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Newsletter # 4
Monday 27th April 2009

Praying the Jesus Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Have you ever tried using the Jesus Prayer? Ridley students had a visit last term from Bishop Simon Barrington-Ward, retired Anglican Bishop of Coventry, who gave a spirituality lecture on the Jesus Prayer.

Bishop Simon first learned about the prayer at an Orthodox monastery in Essex many years ago, as he was looking for a way of praying that was both contemplation and intercession. The prayer begins with the name of Jesus, 'a name with a precious power', he said. 'As we repeat the prayer over and over we become like a bird catching a thermal,' leaving us free to contemplate the name of Jesus, his relation to the Father as Son, God's mercy to us, as well as our own need for mercy.

The prayer can also be a means of intercession. 'Saying "have mercy on me" or "have mercy on us" should always include a sense of the whole wounded creation,' said Bishop Simon. In place of 'me', a person can also substitute the name of a person for whom they wish to pray.

If you have never used the Jesus Prayer, give it a try. Repeat it a few times aloud or in your mind. Some people use prayer ropes, beads, or even their fingers to help them along, but there are countless ways to use the prayer. Perhaps you can think of a new one.

Katy Wehr, Simeon Centre intern

If you would like to know more, Bishop Simon has written a book about it with Brother Ramon SSF, entitled

Praying the Jesus Prayer Together, available at Amazon (remember to logon through the Ridley website) or Wesley Owen.

Report on 'A Day of Preparation for the Great Journey of Lent'

The Simeon Centre was delighted to host a Lent preparation day on 21 February. There were 53 people there, a few more than expected, and the day included inputs, times alone and breakout sessions.

The primary focus was of Lent as a *Journey*, reinforced by the worship and inputs included sessions on creating a life map (drawing out areas of consolation and desolation in our lives) and being conscious of the resources we need for our journey (ways we can orient ourselves, create space, find companions, be fed and open our eyes).

The breakout sessions included confession, guided meditation, prayer beads, visual prayer, making a Lenten calendar and resting prayer. It was difficult to make choices!

The whole day was filled with a sense of rest and joy, aided by the fine weather, allowing people to wander and enjoy the crocuses and snowdrops blooming around Ridley. It was particularly good to see many new faces and the Simeon Centre hopes to host more such days in the future to both equip and refresh.

Farewells and Welcomes

Katy Wehr, who wrote the piece on the Jesus Prayer on the front of this newsletter, left the Simeon Centre, and the UK, in late March, after two terms as our first intern.

Katy found the Simeon Centre, and our internship programme, on the Ridley Hall website, while praying about what God might 'want her to do next.' The short story is that she found herself flying from her home near Minneapolis into Heathrow in mid-September last year. She didn't know what she was letting herself in for, and neither did we!

Suffice it to say that the whole community fell in love with her very quickly, and it took her little time to make her gracious presence felt in the Hall, and the Simeon Centre, as well as in the wider Cambridge Theological Federation.

Most importantly in these early days, she helped us to discover what the Simeon Centre is becoming, under God. What an amazing gift she has been to us, for which we are deeply grateful to God, and to Katy for allowing herself to be our first ambassador.

She has blessed us with her musical gifts, her vision for a proper Christian understanding of chastity, her profound love of 'all the churches' from a convinced Anglican standpoint, her humour, prayerfulness and friendship. Katy, we shall miss you, and we hope that you will soon be back.

Jon Kara Shields – whom we'll call Kara – is a Tripos student at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and has joined us as an intern for the Easter term this year, as well as coming back early from the USA for the Restoring Prayer Conference at the beginning of September.

She introduces herself like this:

Jon Kara Shields comes from Southwestern Virginia and has mountains in her bones. She grew up receiving and giving love in the Christian ministry of the Rescue Mission, a homeless shelter and substance abuse recovery program in Roanoke.

As a student Kara found a love for artistic worship through painting, poetry, dance, and song. In 2008, Kara earned a BA in Liberal Arts from St.

John's College in Maryland, where she found a lifelong learning and loving partner in Andrew Shields.

Kara came to Cambridge in the hopes of gaining a richer understanding of her own faith and the faiths of others. She seeks to practice theology as doxology and is very glad of the opportunity to join with the Simeon Centre in their on-going engagement with spirituality and prayer practice.

The Simeon Community

The Simeon Community continues to grow and seek ways of becoming a dispersed family of prayer. Here's Christine Woods' story about how she came to join, and what it means for her:

In May last year, I was coming to the end of a Spiritual Direction course, when Adrian was invited to speak to us. During the talk he mentioned the Simeon Centre. I had not heard of the Centre prior to this and I decided to look for the web site. The more I read about the Centre I knew, deep down in my being, I was being called to be a part of this work.

A few weeks ago those of us who belong to the community met together. It was a very special time when people shared how they had felt called to the community. On my way home I suddenly realised that, although I had not actually been conscious of it, the Simeon Centre was something for which I had been waiting for a very long time. Many years ago I read a book 'The Path of Prayer' by Samuel Chadwick, there is a sentence in this book which leapt out at me and has always stayed with me, it reads - "It would seem as if the biggest thing in God's universe is a man who prays. There is only one thing more amazing, and that is – that man, knowing this, should not pray."

I believe the Simeon Centre will indeed help and encourage people in their prayer life and I feel very privileged to be part of it. I believe it will be a blessing to many, who in turn, will bless others.

Restoring Prayer: An Update

As we move into the final months of preparation for the conference (3rd – 6th September), we are both overwhelmed by the level of interest, and

daunted by the seemingly endless list of things to do before it takes place.

At the time of writing, 178 people have already booked, with 4 months still to go, so it is going to be an extraordinary meeting of people from around the country, and as far afield as Hong Kong and Australia.

Please don't feel that because of these numbers, it is no longer necessary to promote the conference, however. One of the really important outcomes is that we should become better and more widely known. Continue to invite your friends!

The workshop programme is now well in place, with 12 *Pathways in Prayer* available for people to choose from. They are not really workshops at all; they would be 'prayer-shops' if the word existed. They are about praying, not just talking about prayer.

We'd also really appreciate prayer, and here are a few pointers (which some of you will receive through two avenues!)

- for Eugene Peterson as he prepares, and as he carries the weight of expectation for the Conference;
- discernment for all the speakers in their time of preparation, and for their safety and health;
- wisdom for practical arrangements;
- that we forget nothing essential;
- efficient use of the physical space & a sense of God's presence in our midst.

Adrian Chatfield

Other plans

Though, inevitably, the conference is occupying nearly all our attention at the moment, we are looking beyond it as well, and the list below is included as an encouragement to 'watch this space' and also to pray for the Centre to remain faithful to its original vision, and to the will of God.

- we propose to continue a pattern of termly 'Simeon Days'. In the Michaelmas term, around the beginning of Advent, there will be a Day of Prepar-

ation for that season, similar to the Lenten one but reflecting the spiritual emphases of the period. Similarly, we propose to repeat the Lenten Day next year.

- In the Easter term, we envisage a slightly different day, which may have more of a workshop feel to it, around a theme. Sometimes this may involve invitations to people across a range of disciplines; at other times it may simply be a 'school of prayer.'
- Having had a very successful gathering of the Simeon Community for Katy's confirmation, we will certainly invite those of the community who can come to a community event in the course of the year.
- Jane and Adrian continue to speak at a range of church gatherings, from retreats to training events. We are also receiving requests to help resource churches and groups as 'consultants'. We do need wisdom about how much we take on!
- For several years, Ridley Hall has been producing a Lent book. The current one, *Cast of the Kingdom*, has been selling like hot cakes.

For 2010 (available late 2009), the Simeon Centre has taken on the task of editing this book. Its theme will be 'Encounters in the Scriptures' and its title: *On the Road*.

<p>Don't forget that if you ever have specific requests for prayer, you need only send them to us, and we will disseminate them, or keep them private as you prefer.</p>
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