's eye for a few moments before settling on your sacred word, breath or image. It is useful to have a single focus of attention during meditation.

In your practice, you may find it useful to be united with the rhythms of nature and our sacred relationship with what God has created. A relationship that needs to be tended in order to feed our spirit, mind, and body. You may also find it helpful to sense a connection with the practice of other faiths, and our journey together.

25-minute meditation begins

Post meditation:

'For as the earth is positioned such that it is moderated in every place by the sun, so too the soul that is subject to God is flooded by wisdom's light, to be illuminated by the virtue of discretion.
For the human person, made in the likeness of the earth, has bones without marrow in place of the stones and bones with marrow in place of the trees; and according to the quality of one's character, one receives either the hardness of stones or the lushness of a flourishing garden or fruitful orchard.
Again, as the atmosphere surrounds and sustains everywhere and equally the earth placed in its midst, so body and soul—conjoined by God, yet greatly divided in nature—ought patiently to sustain and instruct one another in precepts of their Creator

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: See Footnotes



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