

September Magazine.

As we reach the latter stages of summer and the hint of autumn you will notice the fruit starting to arrive in the garden, apples, pears, conkers, and hazelnuts. Sadly, in the vicarage garden the latter are very scarce even though we have an abundance of hazel trees! The reason for their absence is revealed by the number of husks that are strewn around caused by our resident squirrels partaking of the hazelnuts!

September and October are traditionally the months during which we celebrate Harvest Thanksgiving and in this Benefice the round will begin at Oswaldkirk on Friday 27th September. The word to emphasize here is 'thanksgiving' and being prepared for the coming of winter with sufficient produce to see us through. It is also a time of course to remember and provide for those who are less well off than us with produce being donated.

For the Church it is a time of reflection especially of the Creation and God's provision for us and to thank Him for His unwavering generosity and love to us.

Which brings me back to the humble hazelnut. One of the great writers of the Middle Ages was Julian of Norwich who in recent times has gained a massive following from a wide range of people of varying spiritualities. Julian was keenly aware of the suffering of the world during her lifetime. It was the time of the bubonic plague, the Archbishop of Canterbury was murdered, the church had three popes and each pope excommunicated the other two, there was a hundred-year war with France. She witnessed these times, and she was keenly aware of the suffering of the world. During a life-threatening illness when she was receiving the last rites, she had a vision of Jesus suffering on the Cross, and she miraculously recovered to write her

‘Revelations of Divine Love’ recounting her mystical experience which has come down to us today.

Julian can be especially helpful to us because we too are so aware of the traumatizing age that we too live in, a time of political strife and contention, the brutalities of war, the violence of prejudice, and threats to the environment. We can become sensitized to these things, so how do we then learn to be a healing presence during an all too often traumatized and traumatizing world? How can Julian’s insight into the mystery of the suffering of Jesus on the Cross reveal God’s loving oneness with us help us to stay grounded and present in the midst of suffering, and not be overwhelmed by it?

The answer for me lies in Julian’s reflection of the hazelnut in the palm of her hand teaching us that in the midst of circumstances, in the deep depths, there’s a place deeper, where we can experience as Julian did, God’s sustaining oneness with us and love for us.

“And in this he showed me a little thing, the quantity of a hazel nut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed. And it was as round as any ball. I looked upon it with the eye of my understanding, and thought, ‘What may this be?’ And it was answered generally thus, ‘It is all that is made.’ I marvelled how it might last, for I thought it might suddenly have fallen to nothing for littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and ever shall, for God loves it. And so have all things their beginning by the love of God. In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second that God loves it and the third, that God keeps it.” (Julian of Norwich, ‘Revelations of Divine Love’)

So, if you are lucky enough to find a hazelnut before the squirrels, pick one up and hold it in the palm of your hand

and reflect on Julian's words and as you do, prayerfully put yourself in the palm of God's hand where you too are made, loved, and kept, and be at peace.

Every blessing.

Rev James