

29th November 2023

Dear Friends,

The first of our regular services took place on Sunday last, the Feast of Christ the King, and what a beautiful and inspiring occasion it was. As we reflected in the Holy Eucharist, on the image of Our Lord as Universal King, we asked pertinent questions about whether his Kingship is in any way reflective of the authority structures we tolerate and experience generally in our daily lives. Jesus Christ is unequivocal in his demonstration of the style of his rule, and he leaves us with no ambiguity about the differences we discern. This is why, in the biblical readings we heard, the other image of his Kingly role, as that of the good shepherd, whose demeanor is of singularly loving care, merciful justice and kindness. Sadly, too often we seek out illustrations of wrath, anger and punitive judgement, never thinking how and why we must apply intelligent critical analysis to the texts, sometimes seemingly more human than Divine. We must always look in the light of the optic of the person of our Loving Jesus through whom we know the fully Loving Tri-unity of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. As Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite says of Almighty God (Divine Names Chapter 8), "... [H]e is celebrated as Divine Justice, ... the very preservation of the whole, ... preserving and guarding the essence and order of each, ... redeeming all things". Here is echoed the foundational texts at the heart of my own faith, expunging from God's very being all possibility of wrath and anger, and showing him, because he is just in his infinitely merciful love, his giving his only Son to redeem and reconcile all things to and in himself, and to and in ourselves. Of Christ's total self-giving, St. Paul says it is done "that the universe, everything in heaven and earth might be brought into unity with him", and, he reconciles "all things to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood on the cross – all things, whether on earth or in heaven". (Ephesians 1:10, and Colossians 1:20)

In this connection of the true nature of our loving God, I have been privileged to have shared deep conversation with Susan Verkerk-Wheatley, on the remarkable and hugely inspired mystical 'Divine Revelations of Mother Julian of Norwich'. I urge you to read, below, her exceptional, evocative and moving reflection, through her very personal and challenging optic, which touched my soul deeply.

Peace, grace and love to you all

+Brian

My journey with Mother Julian of Norwich

In 2005 I began studying Christian spirituality. One evening a friend and fellow learner gave me a gift: *Julian of Norwich, Daily Readings from the Revelations* arranged by Sheila Upjohn (1992). At that time I had read snippets of Julian's writings in other texts. I knew of 'the little thing, the size of a hazelnut' and her deeply reassuring words that 'All shall be well...'. This gift made me eager to find out more about this 14th Century anchoress who lived in a cell adjoining St. Julian's Church in Norwich. So I opened the book, began to read - and quickly closed it. At that time, Mother Julian's graphic descriptions of Christ's passion, his suffering, the thick droplets of blood running down his face from under the crown of thorns were too much for me to stomach.

Fast Forward to early January 2023. An oncologist tells me that a primary cancer treated in 2011 had returned and was not curable. After that diagnosis I instinctively found myself reaching for the books about Julian of Norwich which had accumulated on my shelves and never been read. After 18 years of Julian first coming into my life, I was ready to read her. It is not easy to find the words to describe why her writing has touched me so profoundly. All I can do is share a few of the things that have spoken to me during the past months of slowly reading, and re-reading, her revelations of divine love.

Julian writes about a ‘homely’ and ‘courteous’ God who dwells with and in me. She understands why I struggle with prayer and praying. She wrestles with the reality that sin and suffering are part-and- parcel of my humanity and spends years pondering why this is so. She understands what it means to long for God and to want to serve him. In chapters 50 to 53 (which for me seem to form the very heart of her writings) she paints a picture of the Lord with his servant. It was through these words that I was able to make sense of my longings for God and desire to serve, and to gently and compassionately forgive myself for my times of failure. It is in these chapters that Julian writes about our longings and zeal for God. She describes the eager servant running off to undertake God’s work, only to find himself falling headlong into a ditch, flat on his face, full of confusion, shame and humiliation, and unable to get himself out of the ditch. Her writing reminds me that what God sees is the love and longing and that in God’s eyes it is not the success that matters, but that we try. Despite the failure, I am called to stand up again, dust myself down, trusting in the depth of God’s compassion, mercy and forgiveness -and that it is these things, combined with my determination to stand up again, that lift me out of that ditch!

In the final chapters of her Revelations Julian writes that what she learned is that God’s meaning is Love. An astounding aspect of her years of reflection and meditation is that, for her, there is no wrath in God. Julian is clear: **God is Love.** Julian wrote with her feet on the ground in her tiny cell. She understood what it means to be a fragile human being living in a world that is often brutal and hard. She reassures me that when the suffering becomes too much I can reach out in faith, trusting that I am enfolded in Love and that ultimately, and beyond my understanding, **All Shall Be Well.**

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For a beautiful and profound poem on Julian’s famous words read *Dark Moments* in Ann Lewins’ book of poems and prayers, *Watching for the Kingfisher*. This year, 2023, two wonderfully inspiring new novels have appeared about the life and writings of Mother Julian of Norwich: *For thy great pain have mercy on my little pain* by Victoria Mackenzie and *I, Julian* by Claire Gilbert. Further, a book which takes you into the heart of Julian’s revelations on Christ’s passion and the cross, I can recommend Emma Pennington’s *At the foot of the Cross with Julian of Norwich* (pub. 2020).

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