

Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District - Revd. Julian M. Pursehouse

August 2022

Dear Friends,

I am writing this letter at a time of deep uncertainty and fear in our society – when we are reminded daily of the crippling reality of climate crisis, war in Europe, sexual violence against women, and a cost-of-living crisis that is likely to bring misery to many thousands of people. Where is God in all of this? And what is an authentic Christian response? It is so tempting to add our voice or opinion to the cacophony of well-meaning solutions and consolations – but I wonder if this is truly wise? The more I wrestle with the nature of Christian discipleship in the myriad complexities of our world, the more convinced I become of the need for silence and less words! The contemplative tradition suggests that it is in the *solitude of silence* that we intentionally curate a space into which the divine might speak and we might become the recipients of wisdom. At a critical point in his experience, the prophet Elijah encounters the presence of God *‘in a sound of sheer silence’* (1 Kings 19:12) and only through the silence of this moment is he able to discern the future direction of his ministry.

It is tempting to imagine that silent contemplation takes us away from the visceral realities of a harsh and painful world and somehow insulates the soul from *too* much reality. However, this is to misinterpret the value of the contemplative tradition and to fail to see the vital connection between contemplation and action! Catherine of Sienna reminded the Church of this relationship when she wrote;

‘The secret of Christian contemplation is that it faces us with Jesus Christ toward our suffering world in loving service and just action’

If contemplation and silence draw us into the presence of God, then we are surely drawn into the divine passion and pathos for our world and better able to be drawn into the loving, merciful and just movements of God’s grace. If our actions are inspired and energised by contemplative practices, then we are spiritually resourced at a deeper level to be responsive to God’s call in our human experience. To a certain degree, Jesus modelled this delicate balance between contemplation and action – the synoptic Gospels suggest a movement between engagement and solitude, action and prayer (e.g. Luke 5:15-16 & Mark 6:46). When he was renewed in spirit, Jesus returned to the demands of his ministry and the pressing demands of broken, suffering communities.

I leave you with a prayer from the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta that anticipates this grace-infused movement from contemplation to service:

‘The fruit of silence is prayer

The fruit of prayer is faith

The fruit of faith is love

The fruit of love is service

The fruit of service is peace.’

With very best wishes,

Julian