Reflections on: 'The Original Blessing - Creation Spirituality ' –20th October 2021 – prepared by Fiona

Opening words: This week, we are meditating in person again and have a transcript for those unable to join us. We have included some 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 and Hazel, 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: Celtic and Saxon civilizations established an exalted place for the seasonal sequence of the earth's natural rhythms, establishing spiritual centres where the meeting of the Divine, the natural, and the human could take place. Popular religion up until early medieval times was animistic. Every stream, every tree, every mountain contained a guardian spirit who had to be carefully reverenced before one put up a mill in a stream, or cut the tree, or mined the mountain.

The Ancient Celtic and Saxon people honoured the natural world and its animals, an inheritance of St Brigid and others of the Celtic and Saxon traditions. From Celtic Christianity, Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of the Saxon Rhineland and St Francis of Assis of the Latin tradition all developed earth honouring Spirituality. Saint Columbanus composed Celtic songs and St Francis sang them. Through Columbanus, Celtic Christians settled widely along the Rhine where Meister Eckhart's most active years as a preacher were played out. Like Francis of Assisi, he was much affected by this tradition. In his earlier life St Francis lived as a monk at Columbanus' Bobbio Monastery in Italy.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth-century age of science, the work of Francis Bacon, Galilei, and Isaac Newton, were less concerned with Divine energies than human appropriation of the physical forces of universe for rampant exploitation of environment. Scientific materialism abandoned our capacity for awe of the Divine and instead set humanity up for a religion of marketplace cosmology. However, there are signs things are going full circle, in support of climate issues, 21st Century science is developing chemistry that's either carbon free or recycled from the atmosphere, so no new sources of CO2 are created, while this may not herald a new season of awe, it could help solve our crisis.

For centuries, consumerism has replaced reverence for creation. No longer is our present season of autumn the "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness," as the poet Keats once famously called it. A visit to any supermarket at present reminds us that we are approaching Halloween, a celebration in my childhood only existing in American movies. Known by the Celts as Samhain and later named All-Hallowtide by Pope Gregory II, this late October festival became appropriated into Christianity.

Subsequently, the Feast of All Saints has become a product of American and global secular capitalism. Halloween came to America in the 1840s in the wake of Ireland's devastating potato famine which brought millions of Samhain loving Irish immigrants to the East Coast.

For Celts, Samhain signalled the end of the harvest season and the beginning of the colder, darker nights that accompanied winter. Samhain was an annual night of celebrations that ran from October 31st to November 1st. In Celtic Christianity, Samhain heralds death and rebirth and marks the beginning of a whole new cycle which points to Yule, the Saxon midwinter solstice and darkest time of the cycle. In the Christian Celtic and Saxon traditions, the return of longer days points to the light of Christ amid the winter gloom and new beginnings. The stirring of the seed below the ground then takes us to Imbolc, the Celtic start of spring. Christianity also adopted this festival and restyled it as the Feast of Brigid on the first of February. Imbolic eventually points towards Beltane, the season welcoming in the summer with joyous celebrations at dawn.

The pagan festivals adopted by the Celtic and Saxon Christians help us appreciate the imminent, the primary sacred community of the earth itself. The psychologist Jung proposed that "the earth and psyche are not two separate realities, but one 'unitary world,' this is Fr Thomas Berry's passion also—in Berry's words, we are all "autistic" in our relationship to nature.[1] For Revd Matthew Fox we must both fall in love with and develop the astuteness to defend our beloved, the Earth, with all of our resources at hand. We need to resurrect common values — which is not that hard, since Atheist, Buddhist, Jew, Muslim, Christian and Goddess worshipper all recognize the Earth as sacred.[2]

Earlier this month Pope Francis and other religious leaders made a joint appeal for the Climate Change Conference (COP26) to offer concrete solutions to save the planet from "an unprecedented ecological crisis". The "Faith and Science: Towards COP26" meeting brought together Christian and religious leaders to discuss this pressing issue.[3]

The Celtic Tradition: The Celtic poet John O'Donohue wrote in his *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* "The earth is our origin and destination. The ancient rhythms of the earth have insinuated themselves into the rhythms of the human heart. The earth is not outside us; it is within: the clay from where the tree of the body grows. When we emerge from our offices, rooms and houses, we enter our natural element. We are children of the earth: people to whom the outdoors is home. Nothing can separate us from the vigour and vibrancy of this inheritance. In contrast to our frenetic, saturated lives, the earth offers a calming stillness. Movement and growth in nature takes time. The patience of nature enjoys the ease of trust and hope. There is something in our clay nature that needs to continually experience this ancient, outer ease of the world. It helps us remember who we are and why we are here."

Brigid of Kildare. Celtic Wisdom

The most beloved of Celtic Saints is the golden-haired St. Brigid of Kildare. A patroness of light and lover of animals, St Brigid could call birds to her hand. The Catholic Church celebrates Candlemas on St Brigid's feast day (which is also celebrated as the 'Purification of the Virgin Mary').

Celtic wisdom remembers the sacredness of the feminine through St Brigid. She models female leadership and inspires poets and musicians. Around 470 AD. Brigit was Abbess of the first convent in

[1] Thomas Berry, Dreamer of the Earth: The Spiritual Ecology of the Father of Environmentalism (2011), p.45.
[2] Matthew Fox, Meister Eckhart: A Mystic-warrior for Our Times (2014), p. 27.
[3] Faith and Science: Towards COP 26. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/pope-world-religious-leaders-issue-pre-cop26-appeal-climate-change-2021-10-04/

Ireland, a centre of learning and art; after her death, a perpetual flame was kept in her honour. Brigid shows us how to love the earth, helping us conjoin masculine and feminine energy, the marriage of heaven and earth found deep within the fabric of the universe.

Brigid's life is shrouded in myth. Legend has it that Brigid was born just before sunrise in the twilight of the early morning, neither governed by the moonlight, nor sunlight but the twilight. She is also said to have been born neither inside nor outside, but on the threshold of the dwelling. Brigid exists 'between,' darkness and light, and 'between' the inside and outside, occupying the liminal space between worlds at the threshold of the womb of the universe. Brigid also occupies a space between the Christian and pre-Christian. It is said that Brigid's mother was a Christian and her father a Druid, meaning 'Oak knower'. Brigid's name comes from Brihati which means shining or exalted one. Brihati, like many words In the old Celtic language is connected to the old Indo European Sanskrit language. The earth mythic Goddess Brigid was the shining or brightness deep in all imminent things. In pre-Christian times she was sought and revered in the forests, mountains and streams. Druid communities were established by Oak treas. Ancient oaks were known for their Wisdom, reaching deep into the ground with their roots and high into the air with their branches, connecting heaven and earth. It is likely that St Brigid had a given name at birth and acquired the name Brigid, since in Celtic imagination the Saint took on many of the characteristics of the earlier goddess. Brigid's Christian community became known as Kildare which means 'church of the oaks.'[4]

Meister Eckhart

The Prophet Isaiah says "'The whole earth is full of His glory' (Isaiah 6:3) For Eckhart, "God created the world in such a way that he is still continually creating it." "Whatever God gives…proceeds fully in an eternal now." The act of creation does not fade into the past but is always beginning. "God does not stop creating, but forever creates and begins to create…Every action of God is new and 'he makes all things new' (Wisdom 7.27)."

Eckhart says: "The seed of God is in us…Now the seed of a pear tree grows into a pear tree, a hazel seed into a hazel tree, the seed of God into God." But he also insists that the seed requires a "good, wise, and industrious cultivator" to grow into God. From a Buddhist perspective, Thich Nhat Hanh also likes to talk about our carrying seeds of goodness and seeds of destruction within us and how we have to cultivate and work at growing the former.

For Eckhart the Holy Spirit is the spirit of creativity. It is like a "rapid river" with "living waters that flow." A certain "intoxication" occurs in the experience of the Spirit at work in creativity. "The Holy Spirit cannot keep from flowing into every place where (s)he finds space and he flows just as extensively as the space he finds there." This is why we need to be emptied, to be naked, to let go in order that Spirit can fill us. The soul must be "brought together and solidified in the noblest power found within it if the soul is to receive the divine 'river' that fills it and causes it to rejoice." — Just as the apostles were "gathered together and enclosed when they received the Holy Spirit." the via negativa (way of emptiness) paves the way for the via creative (way of immanence) and we become "coworkers with God."[5]

Preparation for Meditation: So, we will now enter a period of meditation. Moving into a comfortable position relaxing the body and emptying ourselves of concern, bringing ourselves into the peace and unity of the present moment and our relationship with all creatures. We notice our breathing,

[4] https://druidry.org/resources/brigid-2

[5] Matthew Fox, Passion for-Creation The-Earth Honoring Spirituality of-Meister Eckhart, pp.69-71; 511.

allowing it to naturally slow, 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 your breathing. Or you may wish simply to focus on a candle or to follow the breath. Returning to the meditation object or point of focus whenever becoming aware of the mind wandering off, in a spirit of non-judgmental acceptance.

We will meditate together for 25 minutes.

Post Meditation: Francis of Assisi

In the below, Francis of Assisi underscores our rich relationship with the cosmos, in which Sun, Moon, Stars, Earth, and Death itself are named as kin: Brother, Mother, Sister. Like indigenous peoples everywhere, Francis reminds us of the integral relationship of the entire family of beings, and the forces of the universe that constitute all our relations. Among these relatives, "Lord Brother Sun" is first and most esteemed, for the sun brings life to the earth and its radiant light bears a special "likeness" to the Creator. Do you share relationships with the cosmic powers as Francis does? What about "Sister Death"? Have you befriended her as part of a cosmically based spiritual awareness?

All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made,
And first my Lord Brother Sun,
Who brings the day; and light you give to us through him.
How beautiful he is, how radiant in all his splendor!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.
All praise be yours, my Lord through Sister Moon and Stars;
In the heavens you have made them bright
And precious and fair. . . .
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our mother,
Who feeds us in her sovereignty and produces
Various fruits and colored flowers and herbs. . . .
All praise be yours, my Lord through Sister Death,
From whose embrace no mortal can escape.
— Francis of Assisi

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: At foot of relevant pages



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