

Soul Breathing by Jean Shannon

This contemporary word is based on the readings Psalm 34; Mark 10:46-52; the writings of Richard Glover in the Sydney Morning Herald and Julian of Norwich from Manton and Muir, *The Gift of Julian of Norwich*. The readings can be found on page 4.

Julian of Norwich sees God as the ground – the natural substance from which we grow. But it can't be as simple as that.

A couple of weeks ago, in the SMH, Richard Glover told a story about his garden. He said, he bought a couple of those massive pots to sit either side of his door. He filled them with rich potting soil, fertiliser and all the stuff that makes things grow and he planted gardenia seedlings in both. Now on one side of the door, there is a thriving, sparking gardenia filling the air with its sweet smell...and on the other side of the door, nuclear winter: a few twigs and suffering leaves. It seems that not everything is equal. The sun under the veranda and eaves provided slightly different conditions and the outcome was dramatic.

Malcolm Gladwell, in his book, *Outliers*, shows sporting success is not an accident. It is not genius or talent so much as opportunity. He came up with what he called the 1000 hour rule. He noticed that the vast majority professional team sportsmen were born in January, February or March. American schools (like many states in Australia, have a cut off date. If you were born after a certain date, you went to school next year and before that date, this year. It means that there can be almost 12 months difference in age between classmates. There's a lot of difference between an almost 6 year old and a barely 5. The almost 6 year olds have better coordination which means right from go, they are better at sport. The best kids in the class, get picked for the school & state teams. (doesn't matter is its music or sport) If you get picked for a school or state team, you get twice as much practice as your classmates...and so you advance to opportunities to get picked for national teams and competitions etc. By the accident of birth, the child gets substantially more opportunities and these pay out through out life.

Gladwell extrapolates this right through artistic, corporate and political successes. The point of his book is not the luck of the birthdays but that it takes 1000 hours to make a good surgeon, artist, sports person or whatever and so we have to accept that, accommodate and make it happen. It's a question of sunlight.

Glover relates repositioning in the sunlight to Australia's convict ancestors. When the lost. The dregs of society were repositioned in the sunlight, with good food and opportunities, they flourished. He saw this as proving the soil is more important than the seed. But life can be easier or harder, according to where you are positioned.

Ever noticed that you or others behave differently according to who is in the room? You can feel in shadow with some, made dull or tongue-tied by others or with others feel quite aglow, full of life and energy. With one friend, you might feel quite intelligent and in the presence of others, can't think of a thing to say. I fancy myself a deft driver. I can reverse park in the tiniest, teeniest Sydney spaces in a flash. I'm proud of that. It's part of how I see myself. And yet, there was one boyfriend in my life for several years – and I could not park a car in a truck bay in front of him. I just couldn't do it. I had a another friend I couldn't hit a golf ball in front of – I had to take 2-3 swings just to dribble the ball of the tee. When she wasn't there – no problem.

Thinking about the subtleties of positioning – how you thrive next to one person and shrivel next to another. Glover got to talking to his friends about the notion of 'best self'. Best self is the self that is open, interested, entertaining, compassionate, caring – the person who reflects your own sense of who you want to be. The question was asked, 'with which people are you your best self?' Was or is there a person you remember that brings out the best in you? I'm going to stop for a moment to let you think about that and then we'll come back to it. (Pause)

This is where I introduced the stole (because I don't normally wear one at St James) and told them about Deb, the gift and how she shines with love and I

get to bask in it. etc I then linked it to sharing it with St James, the stole's birthday as it was.

Julian of Norwich lived as an anchoress. I'm sure most of you know that is a person who withdraws from secular life. It is essentially a prayer-oriented, ascetic life much like a hermit although she had a window onto the street through which she would conduct conversations and another window into the church through which she participated in services and received the Eucharist.

It is clear that for Julian, the person who brought out her best was God. In her prayer world is a mutual, loving communication between the Trinity and the human soul. She said, 'prayer is a dance of the soul with its maker, keeper, lover. She said, prayer is a natural yearning of the soul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and God welcomes the soul that comes simply, naturally, plainly and homely, without affectation or complex words. She saw it as a communion, rather than a seeking or beseeching. It required no words, because the soul was aware of its connection with God.

For Julian, prayer is a kind of soul breathing. A soul dwells in God, its very existence a form of prayer. She saw it as being, simply, reverently and honestly. Prayer becomes a witness that the will of the soul and God are one and in being that way, a person could be comforted and find peace. In other words, she would expect that you would know, love and forgive yourself as God would.

In Julian's life, the 3 persons of the Trinity God, Creator, Redeemer and Holy Spirit – are in on-going relationship with the human soul, mind and body. We are constantly being 'worked' on with love, grace, mercy, peace and kindness. She saw it as God, the father image as being with us in love, Jesus increasing our being with restoration and the redeeming power of passion and the Holy Spirit – like a magnet drawing us forward into fulfilment. She believed that we were works in progress that could improve and part of that was taking responsibility, yet accepting the help 'to make all things well', ultimately, to be one with the whole, blooming with God inside.

Men On every side, the LORD's messenger protects those who honour
God;

Women and he delivers them.

Taste and see how good the LORD is!

The one who takes refuge in him is truly happy!

Mark 10:46-52 (NRSV)

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside.

When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'

Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.'

So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.'

Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

And Jesus said unto him, "Go thy way. Thy faith hath made thee whole." And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.

Julian of Norwich from Manton and Muir, *The Gift of Julian of Norwich*

Julian has a complex understanding of the make-up of humans and the Trinity. Her's is an organic spirituality, she does not separate soul and flesh, or what she calls, 'substance and sensuality' – all are connected and permeated with each other and God.

Julian's term 'sensuality' has a broader meaning than its modern use. It refers to our sensual nature – our senses and flesh, plus the being and understanding that stems from this. Sensuality is loved, not despised by God. It is enclosed in God who made humans from matter, the silt of the earth.

Julian sees God as the ground, the natural substance in which humans are immersed, despite their contrariness, woe, frailty or sense of isolation. As a plant's roots are in the ground, so is human life in God.

Our soul is made to be the dwelling place of God, the city of Christ.

Julian of Norwich May, 1373