

Ancient Wisdom

Julian of Norwich

MEETING JULIAN

Julian was born in 1342 in Norwich, at that stage the second largest city in England, and was known to be alive in 1416, although her date of death is unknown. While she is quite well-known today, not much is known of her life and she was virtually unknown until the seventeenth century.

In May 1373 she became extremely ill and was expected to die. The parish priest was called to give her the rites of the Church. He left a crucifix for her to gaze for comfort in her final days and hours. Then on May 8th, the third Sunday after Easter, she was given 15 revelations over the period of five hours, from 4-9pm. The next night she was given a 16th revelation that concluded and confirmed all the other fifteen.

Sometime soon after she became an anchoress at the Church of St Julian. This entailed living in a cell, a small room, attached to the church. (Anchoress doesn't mean she was 'anchored'. It is from the Greek meaning "to go apart".) The calling of an anchoress (F) or anchorite (M) was to live a life of contemplation and prayer. From her cell there was one window that opened onto the church through which she could see the altar and another that allowed food etc. to be passed in and through which she could provide spiritual direction to those seeking it. She had a maid to attend to her practical needs.

JULIAN'S WORLD

Julian was born into a world in turmoil. Just a few years before her birth England and France began what became known as the 100 Years' War. A few years after her birth the Black Plague decimated the population of England and Europe. During her adult life there were a series of peasant revolts in England highlighting the political instability of the time.

The reason I have chosen Julian for this leaflet is because we are currently undergoing something similar with the outbreak of Covid-19 which is causing some, perhaps many people, anxiety or fear. Perhaps Julian has something to say to us.

JULIAN'S WISDOM

When Julian asked, 15 years after the revelations, what was their meaning this is the reply she received: "*Love was his meaning.*" Her book is called *The Revelations of Divine Love* and is filled with expressions of God's love for us and how our love for God is satisfied. Remember, this was in a time of great turmoil when many were explaining the tumultuous events within society as a punishment from God. Julian offered a different voice proclaiming God is a God of love, and all God does is for love. Julian's God is a God who loves unconditionally. What can we say about suffering in the light of God's love? What can we say about God's love in the light of suffering?

JULIAN'S WORDS

On God's love

'God does not despise what he has made... for as the body is clad in the cloth, and the flesh in the skin, and the bones in the flesh, and the heart in the trunk, so are we, soul and body, clad and enclosed in the goodness of God. Yes, and more closely, for all these vanish and waste away; the goodness of God is always complete, and closer to us, beyond any comparison. For truly our lover desires the soul to adhere to him with all its power, and as always to adhere to his goodness ... For it is so preciously loved by him who is highest that this surpasses the knowledge of all created beings. That is to say, there is no created being who can know how much and how sweetly and how tenderly the Creator loves us ... God wishes to be seen, and he wishes to be sought, and he wishes to be expected, and he wishes to be trusted.'

- Julian says that God does not despise any creature, anything God has made. How does our having been lovingly created and formed by God affect how we see ourselves? Others? The earth?

The Hazelnut

One of the most famous images from Julian is that of the sphere the size of a hazelnut. Such a simple thing yet something that spoke volumes to her, as it can to us, of God who creates, loves and preserves all creation.

'And in this he showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, and I perceived that it was as round as any ball. I looked at it and thought: What can this

be? And I was given this general answer: it is everything which is made. I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that it was so little that it could suddenly fall into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: it lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the love of God.'

- Spend some time outdoors pondering creation around you. Allow it to speak to you of God's creativity, love and care. You are part of this creation. Allow that wonder to sink in.



All will be well

Julian is perhaps best known for her belief that *'All shall be well. And all shall be well. And all manner of things shall be well.'*

This is no naive optimism but comes from a deep belief in the goodness and love of God. Nothing can ever destroy God's love for us- and that is good news.

- How might these words help you face the difficult times in which we find ourselves?

"God revealed all this most blessedly, as though to say: See, I am in God. See, I am in all things. See, I do all things. See, I never remove my hands from my works, nor ever shall without end. See. I guide all things to the end that I ordain them for, before all time began, with the same power and wisdom and love with which I made them: how should anything be amiss?"