

Dear friends

The bluebells are out in Middleton Woods . I hope you have had a chance to look at them, they are beautiful. I have been twice. Keely and I went on Monday with the dog for lovely walk through and around, and the night before Amy, Nick and I accompanied our CYFA group for a walk through the Woods. This was only the second time that we have met as a youth group face-to-face , so to speak, since the first lockdown, the first being the week before when we walked up to the cow and calf and back down again.

Under the government's step by step road map, groups offering youth provision can now meet both outside and inside. However, we felt it right as we started things off again to meet outside at first and see how that went. Everyone was very good at keeping in small groups as we walked and it was so nice to feel part of something 3 dimensional again - we've been meeting on zoom for games and chat for the last year – I for one found it much more satisfying that looking at a screen. Consequently, I did not really take in the bluebells on Sunday evening, so going on Monday with Keely meant that we could share the experience in a more leisurely and focused way. As I said, it was beautiful.

Today I received an email from my elder sister recommending a book called "Diary of a young naturalist" which is written by a young man of 16 years, named Dara McNulty who happens to be on the autistic spectrum. My sister sent a link to the blurb and also a YouTube link for an interview with him with Blackwell's Books. What a remarkable young man. In the short interview he explained his love of the natural world saying, "*even in these chaotic and stagnant times the world seems to still tick around us... and it's still absolutely beautiful*". It was lovely to hear someone who could be in our CYFA group waxing lyrical about what he was observing around him. In the interview he also reads a couple of passages from his book. In one he mentions walking in a spinney of trees with bluebells around him. The words below are his, the punctuation mine with apologies.

"It almost brings tears to me, being alone and peaceful enough to feel the past, and to feel it overlapping with the here-and-now of musky scent, trickles of light passing through the canopy , the verdant and lapis light of a path through the bluebells and Hazel; a secret way. Sometimes it's good to have a path ..."

The tears he talks of are related to him remembering being a lot younger and having time to investigate his surroundings with that forensic focus and joy that young children so often inhabit.

There is a very old and strong stream of Christian spirituality that, in common with similar streams from other faiths, glories in the focused moments of contemplation and sees them as an opportunity to be open to the voice and promptings of God. There are many communities that draw heavily from that tradition, the most well know is probably the Benedictines. There is also a strong strand to Celtic Christian spirituality which is based on such contemplation.

I have dabbled a bit but rather ironically rarely seem to find the time to properly sink myself into such contemplation and meditation. However, when I have it has always done me the world of good an I have had some profound experiences of not just feeling close to God but hearing his voice through the natural world.

Whilst doing a bit of investigation recently into the contemplative I came across and organisation called the *World Community for Christian Meditation*. Their website says this about them:

[WCCM is] a global contemplative network, a spiritual family rooted in Christian faith. Committed to building a way of peace in our time of conflict, we serve unity among all to build a community of faith composed of people with many beliefs... we work with other faiths and the secular world to develop the

consciousness needed for a new, just way of living as a human family in harmony with our natural environment.

A very laudable aim in my opinion. I dug a bit deeper and found that this year they are focussing, not surprisingly, on health. Here is what they say about it:

We live in the golden age of medicine. Breakthroughs, cures and life-expectancy have all flourished with medical science. The present Covid-19 pandemic shows the value and necessity of this dimension of medicine. It seems, to many medical practitioners and to patients, that we have gained so much but neglected something essential: our capacity for deep and transformative healing.

Young Dara, as he contemplated the bluebells and the hazel in his book, observed that it is good to have a path. I think that is what is at the heart of the contemplative prayer movement and this focus by the WCCM on healing in these troubles times.

More than a road map back to economic and social normality we need to find paths that bring healing to our souls. As I have observed before, and I am sure I am not the only one, we have experienced an existential threat beyond any other our generation has had to face, certainly in the west. This rocks our world, undermining the foundations on which we build our lives. Prayer, contemplation and mediation are ways of digging down to the bedrock that is God, to find the foundations to rebuild our lives upon. It also, as I have said already, provides a way for us to hear the voice of God, speaking in the still small voice of his eternal presence within and through the icon of his creation.

As I have admitted, I am not practiced at this but something about contemplation really appeals. Perhaps you are more adept than I am. It does make me wonder though. What if we practiced a bit more at prayer and contemplative mediation and felt at ease enough with it to offer to help others find their peace and healing by walking that path with them.? What impact could that have on the lives of those who are struggling to make sense of what we have just all been through? I think it could be a great thing to be able to offer to our community - simple but effective – a space and a path to healing and peace in the presence and love of God.

If you have any thoughts on such issues, please do email or ring me. We could even set up a group that explores such issues as part of our looking ahead.

I leave you with some thoughts and a prayer from Juian of Norwich, the 14th century Benedictine mystic. *He also showed me a tiny thing in the palm of my hand, the size of a hazelnut. I looked at this with the eye of my soul and thought: 'What is this?' And this is the answer that came to me: 'It is all that is made.' I was astonished that it managed to survive: it was so small that I thought that it might disintegrate. And in my mind, I heard this answer: 'It lives on and will live on forever because God loves it.'* *So every single thing owes its existence to the love of God. (Revelation of Divine Love, chapter 5)*

In you, Father all-mighty, we have our preservation and our bliss.

In you, Christ, we have our restoring and our saving. You are our mother, brother, and Saviour.

In you, our Lord the Holy Spirit, is marvellous and plenteous grace.

You are our clothing; for love you wrap us and embrace us.

You are our maker, our lover, our keeper.

Teach us to believe that by your grace all shall be well,

and all shall be well,

and all manner of things shall be well. Amen

Blessings and peace to you and all who you love and care for
Peter