

Listening...with our heart and in our heart... *Be still and aware of God within and all around*

Last week, Michelle provided helpful insights on the eye of the heart, reminding us of the worship song, *Open the eyes of our heart, Lord*. Some of you know that I work with children and adults who are deaf or with hearing loss, and particularly with those who receive useful hearing with cochlear implants. It reminded me of when I was doing a workshop and said – *We don't listen with our ears, we listen with our brains; if there is a problem in the auditory part of the brain whatever hearing we provide is unlikely to be useful ...* I was then corrected by a therapist: *No, Sue, you're wrong – we listen with our hearts...*

We also sing the worship song which Michelle mentioned in church and the next bit goes: *Open our ears Lord and help us to listen*. We follow it with silence; wordy prayers and liturgy do not allow space for the shedding of thoughts, or the escape from our own dramas (Rohr). The problem with listening is that unless we are completely deaf, which is rare, our ears are always ON. We can shut our eyes, but not our ears. So, in our Stilling Prayer, when Stephen asks us to switch off our microphones, he is supporting our attempts at silence, internally and externally. The internal silence can be more difficult!

In *Always We Begin Again – the Benedictine Way of Life*, John McQuiston reminds us:

Remember the great value of silence
Each day there must be a time for silence.
Even in our prayers and meditation.
There must be a time within which we
Neither speak nor listen
But simply are.

Our weekly Stilling Prayer offers space... to listen to our hearts and in our hearts. I found Angela's discussion of the Holy of Holies helpful: she mentioned the words of Father Laurence Freeman: 'When we meditate we step into the Holy of Holies within our hearts' through the silence. Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk, living alone in the woods with his books:

What is to be said about silence
Except that it is;
And you sought it out diligently in your woods,
Living alone with your books.....
And there is little you can send us out of your silence
Except to say that it is;
And it cries louder than our clamour. *Padraig Daly*

We often use poems in meditation and recently in the Church Times (15.05.26), Malcolm Guite wrote about using Wendell Berry's advice on how to be a poet which made me think about our time of Stilling Prayer:

*Make a place to sit down. Sit Down. Be quiet.
Breathe with unconditional breath
Unconditioned air.
Shun electric wire
Think slowly.
Live a three dimensional life Stay away from screens.*

So...when Malcolm Guite enters his shed, and obeys the advice, what happens? He gives a wonderful description of letting the silence do the work:

Then from some point, from somewhere in the silence, the words come.

They arrive in twos or threes at first, holding hands, drawing one another in.

They make their passage from the mind through the pen to paper, the shapes and forms of things unknown. I listen to what they have to say, intrigued, and begin the great adventure of what I am going to write next. If it is something new or unexpected, an image that seems to come from nowhere, teasing me with some hint of a meaning that is just beyond my grasp, then I know I may have a poem on my hands.

The poem, if it is a poem, has to quicken in my hands, with its own life even as I am writing it; it has to push back a little, even break free and ask me to follow it somewhere – somewhere that I had not considered or visited. Once there, the poem can start to do what poetry does best; to tell me things that the poem knows and I do not.

As we go into silence let us trust the silence to teach us something it knows and we do not.

To lead into silence: (R S Thomas)

Waiting for God
To speak;
The air a staircase
For silence

Out of silence: J P Newell:

In the conflicting voices of our hearts
Grant us a calmness of hearing.
Let our seeing and hearing
Be rooted in the silent certainty of your presence
Be grounded in the experience of your stillness.
Let our lives be rooted in the depths of your peace.