

Teisho Notes on Christian Zen

When Mary Magdalen went to the tomb she couldn't find the body of Jesus. She asked a man she thought was a gardener where have they laid Jesus? He called to her 'Mary', and she replied 'Rabuni ', which means *teacher*.

Jesus was a teacher of contemplation. He warned against too much external religion. He did not promote 'religion' as such, he said ' Go to private room, that secret place where God is' he said. When he visited Mary and Martha, Martha was busy with many things. It was Mary who sat listening to Jesus. We don't know what he said to her, that will remain a secret, but we do know he said that Mary had chosen the better part. He spoke of hidden treasure, the pearl of great price.

We can have no spiritual life without prayer and silence...Be still in this moment. God is here. 'Do not worry about tomorrow, Jesus said.

Look at the birds of the air, the lilies of the field. Look at the beauty of the world. Look, listen

Be mindful of God's Kingdom.

Be present to the present moment, beyond words.

What will really matter at the end of your life. ?

Today we are going to explore the need of silence. Using some of the wisdom of Asia, especially Zen, we will attempt to sit and be with what is. Because what is and this is our life, and it is a mystery, a mystery we seldom explore or be with. We are always somewhere else, either in thought or physically always on the move. It is a practice of not running away in distractions but being still in this moment. Be still in this moment. Be still and know that I am God.

In this practice of mindful sitting we will silently sit still, sit straight, the body and mind together at peace with what is. It's not as easy as it sounds. The mind has a mind of its own, and will resist being still.

We will borrow some practice form Asia. Zen is a gift to the world from Asia, especially Japan. There are many Christians today who practice Zen.

Zen sitting calls us to live not always in our heads, but from the deep centre of our being.

Zen offers a way to live. A way to live an enlightened life. But Zen needs to be understood as a verb, it's a 'doing', a practice rather than a belief . It is practicing a gentle compassionate life.

Zen = paying attention to your life. This is where we get the term 'Mindfulness'

It needs practice. Like anything it won't be learnt without sustained practice.

Zen does not speak about God. Some Christians are uneasy about this. But like the mystical tradition of Christianity all we can say is that God is unknowable. God is mystery beyond anything we can say. This was also taught to be the Desert fathers and Mothers.

So in a moment we are going to 'drop in' on ourselves. Just be here in this moment. Rest in awareness. Mindfulness is awareness, but we are very often lost in thoughts, thereby not available to ourselves or to others.

Contemplative prayer is also about 'Presence'. Being present to the mystery of our lives, the world in which we live, this mysterious Cosmos. It's this great Mystery that we open ourselves up to. 'Be still and know I am God'.

Lets begin our first sitting with this :

Repeat after me: Be Still and know I am God

Be still and know I am

Be still and know

Be still

Be.

(Sound of the Bell)

It's a radical act of love to just sit down and be quiet for a time. When all the 'doing' and activity of our lives is sensed as in some way 'empty' we realise how short our lives are. In this practice of zazen we are not trying to 'get anywhere', we are being present to just what is now.. Our life is always just now.

We breath in and out gently and quietly - try to be present, open and awake.

Be with what is. Just be an observer of what is there.

We are not trying to stop thoughts

We are not trying to think thoughts

We are just here. (here I am Lord)

Honour the Mystery

Learning to be a meditative person means learning to be at peace with silence.. It might mean switching off the TV, radio or computer; of course, when we do that we find it's not so easy to switch off our minds.. The chatter goes on and on

Meditation is to the Spirit what breathing is to the body. Don't look for results. Don't imagine that you should become all calm and peaceful. It is the practice of sitting that is the teacher. Stillness is the first lesson on this journey of self transformation.

Sitting still and silent prepares us for stillness of heart and mind. The energy of the universe is silence. Everything comes out of silence.

We must be patient with the inner distractions. The last thing we did, plans, what's on tv whatever.. Let them fade

Progress in this practice is always a gift.

There can be no enlightenment (Satori) without pain, grief, sorrow.

In a mysterious way our lives are deepened by our wounds. This is the true path to contemplation and compassion.

Having said all this, nobody knows what Zen is. Just like you don't really know who you are, why you are here and where you are going.

So, Zen can't really be talked about. Its essence is elusive, like poetry and art.

We sit before the mystery in silence and gratitude.

This way of silent sitting can lead us as Christians into a deeper contemplative awareness of the Divine Presence.

Fr Bede Griffiths who lived in a Ashram in India said, 'It is perfectly possible to understand the Christian faith in a deeper way through the insights and practices of Yoga, Buddhism and Zen'.

What is basic to our practice here is a deep encounter with our humanity. This is the teaching of Mindfulness, not to 'miss' our life, but be present to this moment 'If your mind is not clouded, this is the best moment of your life' (Wu men).

We are all called to live our life as if it really mattered, and it does!

This practice is an act of love and compassion, for yourself and for others.

It's also a practice of sanity!