

## Week beginning 21st June – Celebrate your age

Around mid-life many people get a little depressed about the 'meaninglessness of their existence, the futility of their achievements, the emptiness of it all. This reality, ridiculed by some, resisted or denied by most, can be an intensely difficult time of turmoil for others. . . As I myself moved from my fifties into my sixties, I felt the need to sum up the directions of my life, to gather together the strands of it, to shed the fat of it, to try to simplify and refine it. 'What is the essence of my life?' I asked myself. 'To what am I devoting my best energies? For what have I passion? What are the new opportunities thrown up by my journey through the decades? Out of the whole landscape, which is the bright field with my treasure in it? . . .

During those few difficult years when I had to engage in the classic struggle with the condition of ageing, fighting the fact that I was no longer young, denying my mortality, no longer agile in body or mind, this reflection was an enormous help. I began to focus on the emerging sense of freedom that felt like a huge relief after a life of striving to succeed, always trying to please everyone, feeling guilty about taking time off, competing in often unconscious ways, and carrying a sense of anxiety about not being good enough at my work. Being somewhat ambitious by nature, I gradually became more aware of the victim I had let myself become, of the straitjacket that so restricted my true aspirations, of the cage that made it impossible for me to fly. . .

For those who trust the timing of things, the stages of growing, the wisdom of the heart, there will be a call, an attraction toward a kind of compassionate presence and giving, that up to now has not been experienced. It is an ultimate evolution in the classic dimensions of growth and of faith, where a pure form of altruism and community-care, without expectation of reward, take over the body and soul. . . These are the decades of permission to try out ideas and projects that we dared not do at an earlier age, a time to give our creative imagination a free run with its passion for the possible. Around the so-called retirement decades, we should have the expectation for exciting new doors and windows to swing open, not slam shut; for previously unreachable horizons to seem attainable after all. . .

For those who are trying to keep in tune with themselves, body, mind and spirit, and then in tune with God and with others, there is a transcending and unifying spirituality in the gift of years. Ideally, it is a fertile time for the mystic in each one to grow and flourish. The immanence of God, the mystery in all of creation, the oneness of everything, the presence of eternity in the now – all of these begin to assume a more understandable and almost tangible reality. We undertake to enter the centre of ourselves where the love and meaning at the heart of the universe is revealed. If we keep our hearts open, these special years grow a beautiful harvest. (Travelling Light pp118,119,120)

Follow-up - If you would like to explore mindful meditation, try this simple daily praxis:

Put on some gentle music. After preparing your body, mind and spirit in the usual way, become conscious of your breathing and let your thoughts drift towards scenes, shapes and colours of nature. Bring before you an image of your favourite country place. Lose yourself in it. Do you have any opportunity today to walk in a park, to stand on a river bank or cross a stream, to look at the sky either in the morning or evening tonight?, and to wonder at the immensity and the beauty of our wider home? If you feel drawn to a flower, a rock in the stream, a piece of wood, do not miss the message. Honour the moment and listen to the secrets of whatever has caught and called your attention. And there is something so special about the silence of it all. It is the creature within you, who is born and grows in the womb of this silence, who will be your beautiful and faithful companion during the most intense, vibrant and exciting stretches of your journey home. (Travelling Light p122)