

Lent Meditations with Julian of Norwich – Week 1 (Tuesday 23 February)

Julian, a very short introduction



1. Julian's statue, Norwich Cathedral

Very short, because we really know very little about the woman behind the book. Julian of Norwich was an English mystic and spiritual writer in the 1400's. She was a lay woman who became an anchoress, a type of Religious person in the Middle Ages, and lived in a cell attached to St Julian's Church in Norwich; hence the name under which she is known. Hers was the first book in English written by a woman, *Revelations of Divine Love*, an account of a series of 16 visions of Christ that she received when at death's door with a very serious illness at the age of 30 in May 1373. After recovering, she spent the rest of her life pondering what she had experienced and writing up what she understood their message to be. Her writing is very moving, always so direct and rooted in everyday life and with unique turns of phrase, which make us feel that here speaks a real

person to us over these many centuries. Her insights into the heart of Christ's passion and its significance for all are very deep and keep on giving, the more we engage with them.

Julian's book was almost forgotten over many hundreds of years, only preserved in a few manuscripts in the libraries of some Benedictine and Brigittine nuns, to be rediscovered in the early 1900's. Since then, her influence has grown and grown, as her unique insights into Jesus Christ and his love for us resonate with our own time and our yearning for hope and love and friendship with God.

For those of you who are intrigued by this fascinating writer, there are many good books to delve into. At the bottom of this sheet are a few suggestions, and I can point you to even more, should this whet your appetite.

But this Lent course is not primarily a teaching opportunity, but an invitation for you to experience something of that contemplation, which Julian did so much of in her cell, and to connect with God through her writing. I will read a short extract from her book and then we will enter into silence together for 15 minutes. At the end I will bring us all together by reading the last sentence again.

We will start with a short meditation that Julian herself was given as a vision at the start of her 'revelations':



“Then he showed me a small thing, the size of a hazelnut, nestled in the palm of my hand. It was round as a ball. I looked at it with the eyes of my understanding and thought, *What can this be?* And the answer came to me: *It is all that is created.* I was amazed that it could continue to exist. It seemed to me to be so little that it was on the verge of dissolving into nothingness. And then these words entered my understanding: *It lasts, and it will last forever, because God loves it. Everything that is has its being through the love of God.*” (Chapter 5)

As we come together again, we will close our meditation by saying The Grace together:

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God and the fellowship of
the Holy Spirit be with us all
evermore.**

Amen.

Afterwards, those of us who would like to stay and exchange a little of what that was like, or what came to us in the silence, are very welcome to do so, but this is entirely up to each one to do what feels right for them.

Further reading about Julian and some good translations (from the Middle English) of her *Revelations*:

Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (Penguin Classics, transl. Elizabeth Spearing, 1978)

Julian of Norwich, *The Showings – A Contemporary Translation* (Canterbury Press, transl. Mirabai Starr, 2014)

Upjohn, Sheila, *The Way of Julian of Norwich – a Prayer Journey through Lent* (SPCK, 2020)

Pennington, Emma, *At the Foot of the Cross with Julian of Norwich* (BRF, 2020)

Emma is Canon Missioner at Canterbury Cathedral. She has also produced a very interesting series of short talks, called "*Julian of Norwich: A medieval take on lockdown and how to survive it*". They are available via the Canterbury Cathedral website:

<https://www.canterbury-cathedral.org/julian-of-norwich-a-medieval-take-on-lockdown-and-how-to-survive-it/>

Well worth having a look at!