

The View from Grabbist

As we enter 2024, a year which - by any recent standards - opens with huge uncertainty across our world, I find myself coming to the question: *Is there meaning?* Sometimes - continuing the metaphor of our local hilltop - all we can see is the thick, confusing fog of human folly!

But troubling times are nothing new. Amid the shocking darkness of plague, over 600 years ago, the anchoress Julian of Norwich had visions of the sufferings of Christ. They may seem morbid to us on first reading, but when you face suffering head on daily, a God who suffers becomes suddenly relevant and fresh! Many years after her 'shewings', she reflected:

I desired many times to know in what was our Lord's meaning. And 15 years after and more, I was answered in spiritual understanding, and it was said: What, do you wish to know your Lord's meaning in this thing? Know it well, love was his meaning. Who revealed it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For love. Remain in this, and you will know more of the same. But you will never know different, without end. So I was taught that Love is our Lord's meaning.

(Showings, chapter 86, Tr. by Edmund College & James Walsh, SPCK)

It took many years for Julian to hear this. It has taken me all my life just to begin to glimpse it, like a little break in the clouds on the hilltop! I increasingly think that if we begin here, with LOVE, our search for meaning begins, and so will end. And we also should expect to find deep resonances of this Mystery of Compassion in other religious traditions and cultures speaking in different terms and languages to our familiar ones. We can think we have the best ideas, but if we have fine philosophy or unquestionable theology and have not Love, then as Saint Paul said, we are but a clanging gong (1 Cor 13). Love that reconciles us to, or 'ones' (a phrase Julian used) us with, God, one another and all creation *is incarnation* - divine embodiment, not divorced from, but fully infusing *all* aspects of *this* planetary life! Our dark, violent, unjust and noisy world is crying out for this communion, this inter-being (a word used by Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh), this 'oned-ness' with others. So, this season, as we ponder these profound mysteries – in Christian terms, the recent themes of Advent, Christmas, and now Epiphany - and as we enter a New Year, let's keep this Love at the centre.

It's what gives life meaning even when - *especially* when - there's no view.

Happy New Year!

Kenneth Cross