

Men's Group - Respect and looking again

Of late we have looked at Jesus and the mythology surrounding the Green man, the reconversion of the disciple Peter, beginning again, gardening and awakening the sacred masculine. One evening Pete Edwards introduced the topic of prayer and an emphasis upon respect..

"Humans grow in the presence of those who respect them. They even grow for those who respect them. In fact, the English word "respect" means to "look again"...When we can dare to look again, and again, when we can risk being looked at again, and again, the lamp of the body does its work and our whole body is filled with light". So writes Richard Rohr

Moses talked face to face with God, as a friend. Likewise, we are invited to learn to receive and return the gaze of Christ, even though our embarrassment and anxiety would block us. An adult to adult relationship of mutual desire is offered and encouraged.



Vita Vilcina, unsplash.com

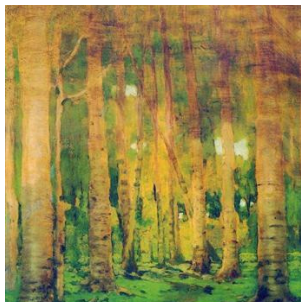
A question arose. Is there someone I need to look at again? A colleague, family member, friend, acquaintance? Is there distrust or unease that would dissolve if I were to look at them again? Can I allow my eyes to see more than I have to date?

And here I am, your invited guest-
It's incredible!

I enter your house; here I am,
prostrate in your inner sanctum.

A Psalm of David (5:7), The Message

And finally, come



So come to this table (*of bread and wine*),
You who have much faith
And you who would like to have more;
You who have been here often
And you who have not been for a long time;
You who have tried to follow Jesus,
And you who have failed;
Come. It is Christ who invites us to meet him here.

*Iona Abbey Workshop Book **

November 2013

The Coracle Trust



Room to roam

The flight of faith

I read that most versions of the Book of Hours name November as the month of gathering acorns for pigs, depleted resources requires some attention! Pink-footed geese, to name but one species, migrate, dotting the sky with their elegant and resolute flight to new feeding grounds. It's surely a flight of faith. In the USA there have been concerns for the monarch butterfly, its feeding patches being reduced. The call for waystations (monarch habitats) to be planted in home gardens, at schools, and on other unused plots of land, along migration paths has been made and answered by locals. In various parts of Scotland plans are being implemented



Fre Sonneveld, unsplash.com

to expand and join native woodlands to help develop habitat networks that a more expansive movement of wildlife, hemmed in over many years, may be supported and species may become more robust in the face of climate change. Gathering, migrating, roaming.

March saw a reflection day for Coracle come and go. What is Coracle now, what is our charism, how might/should we evolve, where is the flow of life? The guiding lights of *travelling light* and of the perceived need for physical and spiritual hospitality, captured in poetry by 'a need for inns on roads, islands in seas/Halts for discoveries to be shared/Maps checked, notes compared', was re-affirmed. Beyond this the exploration, for me, crystallised into one phrase 'find and form' - to be found and be accessible as a faith resource and to consider if further formations may be supported or encouraged further afield. The desire to journey is well documented on paper and screen, and also 'hardwired' into our hearts; an eternal longing. So the call to join, extend and add to native faith through resources (to reflect upon) and contexts (to compare maps) continues, to Coracle, to churches, blog writers, poets, and more besides: to create and provoke the creation of waystations for the nurturing of the expansive and further journey of faith.

Andrew Hook

The Two Halves of Life—Mid-life spirituality

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart. Psalm 51

Can anything broken actually be of more value than a perfect original? This thought has been with me as I try to contribute from what I have generously received since I first attended the Coracle evenings nearly a year ago. These have been a source of comfort and inspiration during a time in my life where in moving to a remote wind swept hillside much seemed taken away from me and I felt a diminution in my life both inwardly and outwardly despite the promise of a country idyll. **Firmly** chronologically into the second half of life (and so unquestioningly and generously welcomed into the group for which I am deeply grateful) the material we covered, especially David Whyte's poem 'Second life' put into words the processes I was grappling with. Not having come across Richard Rohr's writings or others sharing a similar journey I confess some of my *letting go*, was not done voluntarily but came about through circumstances. I was not brought 'kicking and screaming' to where I am now (to use C.S. Lewis's words) but quietly resentful at so much loss, most acutely the total absence of friendship and community which I had been used to. At a Quiet Day at Emmaus House a few weeks after Gus introduced the poem, these words from John O' Donoghue's poem 'For Longing' impacted me and have been an almost daily mantra since:

**May you have the wisdom to enter generously into your own unease
To discover the new direction your longing wants to take.**

With God's mercy (that's not an empty phrase but real) I have entered generously into my unease waiting to discover....Meanwhile the following story seems relevant.

Many years ago I was lent a valuable & beautiful cello by a Quaker who hardly knew me but wanted to encourage me with my music as I only had a three-quarter size instrument. A year later a close friend knowing we were going away, asked if her daughter could borrow my cello as the school instruments were unavailable during the holidays. I was surprised and a little challenged as mine was a valuable old instrument but having been shown such generosity I felt I should do the same. The cello was duly returned but weeks later the neck of the instrument came apart when my daughter was practising, it transpired that the child had knocked it over, the cello broken and the instrument mended with furniture glue. A visit to a repairer and correspondence with our insurance company sorted the matter out and our friendship continued unaffected (our friends clearly having no idea of the value of the instrument or the seriousness of the accident). However when I came to sell it, the instrument was classed as damaged despite what we thought was a brilliant repair and I stood a considerable financial loss.



This whole experience causes me to reflect that God was willing for Jesus to come and live amongst us (to give him, not just lend him), to show us what fullness of life is about, what we need to sit lightly to and what to hold precious, *knowing* we would hurt him. Isn't Christ more precious *because of being 'damaged'*. Being broken demonstrated how much we are worth, worth dying for. What it's all about? It's

*'out the door/into the clear air/of the morning/taking me with it..
so I can lie down at the/end/and show me/even against my will/how to undo myself/how to surpass/myself/how to find/a way/to die/of generosity'.*

There I have it—my longing.

Rosamond Robertson

Picture: The celloplayer, 1896. Thomas Eakins

E-Reflections and Pilgrim Blog —weekly reflections via email.

This year we have alternated between reflecting on time and seasons—for everything there is season, a time for every matter under the sun—and a Pilgrim Stories blog, looking at the theme of the dislocation of soul and modern life. Here we halt to share our discoveries, to sense and judge what they might mean to us. Here's a sample

A time to cry and to laugh

There is a time for crying and laughing, weeping and dancing. *Ecclesiastes 3:4*



Descent from the cross (detail), Rogier van der Weyden

Dual processes

I was recently introduced to the term 'Dual process', where different things are going on with us, but somehow at the same time. A person described mourning in a culture different to ours - people gather together to weep, loudly and obviously, but also tell stories and there can be laughter too.

I was reminded of the verse from Psalm 30, 'weeping lasts a night time but joy comes in the morning'.

Feeling our sadness

There is a deep truth described here. We must feel our sadness for the joy to return. Deep in the wisdom of the bible we find the truths modern psychologists arrive at. It is echoed throughout the Psalms and here in Ecclesiastes. Experience the reality you are in now. Feel and express the emotion you are in. It is ok and it is appropriate, though sometimes frightening. But here is a wonderful promise, joy comes in the morning.

Kirsty Hook

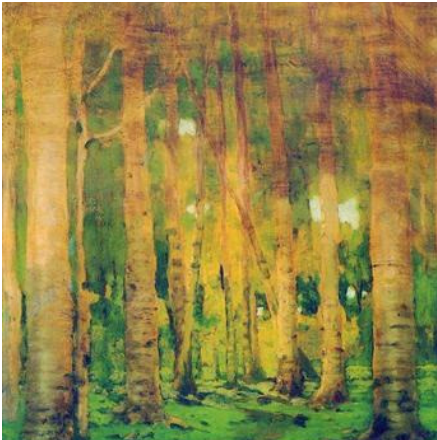
Relinquishment and Albuquerque

This has been a rather exciting year as both Gus Macleod and I were invited by Richard Rohr and his team at the Centre for Action and Contemplation to attend the Conspire Conference in Albuquerque as Co-Conspirators. We were asked to consider how Scripture is validated by experience and experience validated by Tradition, as good scales for one's spiritual worldview.



The invitation for me came as affirmation of my engagement with those who are marginalised and the opportunity to participate in the conference was both exciting and humbling at the same time. C.A.C. very generously paid for the trip. I had also planned a trip to Africa, just prior to Albuquerque in which I went with 'open hands and open heart' for God to use me. And I learned from this posture the importance of Relinquishment and Letting Go—which was the theme of our 4 back to back workshops. We were really blessed with the intentionality of participants to engage with what we were offering. We opened with a chant of the Cécile Dé, a Caim, called 'Grace and Coracle' and then shared about The Coracle Trust and the safe and 'held' space for discourse, it offers us. I shared some stories from my exchanges with people who are marginalised and how through those exchanges, transformation in my own life and the life of many others has occurred.

A birch grove spots of sunlight, Arkhip Kuindzhi



In one workshop during the plenary session a man shared his astonishment at the quick and real connection he had made with people in his triad and had observed many others in the workshop in that same profound space. His comment had participants explode with laughter as he shared that he felt like "a mosquito in a nudist colony!"

We had lots of positive feedback which at times was a bit overwhelming, but I am so grateful for the experience and the honest meeting of hearts.

A wonderful finish to the conference was an Iona Liturgy*, one of the most beautiful liturgies in which I have had the privilege to participate; 800 people walking through the cottonwoods singing praise to God brought me to tears.

Mags Bryan

Tell me what letting go is?

Reaching out to the unfamiliar

Earlier this year I met weekly for a month or so with a wise person for spiritual accompaniment. Here, I experienced a space where I could reflect on my walk of faith, and found that the account of the disciples' journey to Emmaus (Luke 24) - and Caravaggio's *The Road to Emmaus* - read me anew.

I was in retreat from family church life, reeling and in search of a bigger faith perspective. The two disciples were also in retreat: from the chaos, confusion and disappointment which followed Jesus's death in the city of Jerusalem. As I spent time with God on Arthur's Seat* during my retreat, I started to understand how the methodical unfolding of fields beneath sky, the warmth of blood in muscle, and the easy flow of conversation that accompanies walking were perfect conditions to prepare the two disciples' hearts to see.



I think it is significant that Jesus joins the disciples half way along the road, once their doubts and questions about the meaning of Jesus's death had fully ripened. He then opened the scriptures up to them, clearing the approaches for an emotional and spiritual revelation. In the same way, mid-way on my faith journey I find myself full of doubts, working hard to establish new substance to my long-held convictions.

The disciples' hard-won 'aha' moment comes at the end of the day's journey. Jesus reveals himself through the powerful visual drama of the first communion: and everything clicks into place. I strongly identify with Caravaggio's picture - my own conversion experience was one of sudden, absolute and ecstatic clarity. However now, nearly twenty years on, I find I identify equally with the inn keeper - who stares quizzically, but doesn't yet see. I have come to realise there's no final revelation in this life - rather, the slow growth of compassion towards the people, and parts of me, still in shadow.

Finally, this story reminds me that powerful encounters with the living God are not confined to home church services on a Sunday. Jesus reveals himself to this pair in unfamiliar and low key circumstances. The table at the inn has momentarily become an altar; and the wayfarers are just stopping by for the night. I find in the picture an invitation to journey, to leave the familiar behind. Like the bowl of fruit which teeters over the side of the table, I feel compelled to reach out towards a reality which just eludes me.

Tom Ingrey-Counter

*a local hill

Striding Arches

On the last day in August a group from Edinburgh ventured southwest to spend some time in the rolling hills of Dumfries, near Cairnhead. The draw was an art installation on three separate summits. Striding Arches by Andy Goldsworthy.



Photographs by Tom Ingrey-Counter

I had read up about the art pieces before seeing them so that I was more clued up as to what it all meant. Andy had talked about how the red sandstone symbolises the migration of many Scots overseas, 'of the tremendous upheaval they made'. He hoped that the arches themselves would be a 'celebration to the Scottish people and the travels they have made... that they will act as a connection between those who have left and those who have stayed here'.

When we arrived and were in view of the arches I thought back to what Andy had said. It made me wonder, how do our intentions affect particular outcomes? What would our experience of the Arches been like had we known nothing of the artist's intended meaning? Would the knowledge that Andy wanted to imbue the red stones with certain symbolic value shape our interaction with it?

As is often the case with a hill walking group, conversations were in full flow as we stomped over the heather, and I mused on this reflection as we clambered over the curving structures, getting a different perspective of the surrounding landscape. Documentation was a must, as pictures were snapped and memories stored. We ate our lunch by the stones and enjoyed moments of gazing at the view.

Descending from the last peak we found a passage-way through the thicket of tree plantations. It had been a good excuse to see this part of the country. I doubt whether we would have spent a day on that lonely natural amphitheatre had the art installation not been there. My senses on this Coracle outing had definitely made some strides.

I don't think I would've instantly thought about the Scots who have gone overseas upon encountering the Arches had I not known that that was Andy's intended interpretation. The arches, I thought, were awash with potent symbol and at the same time just simple stones. It made me think of Pádraig Ó Tuama when he says, "you will find meaning, when you give meaning". How do you feel your intentions affect the outcome of what you are trying to achieve?

Kevin Aiken, Senses and Faith Day

Trustees news

Nancy Adams journeyed from California to London 40 years ago to study International Relations; various jobs and relationships kept her here! She lectured in IR and was a Political and Commodities Analyst for an Arab research unit before moving to Scotland where a family and job as a Finance Director kept her busy. In retirement, she does some spiritual accompaniment, works with vulnerable children, has taken up a particular interest in mediation and conflict dynamics, and has been nourished by the Midlife Spirituality group.



Mags Bryan is a core member of the Two Halves of Life group. She is a registered social worker presently enjoying work as a Local Area Coordinator, with people with dementia. Alongside, she runs her own business, *Eight Miles Out*. She is also a counsellor, spiritual director, retreat giver and storyteller. As creation and nature call her to the wild outdoors Mags enjoys fly fishing and swimming – but not at the same time!



Jane Edwards combines helping guide the 'Two Halves of Life' midlife spirituality group and active involvement in the Scottish Episcopal Church, finding both life-giving. She provides spiritual direction, leads retreat days and is also an Accredited Counsellor-Psychotherapist, Supervisor and Trainer of Counsellors. Originally from Cumbria, Jane has lived and worked in India and travelled widely in Asia. Jane really enjoys growing fruit and vegetables (with wildly varying levels of success), yoga and people.



Jane Denniston and **Duncan Maclaren** stepped down as trustees during the year. We thank them for their contributions of wisdom as we have explored and reflected together. **Gus McLeod** also stepped down as trustee and as chair. We thank him for his energy, eloquence and continuing input. **Mary Kernohan** has accepted the role of new chair of the trustees.