

## Jesus and the Trefoil

This exercise was prepared for the Contemplative Fire Community Weekend in September 2012. The theme of the weekend was 'Together in the Rhythm of Christ'. What follows is a way of exploring the trefoil shape of our Community Rhythm of Life, expressed as 'Being', 'Knowing' and 'Doing'. This reflection was designed as a way of exploring Jesus' own pattern, or rhythm, of living in these three areas and to enable us to reflect on how that might shape our own.

This exercise can be done as an individual reflection or as a group. The first stage is to mark a trefoil space on the ground. The simplest way to do this is by using 3 objects (such as 3 pebbles) arranged in a triangular shape, around which the outline of a trefoil can be visualised. If working in a group, each person would create their own trefoil. The shape needs to be large enough to stand, or sit, in each of the 3 areas and in the space created at the centre.

In the context of the Community Weekend we spent around 7 minutes in each of the areas set out below. People began by deciding which pebble (or other object) would represent which specific area of the trefoil. For each reflection, move to stand (or sit) by that pebble, or for 'unknowing' move to the space in the centre. In each area there are some readings and a short reflection, after which the remaining time is spent in quiet.

- 'Being' with Jesus (7 mins)
- 'Knowing' with Jesus (7 mins)
- 'Doing' with Jesus (7 mins)
- 'Unknowing' with Jesus (7 mins)

After the 4 guided reflections, we spent a further 7 minutes considering the whole and then a final 7 minutes sharing our response in pairs:

- Individual response to the whole (7 mins)
- Shared response in pairs (7 mins)

In these final 2 sections people were invited to consider two questions:

- What might it mean for my own rhythm to be one with the rhythm of Christ?
- What might it mean to be together in the rhythm of Christ?

The exercise was concluded with a short time of shared silence.

Jo Howard, September 2012

## 1. 'Being' with Jesus

### *Rhythm of Life: Being / Still Waters / Prayer*

Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God.

Luke 6: 12

'But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret.'

Matt 6: 6

'And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came he was there alone ...'

Matt 14: 23

Jesus whole life - his words, and his actions, flow out of a deep sense of connectedness to the one he calls 'Father'. Jesus' wisdom and compassion are nurtured by a deep abiding in God as the source from which abundant life flows.

Jesus modelled many different ways of praying but, time after time, we see a pattern of alternating contemplation and action. Jesus withdraws to a place where he can be alone with God. From this place of resourcing he emerges to act. He then returns to the same place of prayer and quiet.

And what Jesus learned in that place of stillness he passes on to us 'Abide in me as I abide in you'.

Take some time to reflect on Jesus' pattern of 'Being'.

Perhaps, in your imagination, you might want to take a walk up a mountain with Jesus and sit with him in the stillness.

How might what you learn there impact on your own practice of prayer?

## 2. 'Knowing' with Jesus

### *Rhythm of Life: Knowing / A Learning Journey / Study*

'After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.'

Luke 3: 46

'Look at the birds of the air ... Consider the lilies of the field ...'

Matt 6

A Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.' But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' He answered, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.'

Matt 15: 22-28

Jesus, in his full humanity, had to learn all that he knew in the same way that we learn. He didn't arrive on the earth fully formed, with infinite wisdom and a secret knowledge of particle physics that he simply chose not to mention!

Jesus learned in his context and in his time. He had a fine intellect which he fed and honed.

I suspect that when he was little, Jesus was one of those children who was always asking, 'Why?'

Generally human beings learn by making mistakes ... perhaps Jesus learned humility in his playground in Nazareth; when he was too quick with a clever answer and was on the receiving end of a well aimed punch?

Jesus learned by reading – we know that he read from the Scriptures, at least.

Jesus learned by listening – to his parents and teachers, and to those whose voice usually went unheard.

Jesus learned by asking questions – and perhaps by 'minding the gap' between the answers given and the reality he observed.

Jesus learned by watching – the natural world and the behaviour of those he encountered.

Jesus learned because he was willing to be challenged and changed by those whose experience of life differed from his own.

Jesus learned by reflecting and by 'wondering' and by distilling all that learned knowledge into wisdom.

Take a few minutes to reflect on Jesus' pattern of knowing and learning.  
How might that inform your own learning journey?

### 3. 'Doing' with Jesus

#### *Rhythm of Life: Doing / Across the Threshold / Action*

'Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them.

Matt 4: 23 – 24

'The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

Mark 6: 30-31

As we've already noted, Jesus actions flowed from his abiding in the heart of God ... from the love and compassion at the core of his being. This is Jesus 'on fire' with love ... for the hurting and the marginalised, and for those who had lost their way.

Jesus was willing to be questioned, and challenged, and changed; but I don't ever see him acting out of guilt, or ego, or fear, or resentment, or deference to power.

Jesus was motivated by love alone, and his keen sensitivity to those in need. But he also knew when he was tired and needed to rest. He noticed when those who worked with him needed some time out. He knew the value of friendship, and of sharing a meal and a joke and a glass of wine.

Take time, again, to reflect on how Jesus 'crossed the threshold' into compassionate activity.

How might this inform your own actions?

Do you sense any kind of invitation?

## 4. 'Unknowing' with Jesus

### *At the centre of the Trefoil*

The centre of the trefoil is a mysterious place, which means different things to different people. One way of approaching it is as a place of letting go into the unknown ... a place of 'unknowing'.

'From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

Matthew 27: 45-46

Jesus had to walk his own path of unknowing.

During 40 days of fasting in the desert Jesus learned to let go of the conventional ways of drawing attention – the ways of ego, of materialism, of misuse of power.

Jesus stepped into the unknown every time he chose not to conform to the religious patterns that he had grown up with: every time he touched a leper, or ate with an outcast, or treated a woman on an equal footing with a man.

In the garden of Gethsemane, he chose to let go of his life for the sake of his God.

And on the cross, he trusted himself to unknowing for the sake of love, even in the face of the loss of that same God for which he was dying.

So the place of unknowing can be very hard and very real - the 'dark night of the soul' is easier to talk about than to experience. Yet it is also the doorway to revelation, to resurrection, and to abundant life in what Jesus called 'the Kingdom of God'.

So wait for a few minutes in this place of unknowing.

You might want to consider what it means for Jesus to enter into this space and what it might mean for you to do the same.