**Reflection for Sunday 10th May**

**Be not half-hearted….**

**Opening words**

Please light a candle or electric tea light if you are able, and think of everyone else in our community, local and global

Come as you are – bring your whole self.

If you come with pain in your heart, do not hide one drop of it thinking to spare us, but lay it all out and honour it - knowing that your pain is being held, along with your heart, by this whole community.

If you come with joy in your heart, do not conceal it for fear of hurting those who are sad, but bring out all the bunting, set off the fireworks, and sing your heart out – knowing that your joy is being held, along with your heart, by this whole community.

If you come with concerns in your heart, do not be ashamed to name them one by one, but speak each with a clear voice, that they may all be heard and acknowledged – knowing that your concerns are being held, along with your heart, by this whole community.

And if you come with hope in your heart, sing it out loud that the whole world can hear it, and dance it so the whole world can join in – knowing that your hopes are being held, along with your heart, by this whole community.

**Hymn**

One of my favourite hymns by Shirley Erena Murray is number 21 in our purple hymn book. These are the first and last verses.

Come and find the quiet centre

In the crowded life we lead,

Find the room for hope to enter,

Find the space where we are freed:

Clear the chaos and the clutter,

Clear our eyes, that we can see

All the things that really matter,

Be at peace, and simply be.

In the Spirit let us travel,

Open to each other’s pain;

Let our lives and fears unravel,

Celebrate the space we gain:

There’s a place for deepest dreaming,

There’s a time for heart to care;

In the Spirit’s lively scheming

There is always room to spare.

**Prayer**

Spirit of Life and Love,

We come together, yet apart, to kneel in the temple in our hearts. This life is a conflicted bundle of heartbreak and hopefulness, and we are simple yet complicated souls trying to navigate our way through.

We would know that whatever it is that we are feeling, experiencing or suffering right now, is acknowledged, held up and honoured – because it is who we are. And we know that the simple act of being heard, truly heard, brings a healing of its own. Hear us, please, whoever, or whatever is either out there – or in here in our hearts.

We know that sometimes we have lived in a selfish vacuum, as though only our own needs mattered. We have ignored the opportunities for growth that surround us, and blindly continued with behaviour that harms both us and those around us. May we be forgiven for hesitating when we knew action was needed – and forgive us also for neglecting the stillness and the silence. We are so often out of balance – may we find ways to restore our sense of purpose and connection, for we are part of the one great Soul, and bound to each other in pain, and in love.

Spirit of Life and Love, help us to stay close to you, and you hold us close. Ease our burdens, and increase our energy; be with us as we struggle and as we celebrate. And for our part, we pledge that we will try to live this week with greater intention, and renewed spirit, as we do Love’s work in the world. Amen.

**Story**

I suspect a number of you will know this story in one form or another. This version comes from Margaret Silf.

A fisherman once sat in the midday sun, gazing out to sea, watching his little fishing boat riding at anchor, and thinking to himself how good it was to sit in the sun with no worries, watch the waves breaking and enjoy God’s creation.

But his daydream was interrupted when a smartly dressed and rather overweight business man came up to him and broke into his reverie with a sharp question: “What are you doing lazing around at midday? Why aren’t you out fishing?”

Somewhat taken aback, the fisherman replied, “I’ve done my day’s fishing. I’ve taken my fish to market, and now I’m relaxing in the sun.”

But why don’t you put out to sea again and catch some more fish?” his questioner insisted.

“Why would I want to do that?” replied the fisherman politely.

“Well, then you would make twice as much money.”

“Why would I want to do that?”

“Well, then you could buy a bigger, better boat, and catch even more fish. You could even employ other people to do the fishing. My word, you could own a whole fleet of fishing boats if you weren’t so lazy.”

“Why would I want to do that?”

“Well, if you owned your own fleet of boats, and employed other people to do the fishing, you would have as much money as you could ever dream of.”

“Why would I want that?”

“Well, then you could spend the rest of your life just doing whatever you wanted to do, sitting in the sun, relaxing and enjoying yourself, with no worries…”

“But that’s exactly what I’m doing right now”, said the fisherman.

**Reflection**

Well, the lockdown has now been going for seven weeks. Each of us will be coping with it – or not – in our own ways. Some will be enjoying the quietness and stillness – while others will be going gently stir-crazy! Some will have found lots of odd jobs to keep themselves entertained, others will have had extra work piled on to them as work colleagues are furloughed or as their work places struggle to adapt to a different way of operating. We will all, I imagine, have gone through times of extreme worrying, calm, enthusiasm (yes, even for those odd jobs!), and a complete lack of motivation. And all of those emotional responses are completely understandable.

One of the problems I and the kids have been dealing with is the attack of the apathy bug. We can have a whole list of things to do, whether it’s calls, or writing this very service, or the kids’ school work, or even making tea, but there’ll be times when despite all our best intentions, we will find ourselves vacantly staring into space, half an hour after we set out to start something, and nothing will have actually been done. I read on Facebook that that unfocused gaze off into the distance for long stretches of time has become known as the ‘coronavirus stare’.

It’s all understandable. Even before these unprecedented times, we knew the temptation of the 1000-yard stare, that time-out for the brain, whether it’s a daydream or a seemingly complete shut-down. And some of us were very good at falling into it, whether or not we had good reason. These days, we all have good reason.

But it’s strange that I found that piece about the coronavirus stare at the same kind of time that I’ve had a phrase going through my head over and over again – be not half-hearted. It reminds me of a blessing that I have used at the end of funerals – the passage goes like this:

“There is, finally, only one thing required of us: that is, to take life whole, the sunlight and the shadows together, to live the life that is given us with courage and humour and truth.

We have such a little moment out of the vastness of time, for all our wondering and loving. Therefore let there be no half-heartedness; rather let the soul be ardent in its pain, in its yearning, in its praise.”

There’s a lot of poems and articles written about making the most of each moment, that seem to suggest that any still moment is time wasted. And when the lockdown was first announced, all over the internet you could find suggestions as to how you could use your new-found time and space (those that had it, as opposed to those who were now working double shifts, that is). Keep fit videos abound, craft sites offer free tutorials, language schools entice you with the thought of speaking a new language, and as for the number of new novels that are expected to be hitting the shelves just as soon as there are shelves to hit – because apparently there is one great novel in all of us! Well, there may well be one in me, but you’re going to have a wait a bit longer for it! The point they were making is that anyone with free time should find a way to fill it – God forbid there should be a moment of boredom.

But then almost as an allergic reaction to that, there came the advice to ignore all the calls to be doing, and to recognise the need just to sit. Jeff Foster, a spiritual author from London, posted this beautiful reminder of priorities, called Let Yourself Rest.

If you’re exhausted, rest.

If you don’t feel like starting a new project, don’t.

If you don’t feel the urge to make something new,

just rest in the beauty of the old, the familiar, the known.

If you don’t feel like talking, stay silent.

If you’re fed up with the news, turn it off.

If you want to postpone something until tomorrow, do it.

If you want to do nothing, let yourself do nothing today.

Feel the fullness of the emptiness, the vastness of the silence,

the sheer life in your unproductive moments.

Time does not always need to be filled.

You are enough, simply in your being.

It’s not just modern authors who are reminding us of this; perhaps the most famous is, of course,

“What is this life if, full of care,

we have no time to stand and stare…”

There’s hymns written about it – if you are prepared to accept the God-talk alongside it –

“Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the holy one is here.” And likewise, Psalm 46 contains the phrase, “Be still, and know that I am God.” Although in the context it was written, that of war and conflict, a more appropriate translation would be “stop fighting and shut up”!

So conflicting advice, it would seem – should we stand and stare and drift off into reverie, and be still in the presence of – something, at least, or should we remember that life is short, and that every second is a blessing not to be wasted. Which is a more appropriate means of giving thanks for the time we have? The businessman believed that constantly doing, bigger and better, was the proper use of life – the fisherman put great store in just doing what was necessary to survive so that he could enjoy just sitting in the sunshine.

Be not half-hearted – the answer is not that we have to choose between one or the other, but that both can be the same, if we bring our full intention and attention to it. It’s the practice of mindfulness in a way – whatever you are doing, whether it is an activity, or whether it is stillness, do it with your whole being. So if you are writing that novel, or painting the fence (again), or knitting that shawl, bring your whole self to the activity. If you need to just be, then don’t do it by accident, but by intention: acknowledge that this is what you need right now, deliberately set aside the distractions and the busy-nesses, with honour of course, but set them aside, and bring your intention and attention to just, being.

Let there be no half-heartedness; rather let the soul be ardent in its pain, in its yearning, in its praise. This life is a gift, yes. We are a gift, yes. And these gifts should be cherished and nurtured. So when it is time for ‘doing’, do with your whole heart. And when it is time for ‘being’, be – with your whole heart. We need both doing and being in our lives. There is plenty of ‘doing’ that needs us in the care of our world and its inhabitants, in the righting of wrongs and the healing of wounds. And it is through wholehearted ‘being’ that we remind ourselves of our connection to the beating heart of this world, and to our God, or our centre, wherever we find our source of strength, and replenish our courage and focus for when the ‘doing’ is needed.

So each day, whether you are ploughing through your to-do list, or staying under the duvet, know that it is what you need to be doing at that moment, and that that makes it holy work. Do and be with intention, and attention, and be not half-hearted.

**Blessing**

There is, finally, only one thing required of us: that is, to take life whole, the sunlight and the shadows together, to live the life that is given us with courage and humour and truth.

We have such a little moment out of the vastness of time, for all our wondering and loving. Therefore let there be no half-heartedness; rather let the soul be ardent in its pain, in its yearning, in its praise.

And as we do the work that needs to be done to bring healing to the world, and as we take time just to be and to rest and to heal ourselves, may we know that the Love that holds the world is loving us – wholeheartedly.