

# THREE REFLECTIONS FROM REV PETER MILLER, CHURCH OF SCOTLAND MINISTER AND FRIEND OF THE COMMUNITY OF OUR TWO PARISHES.

(taken from his recent booklet *'Within the Weaving of the World'*)

## Commitment to justice

*What the Lord requires of us is this: to act justly,  
love tenderly and walk humbly with our God.....*

Micah chapter 6

These words from the prophet Micah were spoken by the Bishop of Washington in her cathedral at a special service after President Trump's inauguration. Each time I read them they make me remember some of the most important truths within Christianity - tenderness of heart and a commitment to justice. The Bible tells me as a believer what the Lord requires of me. This does not mean that I live up to the teaching in every moment of my life, but rather that it is the light of Jesus constantly present within my heart. The words are both my companion and my teacher, as they are for millions of others who follow Christ. They propel me to live in solidarity with others and in the words of Dawna Markova *"to loosen my heart until it becomes a wing, a torch, a promise."*

Micah's words offer a totally alternative way of understanding our inner life, and that is why it has been important for me throughout my whole life to quietly share "the good news of Christ" with others. For I truly believe that the healing love of Christ can be transformative. In the words of the old Indian saying *"God has lit up some lamps in my heart that nothing can put out"*, which is why I have been an activist for justice.

Christianity is about reaching out in love and kindness to others both near and far. Actions, as the prophet Micah points out, are truly more important than words, but the words teach me how to act. To give an example, I am called upon to be tender-hearted, but I must also be angry at injustice in its many forms in the modern world. The task of the Christian church has always been prophetic, and we see that visionary calling in the ministries of the late Pope Francis and now, that of Pope Leo.

## Prayer and meditation

*The real sanctity of any church is that it is a place where we can go to weep  
and pray in common.*

Words from Miguel de Unamuno

During his life Jesus taught his disciples many things about prayer, and in the centuries since Christ's resurrection, prayer has been a central reality in the Christian church. I myself believe deeply in the power of prayer but not necessarily in a traditional way. Prayer means many things, but essentially it is an opening of our hearts and minds to God's directing. A prayer may involve many words, traditional words, few words or total silence. To sit quietly is to pause in our busy lives, to believe that peace can come to our heart, and that we can be renewed by the Spirit. All of these are all parts of what

it means to believe in prayer. In the Roman Catholic tradition praying the Rosary is a powerful way for an individual to be in the presence of the Lord.

I find helpful these lines of James Montgomery:

*Prayer is the burden of a sigh, the falling of a tear, the upward glancing of an eye  
when none but God is near.*

From my pastoral experience I know that prayer is not always easy for people, but I have come to think that this may be because they are trying too hard. Forget words - and just be still.

We need more than ever, in these times of uncertainty, to learn more of "the mystery of faith" and also of the teachings about prayer and meditation from other faiths such as Buddhism. As Christians we sometime feel that we have to tell God everything, but we are so busy doing that that we are unable to hear what God is saying to us. As my friend John Bell put it - *"Take, oh, take me as I am; summon out what I shall be; set your seal upon my heart and live in me"*.

## **Doubts and questions**

*From the place where we are 'always right'  
flowers will never grow in the spring.  
The place where we are 'always right'  
is hard and trampled like a yard.  
But doubts and loves dig up the world like a mole,  
a plough, and a whisper will be heard in the place  
where the ruined house once stood.*

From the work of the poet Yehuda Amichai

Yehuda Amichai, who died in the year 2000, was an Israeli poet and author and one of the first to write in colloquial Hebrew in modern times. His wonderful words touch me more deeply now at a time when the Israel-Gaza conflict is delivering unspeakable suffering for tens of thousands of people especially women and children. The suffering is unimaginable and is rooted in a modern form of dogmatism which I find very uncomfortable.

As Amichai says, *"we are not always right"* and I agree with these words for they help us to grow spiritually. I believe with him that doubts and questions are at the core of my spiritual journey for they enable all of us to be tender listeners so that we can hear the whisper in the place where the ruined house once stood. In other words, as we hear these whispers from the past our present journeys become gifted with a calmer awareness. Longing for light, we wait with an open heart.

Throughout the years I have tried to keep an open mind to the people I meet and to the varied experiences which have informed my understanding. I believe that this is important for anyone who claims to be on a spiritual search. Sadly, an open heart to the world is not something that some Christians today regard as important. For they are convinced that the way they see things is the correct view of our world.