

Lent Meditations with Julian of Norwich – Week 4

There is of course no getting away from this - a large proportion of Julian's book centres on her vision of Christ on the cross. This week, as we reach the middle of our Lenten journey, I would like us to focus our attention once again on the cross, but to do this afresh, so that we might see it in the way that Julian perceives it, possibly understanding Christ's suffering in a new way.

She describes in great and terrifying detail his last hours, how she watches him suffer, his head bleeding under the crown of thorns, his body drying out from a chill wind and a lack of moisture, reflecting his own words 'I am thirsty'. His face changes colour from pale to grey, then dark blue and in the end brown. As she had asked in her prayers to experience Christ's suffering for herself, this is it. She says: *'Like a wretch, I briefly regretted having asked for the experience of bearing witness to his agony'*, but she is then made aware that *'the part of me that resisted such suffering belonged to the natural weakness and negativity of the flesh, but that my soul did not agree with this, and God did certainly not blame me for it.'*



She writes: *'I watched our beloved Jesus languishing for a long time. The one-ing between himself and the Godhead gave him the power to suffer beyond all human endurance. I don't only mean that his anguish surpassed that of any other human being, but that no human being from the beginning of time until the last day could possibly measure, describe, or even conceive of the magnitude of his pain.....And he suffered for the sake of every human being. He saw every individual's sorrow, desolation, and anguish, and, from the depths of his kindness and love, he grieved for us all.....As I gazed upon all this, by his grace, I saw that his love for us is so strong that he willingly chose his passion and suffered it humbly, with deep joy and satisfaction. Any soul touched by grace who sees things in this way will truly realize that the pain of Christ's passion exceeds all other pain. And yet all our pain will be transformed into boundless, everlasting joy by the power of this same passion.'*

Julian learns that Jesus is delighted to have suffered for her sake, and for each one of us: *'Then our beloved Jesus Christ asked me, "Are you well satisfied that I suffered for you?" And I said, "Yes, good Lord, thanks be to you. Oh yes, good Lord, blessed may you be!" Then our kind, sweet Lord said, "If you are satisfied, I am satisfied. It is a source of endless joy, bliss, and delight to me that I suffered my passion for you. If I could suffer more, I would suffer more.'*

As she explains: *'The love that made him suffer his passion is greater than all his pain. His love is as far beyond his pain as heaven is from earth. For the pain was part of a noble, honorable act, done once, and compelled by love. This love is without beginning, and shall be without end. It is because of this love that he uttered these sweet words, "If I could suffer more, I would suffer more." He did not say, "If it were absolutely necessary, I would suffer more." Because even if it weren't necessary, he would do this over and over again for our love.'*

Julian perceives, that Christ is full of joy and delights in his passion. *'God wants us to rejoice with him in our liberation'*, she says.

When you turn your inner gaze towards Christ, can you sense both his suffering and his joy?
Which resonates stronger with you at this moment? Can you share in his delight?





Then, with a cheerful expression, our Beloved looked into his side and gazed into his wound with joy. With his sweet gazing he directed the mind of this creature to enter through that wound in his side. There he revealed to me a beautiful and delicious place, ample enough for all humanity to rest in peace and love. This made me think of his dear blood and the precious water that he allowed to be poured out for love. Then he showed me his sacred heart, cloven in two. With sweet rejoicing, he partially revealed to me the nature of the Godhead, strengthening my poor soul to be able to understand what I saw: the endless love that is without beginning, always is, and evermore shall be.

And with this revelation, our sweet Lord said, with passionate bliss, *“Oh, how I have loved you!”* It was as if he had said, *My darling, behold and see the Lord, your God, who is your Creator and your endless joy. See your own Brother, your Savior. My child, behold and see the utter delight and bliss I take in your liberation. For love of me, enjoy it with me now.*

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.

Tim Bentley mentioned a good BBC program about Julian and her manuscript and how it was preserved and found. Here it is: <https://youtu.be/VptjqJN8wy0>

Very interesting – thank you, Tim for finding it again!

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!