

V

Welcomed into the Wound

INITIATION

24

Then with a glad cheer our Lord looked unto his side and beheld, rejoicing. With his sweet looking he led forth the understanding of his creature by the same wound into his side within. And then he shewed a fair, delectable place, and large enough for all mankind that shall be saved to rest in peace and in love.

And with this our good Lord said full blissfully: “Lo, how that I loved thee,” as if he had said: “My darling, behold and see thy Lord, thy God that is thy maker and thine endless joy, see what satisfying and bliss I have in thy salvation; and for my love rejoice thou with me.”

Dear Julian,

When I was a child I had a piano teacher. He was a very old man and a very wise man in the art of teaching. I was awful at reading music and he knew it. When he taught me a new song he would allow me to agonize over it for a time, but when I had agonized enough he would invite me to put my hands on his and he would play the song for me. After this I would be able to play the piece. He knew that I saw the piece far better

through my hands and my ears. This letter reads to me as an infinitely rich form of this experience.

Christ invites those of us who cannot grasp the love and joy of the life of the Trinity to follow his gaze and enter into the wound on his side. We can enter into his body and learn the music of the Trinity by feel. This place is large enough for all humankind. Here again, we have a small enclosure being the place vast enough to contain *all*. It is vast enough because the wound in his side is our entry into the infinite space of the life of God, which is the life of love.

Throughout these letters you seem to be showing me again and again that the only way to understand and see the Godhead is within the love of the passion. The wound in Christ's side seems to literally open him. We can now go under the flesh of Jesus and into the water and blood that flows out of him. The wound is the gateway into God, who is the life of this body hanging on the cross. It is beautiful here.

I imagine the warm redness of the inside of all bodies, the blue veins and the whiteness of the rib cage framing the arches of this place. I walk a passageway to his riven heart. As I walk, I see the story of Christ, the gospel from within. It seems to sink in and flow into my bloodstream easily because I am here; I am permeable to Jesus because Jesus is permeable to me. By being with all humanity here I am beginning to feel our unity in a new way.

You show me that when I cannot understand with my mind, the way to grasp the vast space of the trinitarian love is to come inside this body; beckoned by Christ's loving gaze. Just so, the church, the body is this place within his wound where I can feel the waters of baptism that pour out of his side, and eat the flesh and blood of the Eucharist and go along the pathways to his heart with all of humanity. But to be within the church is not to lose the particularity and intimacy of his love. It seems a beautiful life calling to enjoy the extremity of his love from within his body and to there learn the music of the Trinity. I feel this calling to me, but I am also afraid, I know that we are in his body stretched on the cross and I also know that this love demands my soul, my life, my all, and my willingness to be enclosed within him rather than find my life outside of Christ.

Oh God, put my hands on yours and teach me to play the love music of the Trinity with my life, gaze into your wound, and lead me deeper into you.

25

And with this same cheer of mirth and joy our good Lord looked down on the right side and brought to my mind where our Lady stood in the time of His Passion; and said: "Wilt thou see her?" . . . And for the high, marvellous, singular love that he hath to this sweet Maiden, his blessed Mother, our Lady Saint Mary, he shewed her highly rejoicing, as by the meaning of these sweet words; as if he said: "Wilt thou see how I love her, that thou mightest joy with me in the love that I have in her and she in me?" And also unto more understanding this sweet word our Lord speaketh to all mankind that shall be saved, as it were all to one person, as if he said: "Wilt thou see in her how thou art loved?"

Dear Julian,

Because we always need more, he gently offers you a vision of Mary. His eyes turn to her in the same way that his gaze turns towards the wound in his side. His eyes turn to her so that we can follow her eyes back to him. "Would you like to see her?" he asks. "Yes!" you respond. He knows you want to see Mary; we all do. This has shown itself to be true throughout the history of the church. I have just perused a *National Geographic* about Mary: it documents all the sightings of Mary from all over the world. They are incredibly multitudinous. We want to see Mary. Why do we want to see Mary? We want to see Mary because she carried the Son of God inside her. He loved her and she knew him intimately and we hope she might let us into this intimacy. We hope that because she loved, participated, and obeyed we might also find a way to do the same. We want to see Mary.

Mary is focused only on Jesus and therefore we never feel judgement from her, only a motherly tenderness. She perceives the needs of others (as at the wedding of Cana), but her solution is always to hand those needs over to him. She is his in a particular way and this makes her available to all of us in a particular way. She is the un-mediating mediator of the divine life. We want to see her.

Julian, you long for a direct vision of Mary, a bodily sight, but you do not receive what you ask for and this withholding seems to be key to what it is that he wants you to receive. In the first line of this letter there is an echo of the beginning of the last letter, Jesus is directing your gaze with

his gaze at another place of entry into his love. But when you look where he directs your gaze you cannot see anything bodily, you only sense her place there. Christ is objective and Mary subjective; a vision of Mary is not external to you, but rather it is held within you.

What I see in this is that in Christ we are called to see and feel love, and in Mary we are called to learn love, to become love. This is not a bodily place of entry in the same way that Christ's body is permeable to us through his wound and in the church and in the sacraments. We cannot enter into Mary in her particularity the same way that we can enter into Christ because Mary is one of us and each of us is called to be our own person before God. What is brought to your mind through the focus of his gaze is the *place* of Mary. Mary is a spiritual way of entry not bodily. It is always Mary's posture, her place, that we are invited to contemplate. The visions of Mary you are given seem to be meant to teach us how to be with *him*; they do not end in her. She is our leader, he is our end.

In Christ's love for her we can see how much we are loved. You say it beautifully in his voice, "Would you like to see in her how you are loved?" In his love for her we see that like her we are chosen and that we are capable of living up to our calling because we are chosen. Jesus wants to show us Mary in order to make delight in us; the delight of love. Christ wants us to know his love in her and how that love returns to him; her purity of love for him, her "let it be unto me" is meant to open our capacity for love. You tell me that I must look at her with the eyes of the spirit, seeking to know the virtues of her soul, to know her truth, her wisdom, her love. You say that in this spiritual gaze I can learn to know myself and know reverent fear of God. This is a personal and slow seeing. I want to learn her truth, wisdom, and love so as to slowly know myself in these.

Julian, just as Mary is a spiritual vision given to you, your text is a spiritual vision given to me. In Christ's love for Mary and for you I have begun to perceive his love for me. I know myself better in this task of seeing you as you see him, and I love him more as I watch you love. Is this the sole purpose of our being: to be receptacles and reciprocators of love, revealing to others how much they are loved by him?

Oh God make it so in me.

26

Our Lord Jesus said repeatedly, “It is I, it is I; it is I who am highest; it is I you love; it is I who delight you; it is I you serve; it is I you long for; it is I you desire; it is I who am your purpose; it is I who am all; it is I that Holy Church preaches and teaches you; it is I who showed myself to you here.”¹

Dear Julian,

Here, Christ speaks some of the most glorious lines in all of the revelation. The repetition is pounding and fabulous. It is I. It is I. It is I. . . . It crescendos like a wave washing over me. He speaks to everything in my life, calling me back from my constant distraction, concentrating my being. Each *I* is a magnet of magnificent proportions. When we first met ten years ago, it was this letter, these words, this vision of Jesus that lanced a wound of sin in me. It was extremely painful, because I knew it was *not* him whom I loved and suddenly I realized emptiness. I remember exactly where I was as I read the words. I remember weeping at the truth I could not meet. I did not want *it* to be him. I wanted some exclusion, I wanted something that ended somewhere else. I wanted someone or something to desire that was less demanding and more immediately gratifying. I wanted to keep my ends that were other, so that all of me did not have to open up to his holiness; to his all-consuming fire. The first time I read this letter, I read it as judgement, a beautifully intoxicating judgement that hurt.

These words are still chastening, but my experience reading them is different. My other ends have shown themselves to be insufficient to the soul's longing. I do not feel the need to stop my ears when I read this. I do not coddle and protect my sins like I used to. I want to be incited to love. But in the face of the magnitude of Jesus Christ and this revelation I feel insufficient. Insufficient in understanding. The first time I read this, at least it provoked a proper awe and fear, yet I turned away. This time I cannot reach the proper response, the proper awe. I am willing to listen, but I am distracted and I am doing a million other things in my mind. The words trip by me and inspire nothing within me at this moment.

1. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*, 78 (trans. Spearing).

Did you feel the restlessness of your own soul as you looked at his glory? I feel the restlessness of my own soul in my incapacity to imagine or see this glory. What is the root of restlessness in me? It used to be desire, but now is it distraction, dividedness, weariness, uncertainty? Do we simply move from one form of restlessness to another in our lives? Is one form better than another? When I find rest in Christ will my capacity for concentration and my capacity to see be full and endless?

As I write all these questions I come to understand that my disordered desire and my insufficiency are held within his constancy. Christ is bliss, I am not. Christ remains always the same even when I do not want to enter in and when I cannot enter in. My inability to access truth does not make truth absent. I have moved from disordered desire to an incapacity for him by means of constant distraction. These words of Christ's are still judgement in their inaccessible beauty and they call me to a constancy of contrition and turning towards.

“It is I, it is I; it is I who am highest; it is I you love; it is I who delight you; it is I you serve; it is I you long for; it is I you desire; it is I who am your purpose; it is I who am all; it is I that Holy Church preaches and teaches you; it is I who showed myself to you here.”

Christ is the Judge, but he is also the actor; it is Christ who will do the work of attention in me and he has already done it. All of this is said in the present tense. According to his words: I do love him, I do delight in him, I do serve him, I do desire him—he is my purpose. This is all true because he makes it so. My experience and capacity for it is not what matters. My turning to him does matter, but this is why he calls again and again; it is to make me turn. You say Christ calls with a number of words that transcends our wit, understanding, and all our power. The superabundant repetition gives the life needed to run towards it. His call is making me, it is making me love him. It started with my first infant cry and will continue to my dying breath, it will be excessive and persistent, and it will work! I may not feel it or understand it, but the rhythm of my heart beats with, *It is I . . .*