

Meditation June 2021

Sitting quietly by the river

How lovely it is to be able to sit outside this time of the year surrounded by blossom and the wonders of nature. I'm really lucky to have the added advantage of the Marchburn flowing through the garden and love to sit quietly on the seat overlooking the stream and meditate. Hard to describe but it adds an extra dimension to meditating but others may get that same feeling on the top of a mountain or standing in a meadow of wildflowers !

As Graham Usher (an ex Rector of Hexham Abbey) wrote in his book, *Places of Enchantment* , " As we wait on a God we don't fully know and will never fully understand , the natural world conveys something of the mystery and wonder of God that might just provoke the inspiration to be amazed"

There is something quite magical about streams and rivers. I love watching the water cascading over rocks, meandering and flowing ever onwards gently bubbling and gurgling. I love watching the dippers ducking and diving quite literally from the stones or the herons standing patiently, statuesque, yet quite menacing. Sunlight dances across the water sometimes highlighting small trout. Later in the summer there will be turquoise dragonflies flying to and fro. For meditating though, it is blissful just to close your eyes and listen , the water provides a calming backdrop. It is quite heavenly.

This peaceful, babbling stream however can change mood quite dramatically after heavy rainfall and it transforms into a raging torrent, roaring as a lion . Dramatic and powerful, yet in Psalm 93 we are reminded that God's power is greater than the tumultuous waters and "majestic on high is the Lord"

God promises to protect us, in Isaiah chp 43 v 2 " When you pass through the waters , I will be with you ; and through the rivers. They shall not overwhelm you "

Graham Usher reminds his readers of the huge importance of rivers throughout history providing water for drinking and irrigating crops so essential for food not to mention their importance for transport and communication. Most of the world's towns and cities have developed near rivers or lakes. The fishermen of Maria Ribeira refer to the Amazon as their father "that gives the best to his children" it is so essential for their entire way of life. Sadly, the amount of fish there is rapidly declining due to exploitation and overfishing by trawlers. Many other rivers are suffering pollution from industrial waste in some shape or form. Even the River Jordan , so important in the Bible, has lost 90% of it's water flow over the last 50 years according to Usher, with it's lower waters containing very little fresh water any more "bearing instead a toxic brew of saline water and liquid waste that ranges from raw sewage to agricultural runoff fed into the river's vein like some murky infusion of tainted blood. " How dreadful, how negligent mankind has been. It really is enough to make us weep.

There is always hope however – not only that mankind is trying to redress these matters in many parts of the world but that our journey through life gives us hope and sitting quietly by a river can be a huge part of our spiritual journey. I like to think as Usher does of the river symbolizing the River of Life, a continuous flowing of God's love. How the Christian pilgrimage is about allowing yourself to enter these waters , the waters of life. Sometimes there are as he says, calm , deep waters where we can float serenely as in the shallows and still waters where we are led beside in Psalm 23. There may be rocky rapids ahead he says where we get thrown around and have to face new challenges . And something to ponder on, he says "Do we go with the flow, excited by the journey and its

unexpected twists and turns, seeing these as God - given opportunities ? Or do we sit on the banks , remembering the past and weeping like those in exile in Babylon; “By the rivers of Babylon , there we sat down and there we wept , when we remembered Zion (Psalm 137.1) Or he goes on to say “Do we fight it the whole time?” – though as he then adds we may not be as trusting as Annie Taylor who in 1901 became the first person to survive a barrel ride down the Niagra Falls suffering only a few bruises or the next survivor in 1911, a Bobby Leach who survived – only to later on slip on orange peel and die of complications from his injury!

Water makes up 70% of our bodies. In the womb we are enveloped in water . In Psalm 139 we read “ For it was you who formed my inward parts: you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works :that I know very well.”

Usher finishes his chapter on Rivers by quoting from a second century theologian called Tertullian – “We, being like little fishes, as Jesus Christ is our great Fish , begin our life in the water, and only when we abide in the water are we safe and sound” I shall remember those words the next time I’m sitting quietly by the Marchburn, hopefully not just listening but entering those waters too.

In the last chapter of Revelation, John the Divine is shown a river flowing through the main street of the heavenly city. It is called the “river of the water of life ”It is lined with trees and comes from the throne of God. John describes it as sparkling as bright as crystal. The river and trees bring nourishment, regeneration and healing to everyone who draws near and the throne is the source of all power. Those banished from the garden of Eden are now welcomed home. That is our great hope and future.