

## Seeing Jesus Again with New Eyes

### **For the Ritual**

*Blessing of 4 directions*

*Looking to each direction:*

May there be Peace in the North!

May there be Peace in the South!

May there be Peace in the East!

May there be Peace in the West!

May there be Peace from Above Us!

May there be Peace from Beneath Us!

All together: **May there be Peace throughout the whole world.**

*And the Druid prayer (adapted):*

Grant, O Holy One, your Protection;

And in protection, strength;

And in strength, understanding;

And in understanding, knowledge;

And in knowledge, the knowledge of justice;

And in the knowledge of justice, the love of it;

And in that love, the love of all existences;

And in the love of all existences the love of the Earth our mother and all goodness.

**Amen.**

**Continues overleaf**

## For the Sharing Sessions

### **Five Buzz groups' themes:**

- 1 - The cost of authenticity - integrity and consistency
- 2 - Finding Magic in the *mess*
- 3 - Uncovering the hidden treasure
- 4 - Religion at the (h)edge
- 5 - Learning from the Jesus of the 'non-church-world'

### **Five symbols:**

- 1 - A Cross
- 2 - A broken pot / and inner light
- 3 - Diamond and black bag
- 4 - My interfaith stole
- 5 - Jesus / Christian Tarot card images

### **Five Stories:**

#### 1 - Is That So?

There was a zen master who enjoyed a good reputation in his community. One day the neighbours came to his door enraged and furious, accusing him of having fathered the child that their teenager was about to bear.

The zen master said: "Is That So"? The rumours ran wild and the master lost his reputation. A few months later the child was born and the baby was brought to the zen master, who accepted and cared for him or her.

A year later the daughter of the neighbours admitted that the father was actually the butcher of the town. The parents, mortified, went back to the Zen master's house and confessed, apologized and asked for the child back. The zen master said: Is that so? – then returned the baby.

## 2 - The Cracked Pot

*A water bearer in China had two large pots. Each hung on the ends of a pole, which he carried across his neck. One pot had a crack in it, while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water. At the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full.*

*For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to his house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.*

*After two years of what it perceived to be bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream... "I am ashamed of myself, because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house."*

*The bearer said to the pot, "Have you not noticed that there are flowers only on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side?" That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I planted flower seeds on your side of the path. Every day while we walk back, you water them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. "Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the house."*

## 3 - The Egg of Gold

*They were an ordinary family, living ordinary lives, in an ordinary Russian village. Ordinary that is... until devastating famine struck! The suffering was vast, and no one tasted the bitterness more than Nicholas' household. Their only saving grace was their hen whose daily egg they relied upon... But she eventually died.*

*They were forced to sell everything – even Natasha's most treasured possession... a tiny painted wooden egg given to her by her grandma. Their stomachs grew empty. Their world had been turned upside down, and inside out.*

*Nicholas heard a rumour of salvation – another hen – that laid golden eggs. He took a chance and sought to find her. He tried hard but was too late. She lay lifeless, surrounded by the bodies of the desperate men who had fought over her.*

*Nicholas returned home in despair. His family were near death, their lives now cast into utter darkness. There was nothing left to sell. Nicholas glanced around his bare home, his eyes drifting from one place to another. Then he noticed the little bag that had once been used to store eggs. ‘Oh how I wish you would provide us with one more’, he sighed, but they all knew it was empty.*

*Yet an unexpected intuition came to the Russian peasant. He cautiously placed his trembling hand into the dark interior of the bag and pulled out what his logical mind knew could not be there, yet what his heart knew would be there – a solid golden egg.*

#### 4 - Where now?

I don't think I'll ever feel truly settled, spiritually speaking. It seems that my own questioning and somewhat iconoclastic nature will always demand that I stay on the journey towards truth, rather than ever thinking I've arrived, though I must say that my years of struggle have given me much more of an insight into what various teachers call "living in the present."

At the moment I am more than content to remain an Independent Priest within as well as a member of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids. I call this combination living on the Hedge. My local druid group call me a Hedge-Priest and I've recently started a Hedge-Church in my local town, a monthly service that draws together both Christian and Pagan traditions.

I also have a future dream. My deep goal and passion is to (someday) be able to create a genuinely open and inclusive church *with its own building*, where people who've been squeezed out of the mainstream can come for unique and eclectic services and rituals. This church would also offer ceremonies for all those who cannot use a regular church for such events: gay weddings, inter-faith baby naming ceremonies, spiritual but not religious funerals and so on. I'm a quarter of the way there with the Hedge-Church that now meets monthly. The rest will come someday.

## 5 - Pagans on Jesus (from Interviews for the book 'Jesus Through Pagan Eyes')

*Selena Fox, Caitlín Matthews & Janet Farrar*

MT: Whether or not he was in the past is Jesus important to you at all now?

SF: Yes, Jesus, along with his embodiment and teachings of Divine Love, continues to be important to me. He is important because of His loving essence and His wise teachings. He also is important to me as well as to many others because His spirit, lore, and symbology have been a way to perpetuate and transmit sacred knowledge and wisdom from a variety of ancient cultures and religions. In addition, He is important because of the impact, positive and negative, of those who call themselves Christian have had and continue to have on the world.

CM: So much of our ancestral traditions, culture and civilization are shaped by Christianity, it has been essential for me to understand Jesus' teachings intelligently from both within and outside of the context of the church that formed around him. Every spirituality has at its heart a figure in whom Love is manifest. If we walk through the world with this knowledge in our souls, then we can be welcome everywhere we go. The priests, priestesses and congregants of any spirituality are, to my mind, most faithful to the Beloved (whoever he, she or it may be for them) when they give the Beloved's unconditional welcome to visitors.

JF: I prefer to use the name 'Christ' rather than 'Jesus'. I see two aspects: The historical figure of Jesus, and what some refer to as the 'Cosmic Christ'. The Cosmic Christ I believe to be the true concept behind Christianity; an all-embracing Christian figure who is a divinity in its own right. Yes, that part of it is important to me, but not so much the historical figure of Jesus. I view him purely as a figure of academic interest.

MT: Do you think of Jesus as a historical person?

SF: Yes, I think that Jesus was a historical person. And, as Jesus Christ, He was and is a sacred iconic figure with mythic and mystical dimensions. I also make a distinction between Jesus and Christ. Jesus is the name of the incarnated human being. Christ is the name of the Divine love and wisdom that manifested and expressed itself through Jesus during His birth, life, death, resurrection, and eternal presence.

CM: Jesus lives in time as well as eternity, being, as I understand it, an embodiment of divine wisdom. Since the church is supposed to be the body of Christ, his followers are (or should be) his mediators, because that was the spirit in which he taught. It's a lovely, ancestral-style kinship, but, like many families, it has its own hidden loyalties and exclusions. I've found Jesus' same wisdom and respect for others in animist and ancestral traditions, but then I would respond to it wherever it showed itself, in whatever place, having long been accused of 'spiritual promiscuity.'

JF: Well yes, but I don't really see his historical character or spirit reflected in the modern day church. What has happened over the generations is the Jesus I knew as a child, and the Jesus that people talk about in the Church today are two very different characters. I do not see the spirit of the human Jesus reflected very much in a lot of Christianity, with certain exceptions, one of these being the Quakers. With the Quaker families I have known personally, I have found them to be very sincere Christians.

MT: What lesson do you feel the modern day Church needs to hear from the person of Jesus?

SF: Focus on resonating with and expressing the loving consciousness that was and is the spirit of Jesus. Release from the distorting and counterproductive confines of dogma. Come to understand that when Jesus said that he was the way, the truth, and the light, that this was referring to Love, not some imperialistic edit to proclaim and enforce "Christianity" as the only religiously, morally, and politically correct way to be.

CM: Jesus welcomed everyone, unconditionally. He also spoke clearly about what his disciples were to do if they themselves were not welcomed when they went through the villages healing: 'shake the dust from the soles of your feet.' Tribal-style Christianity often wishes to inflict itself on the world whether we want it or not. Proselytizing evangelism is, for me, on the level of an advert that demands that we eat a product whether we have a taste for it or not. Jesus's remarks on salt come to mind: "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men." (Matthew 5:13 English Revised Version). If the message doesn't have any savour, then we can't hear it!

JF: I think the first thing they need to learn is a little more humility, and that the hoarding of worldly possessions is not the important thing. Throw away your gold; open up the windows of your churches and temples and feed the world! Open up your arms and realize that every man, woman and child living on this world is divine, and when they are starving, when they are war torn and when young boys and girls are forced to hold guns and kill, going out and converting them is not what the world needs! At these times the Church needs to feed them, educate them, turn this world into a better place. I think is what Jesus was trying to say. Sadly the church has lost it's understanding of this.

### **Five questions:**

1 – In Act 1 Scene 3 of Hamlet, Shakespeare has Polonius say, *“This above all- to thine own self be true...”*

This reminds me of a time at theological college when I got in trouble with the Principal. I said in a session that the most important thing for a Christian is to be true to Self. He reacted abruptly and shouted out ‘No, no Mark, to be true to Christ and Christ crucified. That’s the most important thing.’

Is there are way of being both true to Self and true to ‘God’ – indeed are they sometimes the same? And, if so, is being true to self/God impossible 100% when the Church also demands obedience.

2 – What mess, muddle, brokenness can you now – looking back – detect glimpses of grace, glimmers of gold within?

3 – Where is your treasure? List some ‘treasures’ you already have (but not ‘possessions’)

4 – Prolific spiritual author and Shamanic practitioner Caitlin Matthews talks of the lovely untranslatable Russian word, *dvoverie* or 'double-belonging,' for people who follow two paths. Is this really possible? Can one be, for example, both a Christian and a Pagan?

5 – What does Jesus really mean for Progressive Christians, and can other insights from outside the church help in creating a truly Progressive Christology.