

Quiet Places

The Newsletter of The Quiet Garden Movement

Jesus said: "Come with me by yourselves and get some rest" (Mark 6.31)

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ANNUAL GATHERING 2011

Keynote Address -

Soil, Soul and Society

By Chris Sunderland of Earth Abbey

On Saturday 4 June 2011

At Polesworth Abbey, UK

An opportunity to meet and hear from
Quiet Gardeners, the Trustees,
Director and Staff

Please put the date in your diary now.
Details from the Quiet Garden office
and on our website later.

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The Restorative Art of Therapeutic Gardens

"The healing began with my awakening from the anaesthetic to see the white dogwood blooming in profusion just outside my window. Over the next few days that glorious tree became an object on which I was able to focus and to remind me that there was still much beauty in the world ..."



This hospital patient alerts us as to how nature recalls us to attend to beauty, awakens positive memories and elicits hope within. Gardens are places of healing where the natural world reminds us of rhythms of growth and decay, calls us to stillness and momentarily provides an alternative focus for tired minds.

Some gardens are designed specifically with a therapeutic intent. In recent years, the Quiet Garden Movement has encouraged the provision of garden space in prison, hospital and school, but any Quiet Garden offers a place of potential healing. Designing healing gardens is an art which brings together the discipline of horticulture, landscape design and human development! The Monastic cloister garden is an ancient cultural archetype of the therapeutic garden with its sheltered, spacious walkways giving a welcome sense of enclosure. The form, pattern and contents of a sensitively created garden, can foster for us the link between the inner and outer journey.

There is a relationship between the real environment and that which is perceived, so that what is evoked in the individual will depend on their own unique inner world. It is important therefore to avoid jarring images or inappropriate shapes. A hospital garden might do well, for example, to favour the use of textures not found within the building and to avoid bleak slabs of concrete reminiscent of grave stones!

Gardens for children can provide opportunities for exploration with easy pathways, and do well to have a strong sensory element providing a fragrant treasure hunt - children are creatures of the senses! A school Quiet Garden can be a place where silence is befriended, a love of plants nurtured and hands-on skills acquired.

Gardening is a life affirming activity. At a workshop run by the organisation "Cultivations" I heard how disadvantaged members of society have had their lives turned round by the opportunity to garden with others. On a recent prison visit, a young inmate shared that gardening, "makes me feel I have achieved something". May I encourage us all to ponder imaginatively on the therapeutic possibilities for our own gardens.

Mollie Robinson
Quiet Garden Coordinator

* quote from *Healing Gardens* by C Cooper Marcus & M Barnes

The primary vision of The Quiet Garden Trust is to initiate and resource a network of local opportunities for prayer, silence, reflection and the appreciation of beauty; for learning about Christian life and spirituality; for experiencing creativity and healing in the context of God's love.

Therapeutic Value of Quiet Gardens

I greet you from Finland where we have had a small Quiet Garden since 2007. A few years earlier I was able to visit some Quiet Gardens in Britain with my old gardener friend and we came back home very inspired. We were lucky to find a suitable environment at the Vivamo Centre - a very active (35,000 visitors every year) Christian centre which arranges camps, confirmation schools, many kinds of courses throughout a year and runs popular bible dramas. Now there is also a Quiet Garden (www.vivamo.fi).

Though the Vivamo Quiet Garden is small it has created a lot of interest, just like a mustard seed. It has been presented in tv and radio programmes and in a book. Several articles have been published in gardening and other magazines. We also established a little society which takes care of the maintenance of the garden - we have about 25 members at the moment.

In my every day work I am involved with therapeutic rehabilitation programmes which use different kinds of natural elements to bring healing and recovery to clients, who may be children with learning difficulties, elderly or homeless people or people with mental disorders. We call this Green Care and it is spreading quite rapidly creating new programmes in institutions and offering farmers new opportunities to earn their living by offering care and treatment with other professionals.

Spirituality is very much present in all this, though it is not always recognized. Nature is God's rebus for man, as Bishop Kallistos Ware mentioned when I attended a Quiet Garden seminar years ago. Research tell us that the natural environment gives us a chance to experience "a soft fascination" (what a beautiful expression!), where at the same time we are both relaxed and awake in nature and able to ponder and reflect on our life situation and the deepest human questions. Other researchers have found that nature metaphors can be very meaningful for those people who are struggling with recovery issues. Small details in the garden may become an important signpost which gives direction in the midst of difficult times.

In addition, the natural environment restores our physical abilities, lowers blood pressure, muscle tension and other stress symptoms, renews our cognitive capacity and opens a way for more positive emotions. According to the world famous environment psychologists, Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, the most effective restorative effects are found in environments where we can experience fascination, a sense of being away from every day hassle, and in an environment which is compatible with our needs and has meaning for us. (It is interesting that in recent years these scholars have also studied monastic environments as they have been particularly effective as a restorative environment.)

All these treasures are often found and experienced in Quiet Garden settings. Quietness, beauty, fellowship and a healing spirituality are luxuries of life. It is no wonder that the secret is spreading around the world.

Tuomo Salovuori



Photo: Last summer a cock use to walk around the Vivamo Quiet Garden as if he owned it, entertaining visitors and giving his loud input to the garden's voices (not really respecting the quietness idea!).

Little Lorantong, Botswana

Little Loratong retreat house and garden must be one of the least known in the Quiet Garden network. Having spent several hours recently working in the 'garden', I'd like to describe Little Loratong; Loratong is Setswana for 'the place of God's love' and it has indeed been a place of prayer for nearly 20 years. It is a small and very simple house, thatched, with two rooms and a cool south-facing verandah. It nestles on a rough, rocky hillside, facing eastwards, where Gaborone is visible 15 kms away. There is no road access to it, so one climbs up a rough stone stairway, but it isn't very isolated as our house is only about 20m away. It is used largely by local pastors whose home circumstances are often crowded and not quiet, and who are really grateful for a place that is quiet and undisturbed.

"Gardening" is a grand word for what is actually southern-hemisphere winter work - cutting down, pulling up, clearing and generally keeping back the annual encroachment of every sort of thorn bush imaginable, sticky-burr bearing weeds and hugely long, sinuous, creepers that flourish after the summer rain. There are a few planted succulents that don't need watering, but we haven't planted anything else, so the 'garden' is just the interplay of rocks and natural vegetation that surrounds the house.

Anyone passing through Botswana would be most welcome, but one does need to book.

Margaret Taylor

Sensory Garden at Polesworth Abbey

The design of this garden included ideas from sighted and partially sighted people. It is based on a Medieval garden and includes fragrant herbal plants used in cooking, medicine and dying cloth. It is on the site of a medieval cloister. This Quiet Garden with its historic Abbey and Refectory are the venue for our Annual Gathering 2011.

Creative Thinking

“What is creative and life giving; leading to an increase in faith, hope and love? What energises me and makes me feel most truly myself, making me more sensitive and aware of other peoples needs and more open to respond in concrete compassion? What causes my humanity to flourish in joy, purposefulness, gentleness and truth and justice?”

These words sum up what I would like to achieve through our Quiet Garden here on the Shropshire Staffordshire and Cheshire borders. A friend had suggested keeping a record of some of the creativity which came from the quiet days here and in July she led a day on “Creative thinking”. After a stilling exercise she encouraged us to forget the negative judgemental comments we may have had from our earliest years which led us to think “I can’t draw”, “I can’t paint” or “I can’t write poetry” and first asked us to take an hour walking in the garden, really looking and then selecting an object or thought which seemed to speak to us and to reflect on it. When we gathered back together she asked us to consider some questions like why we had felt attracted to the thought or object and what our feelings were about it. For some this led to unexpected feelings. In the afternoon we were encouraged to use freely a wide variety of paints and other materials to express those feelings in colour and texture without trying to paint a picture for the judgement of others.

I enjoy watercolour painting but perhaps for the first time I tried not to paint a picture but to express my thoughts of the day in colour and shapes. It was liberating and fun!

One of us wrote a poem (she says she only ever writes poems in our garden) and someone used paints for the first time in 50 years. Someone else sketched the silver birch by the pond (though he said he couldn’t draw) to represent his thoughts of the Holy Spirit moving like a wind through the garden. Someone else’s torn paper collage represented the lichen growing like new life on a dead twig and someone else was drawn to reflect on part of Eliot’s poem “Little Gidding”. We finished the day with a reflection on sharing and being held in stillness.

I think we all found the day stimulating and a helpful way to develop our thoughts and more fully appreciate our surroundings. I hope we have another like it soon but in any case I shall try to do as my daughter suggests and spend a few minutes every day doing something “creative and life giving”.

Wendy Davies



Pebble mosaic at Lea Cottage Quiet Garden, Westbury

Creativity

“The heavens declare the glory of God and the earth shows forth His handiwork”

“All the good things we experience in this life are but a shadow of the reality to come... They are the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we haven’t heard, news from a country we’ve never visited.”
The Weight of Glory - C S Lewis

When we open our hearts to engage with all the creative energy around us and allow space to see and express that beauty in paint, in words, in music, or maybe even in fresh ways of seeing the world, we walk with God as surely as Adam did in the very first garden.

During retreats we offer times of stillness to one another as a gift. This provides opportunity to observe beautiful objects, maybe a fir cone, a shell, an icon or a painting. Others wander round the garden, touch the rough texture of bark or examine closely a fragile leaf or flower. The wonder is that God speaks in a personal way to all those with a heart to listen.

Then we forget ourselves and our inhibitions in the joyous freedom of expressing our longing for God in a tangible way. As we participate with God in the creative process with paint or words we see glimpses of wholeness and discover new truths about ourselves. For many this brings a surprising revelation of self worth and the inner journey of healing commences.

No one aims to produce a masterpiece for there is no right or wrong way to express what is hidden within. The leader may suggest something as a source of inspiration but it is never intended as a blueprint, just a starting point on a voyage of discovery and the results are often awe inspiring.

From a Quiet Gardener

Earth Abbey

Earth Abbey is a movement of people helping one another to live more in tune with the earth, drawing inspiration from Jesus. Founded in 2008 and based in Bristol, UK, it pursues a life-affirming, creative spirituality. Earth Abbey promotes a rich relational life between human beings, a compassion toward the earth and its creatures, a sense of interconnectedness of all life, wisdom and justice in relationships, the nurture of the inner life, a way of living that leaves the earth better than we found it

Practical expressions of this are found at the Walled Garden in Bristol and the encouragement of local food growing initiatives through GrowZones. A virtual community is also being established through the website www.earthabbey.com where resources can be shared to encourage sustainable living which is infused with Christian spirituality.

The founder of Earth Abbey, Chris Sunderland, will speak at our Annual Gathering in the UK on 4 June 2011

Rest and Refreshment



The Quiet Garden at Le Moulin Fargan in South West France provides rest for the weary and comfort for those who are struggling. We receive visitors from all walks of life and many European countries (eg Belgium, Germany, Holland, England) as well as France; and even as far away as New Zealand. Our visitors often come initially for a one night to stay en route to somewhere else! They have no idea what we are like and don't know anything about the place they have come to. The watermill is on an island in the river. Some arrive at night so don't see where they are until morning. Others come down the drive, get out of their cars and say "Wow, this is paradise" or "the Garden of Eden". The presence of the place sometimes touches people as they come down the lane. The young, and those from cities, are amazed to find livestock tucked away in different places and enjoy watching and stroking them.

Our weary travellers find rest here and say that they sleep better than they have ever slept. Some who are troubled find comfort and rest. Refreshed, they resume their journeys and the feeling of the presence of God goes with them from this place. Some find they just cannot let go of it and return! To me, it is the love of God they have found and peace in His place.

Fionna Bardwell

Leave a gift in your will

Any legacy to the Quiet Garden Trust would be much appreciated.

For more information please contact the Quiet Garden Trust office - address below

Be Quiet, Be Garden, Be Prayer The Healing of Being

The capacity to be is God's gift and a key part of the journey into wholeness. But do we savour the gift sufficiently? As a budding contemplative-in-action, yet recovering hyperactivist, I find this immensely challenging! As one of the most significant encouragers to me on my spiritual journey said to me some years ago "Be your metaphor ...be the quiet garden".

When, in the early seventies, I spent a year in a Russian Orthodox hermitage in Wales, I was introduced to the perceptive writings of a number of Orthodox sages from the contemporary era. One of them was Paul Evdokimov who wrote a passage that has recently hit me between the eyes, as it were. He writes: "It is not enough to say prayers, one must become, *be* Prayer, prayer incarnate. It is not enough to have moments of praise. All of life, each act, each gesture, even the smile of the human face, must become an offering, a prayer. One should offer what one is."

The invitation not only to offer prayer but also to be prayer is alluring to all of us drawn by the call of discipleship. Perhaps this is in part what Peter was pointing to in his second letter when he affirmed Christ's followers are: "partakers of the divine nature"

(II Peter 1,4)

As another seminal Orthodox theologian writes in a reflection on the first verse of Psalm 130: 'Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord': "True prayer is not only of the mouth, it is of the heart, that is, of the whole being. It is a cry *de profundis*, out of the deep. It is a correspondence between the depths of the heart and the heights of heaven."¹

Our perception is then cleansed so that the tiny things of the everyday become revealed in their true glory and present the focus for our wonder and our creativity: "Miraculously...it was as if I was seeing the forest for the first time. A fir tree was not only a fir but also something much greater. The dew on the grass was not just dew in general. Each drop existed on its own. I could have given a name to every puddle on the road."²

Every local Quiet Garden, be it in a home, church, retreat centre, prison, school or hospital is offering the passer by, the visitor, the day retreatant, a sanctuary space of simple beauty and welcome. May each of us be given the grace to respond ever more deeply to the invitation: "Be quiet, be garden, be prayer."

*Philip Roderick
Founder Director*

¹ *Oliver Clement, The Roots of Christian Mysticism p 182*

² *Vladimir Maximov in The Seven Days of Creation*