

THE POET LEADER

Andrew Norton

Study leave 2013



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READING61

“COMFORT IN CHAOS”

Response and Introduction to ‘The Poet Leader’,
Andrew Norton’s Study Leave Report 2013
Carolyn Kelly

The ‘Poet Leader’ is an interesting title, and this is an interesting report. However, to call it a ‘report’ hardly does it justice, for two reasons. Firstly, Andrew Norton imaginatively combines two spheres of activity we are more accustomed to regarding as distinct, perhaps even unrelated. This may be especially so in relation to church ministry, yet within the PCANZ, indeed throughout Scripture and the tradition, there have always been poet-leaders. This interpenetration of roles or personae is helpfully introduced early in the piece:

The Poet’s task is to invite people into conversation about their experiences of life, ask the questions that no one else is asking and to create a sacred silence that speaks of identity and meaning. This is the task of a leader.

What follows explores this dynamic relation, but in a decidedly personal way that is somewhat disarming. Thus secondly, ‘The Poet Leader’ is not merely a report because the poems, photographs, prose sections and questions all combine to engage and draw you in, inviting much more than a casual or detached reading. Thus, some of the ‘issues’ in leadership are moved to the other side of the brain, as it were, taken to those parts of the psyche not often

explored or acknowledged in such matters but familiar terrain to the poets, contemplatives and lovers of land. The importance, and neglect, of such imaginative engagement for human productivity in general and the creative capacities of leaders in particular, is increasingly acknowledged (as any devotee of TED talks will testify). We will return to this subsequently.

By exploring leadership through poetry, photos and ‘beautiful questions’, Andrew unsettles and probes some of the tricky issues around leadership and identity; the work destabilises. At the same time, he recalls the comfort of God and evokes quite lovely images of peaceful stability, of what it means to be known and loved in the depths of one’s being. Both movements, the destabilising or disorienting, and the settling and reorienting, are integral to pilgrimage. In *The Return* (page 9), Andrew invites us on a pilgrimage home to ‘retrace’ our steps and ‘discover where we have come from’:

Bruised from the fall,
wearied of soul,
and a hunger heart.

These are good words for the church leader bruised and wearied by the demands of ministry in confusing times; such beckoning ‘home’, to be pilgrims *that way*, is timely for leaders in the PCANZ.

Many in the church find themselves lost, experiencing the 'disorientation' Brueggemann helpfully identified in the poets of the psalms and declared by the prophets. In such a time as this, poetry might save us. At the very least it offers a language for our lived chaos and a posture in which, as contemporary leaders, we might awaken to new possibilities of order, or comfort:

"A poem extends its readers, requiring of them patience, persistence, flexibility, adaptability, humility, a taste for paradox, a thirst for precision, and comfort in chaos."
(Morgan 2010: 123, cited p33)

Especially now, some of the postures and ways of articulating 'leadership' we have been accustomed to, are not serving us well. Andrew suggests:

To do this will require stepping into a new space and learning a new language. This is a space you enter into without preformed and formulaic answers; it is a disruptive and disturbing conversation that requires courage...

The voice of the Poet is one way you can begin to venture into this territory.

So the Poet-Leader, an accompaniment into uncertainty and discomfort, is a welcome soul-friend. In *The Work of Wilderness*:

It starts with eyes acquainted with grief
and hands wearied from fences you've drawn from the deep.

A barren unfamiliar land, where only shadows grow;
an exile to your heart's home.

These words and pictures gave me a welcome respite from my default modes - busy activity and thinking - in ministry formation; they were rewarding and pleasurable; they were *comforting*. They reminded me of God's kindness and others' thoughtfulness; of the surprising yet commonplace means of grace all around, the beauty of the familiar, well-worn paths. The work of the poet does not only *re-mind* us to cognitively identify 'truths'; it invites us *re-member*: literally to re-gather our disparate selves and to be reacquainted with God. In *Go Gently*:

Go gently as you climb Máméan of Connamora.
Walk in a manner appropriate for the mountain
and for the greater good.
Take two hands,
one for the mountain and one for yourself.
Tread softly upon the ground.
With each step your foot will be received by creation's
waiting.
This ground will love you and wound you deeply.
There is no safe pass on this pilgrimage
but,
do not be afraid
"I am" is with you.

There are several themes particularly worth noting in 'The Poet Leader' (although many others invite reflecting on at leisure).

Firstly, Andrew invites us to reconsider *work*, especially the idea of work as 'creating'. Many feel burdened by work, not least ministers:

When work overwhelms, they describe it as "soul destroying". No matter how you define the soul, the leader's task is the care of "souls".

The work of the poet, he suggests, reminds us that work is essentially 'creative', and this touches on current interest in neuroscience on the brain and creativity. This emphasis is apparent not only in the arts, but also in education, health, business, science and mathematics, and perhaps even the church is catching on. We who believe in God as Creator have ample reason to reflect on how our work – our loving, thinking, acting into what we know and hope, is a participation in God's ongoing creation and the Spirit's activity in the world. In this work, Andrew happily remembers what God has joined, reminding us that 'leadership' is not only the servant of pragmatism or rationalism.

Reading poetry encourages a fresh focus on these emotional, contextual, and cultural issues. It also requires that one enjoy the experience of poetry and to become an astute reader. The skill can be learned, and once acquired, should be transferable, for example, to responding to complex, strategic situations.

Reading poetry encourages a fresh focus on these emotional, contextual, and cultural issues.

Secondly, this piece reminded me of God's call to *play*. Again, this is not the default position of the preoccupied leader, but we are invited to regard our time; to 'number our days' and 'consider the lilies' (or: 'look at the wildflowers'). Andrew travelled overseas to find that rest, but here, even at my desk, his poetry made me *listen*; his photos reminded me to *see*. We can choose to focus on heaven in the wildflower; we may see eternity in a grain of sand and inhabit a Sabbath-punctuated existence with no agenda or required outcomes.

Thirdly, I was also struck by his invitation to the leader to ask of themselves 'beautiful questions'. This, within the workshop (in the latter part of the report) was especially provocative:

Does your work make you more or less fully alive?

A beautiful question, indeed.

Carolyn Kelly, Lent 2014

REFLECTIONS



Culmstock

Bridge Over Time

I met my great great great grandfather this week. Born 1791 - died 1869. A stone in the ground says this is where he lived and died. His name was John. John was the son of William whose father was also William. John (1791) married Mary Dare (1817) and had a son named John, who had a son named John, who had a son name Charles, my grandfather.



I walked the fields of Culmstock (Devon) separated by time but reunited by the ground.

Hope

I was reading, if you want to see a rainbow you need to be between the sun and the rain, with the sun at your back. Beauty like this needs a storm. The light shines in the darkness. That's what hope is.

Andrew Norton & John Norton



Rainbow over Devon



TIME

I've been thinking a bit about time.

Chronos measures and marks time. The hands of time are never idle.

Kairos is different; it is time within and beyond time, transcended time suspended and eternal. Kairos cannot be measured by shadow, sand or hand, but exists in timelessness.

Another type of time is **Synchronos**. This is the point at which times intersect in a given moment. This time walks through ancient ruins and in a moment you hear the rocks sing the ancient chants. This is the time of destinies meeting; north, south, east and west, a communion of pilgrims on a journey.

The Keepers Of Time

I noticed that most churches have a clock tower. These historic churches have been the guardians of time for hundreds of years. This had a practical function "what time is it?", and a spiritual function "whose time is it?" To live well you need to know the answers to both those questions. If not, you may miss the supper. "*Lord teach us to number our days that we may gain true wisdom of heart*" *Psalm 90:12*. How things have changed! Today, time is measured by money and is sliced very thinly with little regard for wisdom.

(I've just discovered my watch has stopped telling the time!)

Wow

I'm reading Anne Lamott's latest book. It's a book on prayer that is inspirational without leaving me feeling guilty. Anyway, Anne says "Wow" means we are not dulled to wonder. The word "Wow" is thought to have been used first by Thomas Burns in a poem in 1871 "Tam o' Shanter".

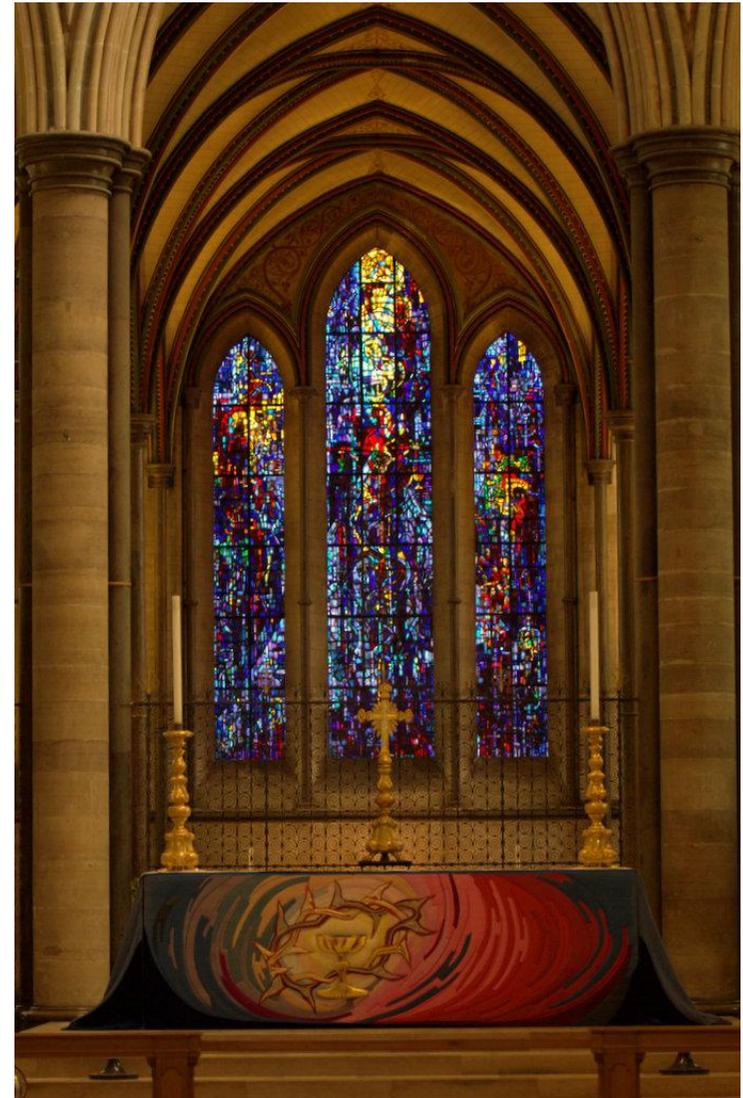
"An', wow! Tam saw an unco sight!"
"Unco" means strange and unfamiliar.
I find myself praying "wow" quite a lot!

Wow is the experience of wonder!
Wonder is being in a presence greater than yourself.



The Mall, London

Salisbury Cathedral



GO GENTLY

Go gently as you climb Máméan of Connamora.
Walk in a manner appropriate for the mountain
and for the greater good.
Take two hands,
one for the mountain and one for yourself.
Tread softly upon the ground.
With each step your foot will be received by creation's waiting.
This ground will love you and wound you deeply.
There is no safe pass on this pilgrimage
but,
do not be afraid
"I am" is with you.
Looking straight into the wind
allow the tears to flow across your face
as you remember
where you have come from
and the people who have gifted you with legacy.
When you stumble at the station of the cross
take the third hand,
the hand of grace
that lifts you back to your feet again.
Take off your shoes and stand still,
this is holy ground
and listening for the still small voice that calls your name
turn sideways into the wind,
surrender,
and as you return to a world in waiting
go gently . . .

Andrew Norton, July 2013

"Tread softly because you tread on my dreams". William Butler Keats



Máméan of Connamora, West Ireland



The Burren

BARDSEY ISLAND

*"Here there are pilgrims born of the waves
with sunset in their eyes." Moses Glyn Jones*

Pilgrim is the name you've been given
as each day you walk the pilgrim way.
Go west to land's end and wait.
Taking the narrow way across to the Isle of Bards,
listen for the echo of saints come to rest.
Watch as the Kestrel learns to fly,
leaving familial nest
to a land unknown to eye
but known of heart.

A "thin space",
no line between heaven and earth.
The cathedral walls of twisted cliff rocks and waves,
rafters of azure sky
and music of Warbler, Chough, and Gull
invite a conversation of soul proportions.
Ynys Enlli!
Isle of currents,
between this and that,
here and there,
comings and goings,
ancient stones and tomorrow's horizon,
until the solitude and sweeping seascape
take hold of you in silence.
This is the prayer of the pilgrim.

Andrew Norton, Llyn Peninsula, Wales—July 2013



Bardsey Island

Bardsey Island, known as the Isle of currents in Welsh (Ynys Enlli) and in English, Isle of Bards (Bardsey), located in the remote north west of Wales. Human history on this island dates back to the Neolithic age. From 429 AD the island became a place of Christian pilgrimage. Contemplation and 'mortification of the flesh' were seen as the ways to achieve a vision of heavenly things. It is believed that the spirits of the dead depart from the west making Bardsey an ideal place for pilgrimage. It is said that 20,000 saints are buried on the island. Three pilgrimages to Bardsey were equal to one to Rome!

If you are looking for shelter from the sun or the wind you won't find any here. There is only one tree on the Island. What you will find however, is an Isle of intrigue, mystery, wildness and natural beauty.

Bardsey Island also holds a fascination with the meeting of the Church of Rome and the local Celtic spirituality. While the Roman Abby is in ruins the Celtic spirit is still present today.

THE RETURN

Walking backwards into the past I stumbled upon standing stones,
guiding me on tomorrow's way.
Not seeing at first.

I retraced my steps to discover where I had come from.
Silent witnesses speaking from ancient pathways,
Rocks holding memory.

Wind breathing,
and tidal cadence in perfect time,
with life's first note.

Bruised from the fall,
weary of soul,
and a hunger heart,

leading me on
a pilgrimage
Home.

Andrew Norton, London, July 2013



Devon country lane

AVAILABLE TO GRACE

When all is said and undone
and your plans are nailed to the wall.
When the well is dug dry with blisters in hand
and life is a liturgy of work without rest.

Are you not worthy to receive without worth?
With white flag raised;
a soul surrendered is available to grace.
Hands visible and invisible guiding the way,
hidden in plain sight through a curtain
drawn back, an invitation to hold.

Speak not to be understood,
beyond all reason,
listen with the eyes of your heart and the laughter of soul.
Now you can see sunrise and set without aid of your hand,
forty shades of green make way for nature's harvest in fields of gold,
lavender reflected in the hue of blue and grey sky.
Hidden in the corner, the artists sign!

Before you
a door of welcome is opened to the stranger in you,
a table prepared for a meal without end,
an empty cup filled again and again
with the very best wine of life,
becoming friends with those who witness your silhouette back lit by the
setting sun.
Available to grace.

Andrew Norton, Provence, France July 2013



Provence

To understand Provence: everything is drawn from the earth.

Saint Paul de Vence

While Sue was shopping in Saint Paul de Vence I sat on the footpath and photographed people's feet as they walked by on the polished paving stones. I wanted to capture the temporal nature of those who hop off the bus in their hundreds (thousands), stay for a couple of hours and then move on. Each day they come and go and each day their feet polish the stones. What do you think of my one legged woman?



Envol, St Paul de Vence, France



LOST AND FOUND

In this body of evidence no stone is left unturned,
searching for clues left behind by
an abandoned past.
Memory is like that,
dusting the corners in search of a word
dislodged by the wind and rain.
In the crowd of strangers
I look for the face of a friend
to find my place.
It is in the unfamiliar that the familial is found.
I had to go far away
to see what was close at hand.
If not found by day,
I listened to the dream in the night,
for only in this body, the soul is found.

Andrew Norton, Provence, July 2013



"My country is in my soul" *Marc Chagall*

"There are no strangers here; only friends you haven't yet met."

William Butler Keats

A NEW DAY

With eyes acquainted with the dark
may the first light of morning awaken within you a beautiful question;
one that unlocks doors
bolted by yesterday's grief
and the harsh and unforgiving words
you have spoken to yourself.

May the sun spill light
into the cracks where the residue of darkness hides
inviting you to walk without fear of what lies within.
On these virgin sands of time coming to you as pure gift,
may you be embraced by a concept of grace
that sets you free to begin again.

Untie the string around your finger
as you remember forgotten dreams,
like a song that has been waiting to be sung,
listen for the long note played by the most gentle touch of the bow.
May it resonate with the one true note within that is you
and dance your dream into this day.

Andrew Norton, Switzerland, July 2013



Israel: It is impossible to walk the land of Israel without getting dusty feet. In the same way it is impossible to hold one corner of the truth and think you know it all.



Jerusalem Temple steps

BLIND SPOTS

God bless my blind spots.
Bless the people whose eyes I cannot see,
give to them surfeit grace
that overlooks the blindness of
my log jammed eyes.
And while you bless them,
may you also bless
the naked image I see in the mirror
as for the very first time,
spotless.

Andrew Norton, September 2013

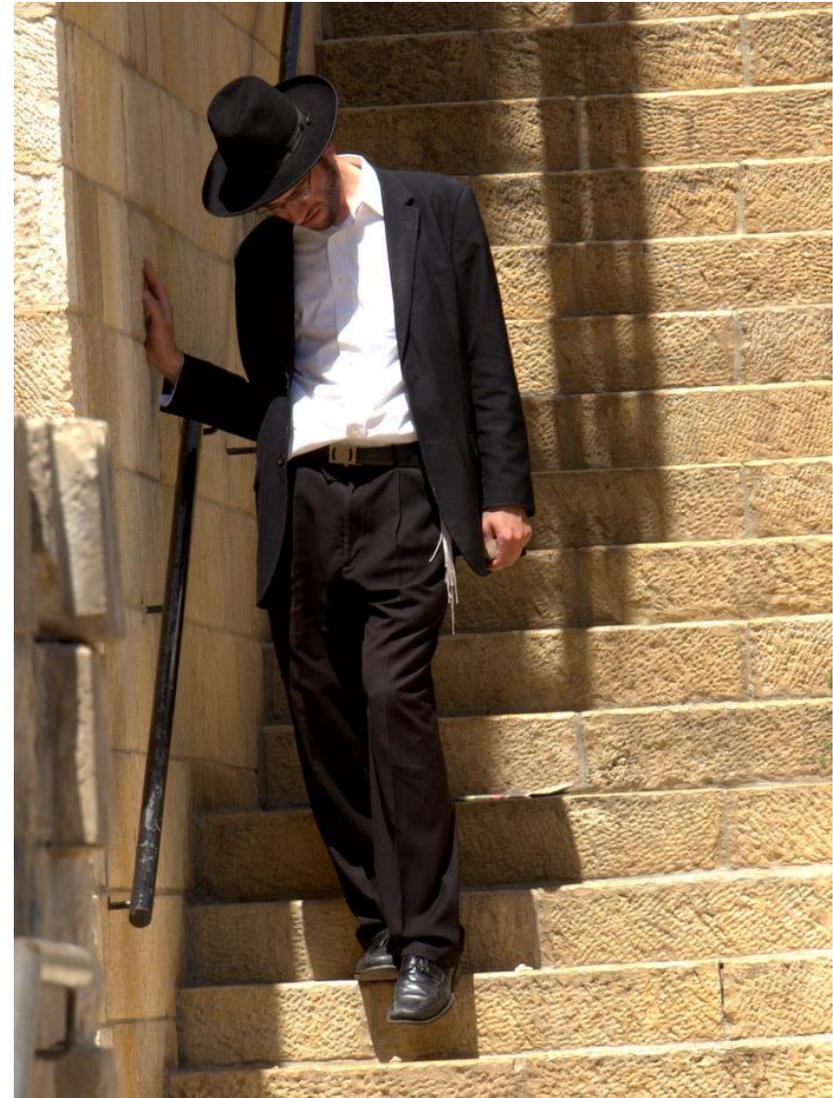


THE PROMISE

There is a promise
that is carried throughout the ages
and journeys the barren beauty of wilderness,
the valleys of grief
and the thresholds of new beginnings.
Jerusalem's pilgrim polished streets;
cream red veined stone
and walls of prayer
have not forgotten
the promise.

It comes to the listening ear
wearied by the sounds of many voices,
now available to the one true voice that calls you by name.
Wrapped in pervading aloneness
a voice of prevenient befriending
whispers sacred words.
You are not alone . . .

Andrew Norton, September 2013



THE WORK OF WILDERNESS

It starts with eyes acquainted with grief
and hands wearied from fences you've drawn from the deep.
A barren unfamiliar land, where only shadows grow;
an exile to your heart's home.

The dreamer in you dies
as the horizon appears far above lines of sight
extending beyond hands reach.
In solitude and silence the soul waits.

Write your name in the dust,
trace every mountain with your finger to the sky,
waiting for the work of wilderness to be done.
Until one day gravity breaks you new upon the rocks.

Darkness will be rewritten in a story made new,
the matutinal dew will wash away all tears
with refreshing springs from valleys
a beautiful way in the wilderness will be your guide.

Andrew Norton, September 2013



Judean Wilderness

BLESSING OF TIME

As the days line up one after another, outside the door of tomorrow
with hours sorted and stacked in piles of do's.
May you know how to count the preciousness of each moment and not
live the next before all of life is extracted from the present.

As interruptions come in every shape of the clouds calling for attention,
may you have the eyes to recognise the angels in disguise,
stop what you are doing and go out for coffee.
This may be your real work for the day!

As you become buried in your own sense of self importance
May you speak words of praise to those who make you look so good and
words of encouragement to the wearied of hand and heart.
This will save you.

In the mundane minutes filled by the particulars of nothing
May the child within you not forget how to play.
May your eyes sparkle with curiosity
and your heart be always open to wonder and surprise.

At day's end when you're spent of hours
And the shift worker of night has come.
Surrender to the setting sun and
may the grace of darkness bring light to your body and soul in sleep.

Andrew Norton, September 2013



Rider Alp, Switzerland

GRAVITY

There's a moment of truth
in which you feel the weight of gravity,
life lived a little and died a little more.

Fully alive to
the sound of branches breaking under your feet,
the smell of moss and the falling of rain,
the darkness of winter,
the promise of spring,
an epic of dust written in sand.

You speak in the name of being brave,
with faltering words
created in chaos
drawn from the deep
to convince the unconvincible
of the place you now stand.

You know the number of days
the sacredness of breath
the line between tides
and the cold kiss of death.
Announcing
the fragile,
gloriousness,
of life.

Andrew Norton, May 2013



St Columba Cross, Gort, Ireland

THE INVITATION

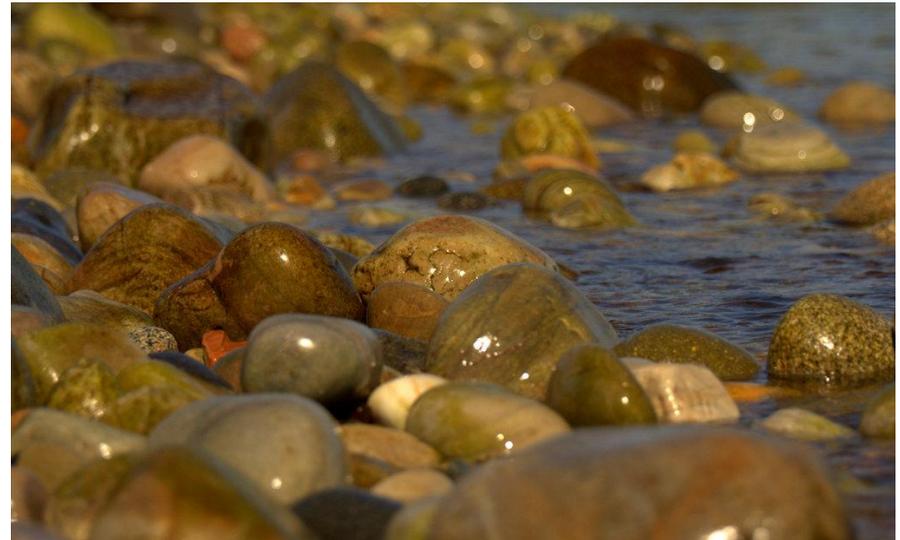
Come with me and stand before the dawn,
let us be still,
without words
and wait,
wrapped in the blanket of darkness
within and without.

Watch with me
as sun splinters break into our worlds,
to see and to be seen,
never giving ourselves in total to the light,
but living in the threshold of shadows to protect this precious gift.

The invitation of this day comes
through the mist across the vast sea
inviting the mystery of our adventure,
the known and the unknown,
consummated through our eyes,
a revelation, a constant re-veiling,
for to see fully would be not to see at all
as it is in the familiar of things that we lose our sight.

From this dawning may we awaken
tired eyes blinded by the ordinary
and welcome the wonder of this new day.

Andrew Norton September 2013



Black hedge road, Northern Ireland

A CONVERSATION WITH WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

LINES WRITTEN A FEW MILES ABOVE TINTERN ABBEY

William Wordsworth, July 13, 1798.

On Sunday 14th of July 2013, friends took us on a mystery drive into South Wales. Imagine my surprise and delight when we drove into the valley of the river Wye and there was Tintern Abby! I'd not been here before but I knew the significance of those famous lines of William Wordsworth.

"LINES WRITTEN A FEW MILES ABOVE TINTERN ABBEY"

The title invites the imagination to take another perspective on life and the passing of time. "A few miles above Tintern Abbey" is either a few miles upstream or the "birds eye" view now come to rest under the dark sycamore tree.



Tintern Abby

Time is marked in a number of ways: the passing of the seasons, the maturing of a man who has been broken by love (maturation takes time and pain) and the ruins of the Abbey (not mentioned but in the title) that speak of another time come to rest. Tintern Abbey, a symbol of reformation of faith and prayer, silent to all but the running of water and the sounds of doves. Running through these different time zones, another time flows through the valley; nature's time has been a silent witness to all times.

Two hundred and fifteen summers and long winters have passed.
Two hundred and fifteen seasons have waited for a return.

*"Five years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a sweet inland murmur.—Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
Which on a wild secluded scene impress"*

I stood on the hillside in the chapel of St Mary's Abby overlooking the valley and was invited to . .

*"Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view . . ."*

Thinking of this kind requires a space. A space that comes to rest and then calls forth thinking. It is a clearing of all thoughts and connectedness that

joins the still blue of the summer sky with the restful green of the landscape. It is in this place you come to rest.
This is not to be rushed.
Be still and drink deeply with your eyes.

*“These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which, at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Among the woods and copses lose themselves,
Nor, with their green and simple hue, disturb
The wild green landscape. Once again I see
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild; these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreathes of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees,
With some uncertain notice, as might seem,
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some hermit's cave, where by his fire
The hermit sits alone.”*

Life however is not lived in the space. Being still does not come easily. There are always things to do, places to go, people to see, lists to complete and demands to be met. Though absent long from this beauty seen in stillness, it is nevertheless available even in the midst of the noise and din of daily life.

Through the mind's eye, remembered beauty restores the soul in the midst of an unintelligible world.

Even when everything in life seems to be out of sync, there is a reference point that draws us back again and again to a connectedness that restores and then gently leads us on.

The Abbey ruins pose an unspoken question.
If the spirit of God was once at home in this place, where is God's spirit now?
Where is the spirit that will sustain and guide the pilgrim?

God has been set free from the house made of stone to dance through creation's glory.
Beauty unbounded by the blindness of those who refuse to see.



St Mary's Abby

*“Though absent long,
These forms of beauty have not been to me,
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure; such, perhaps,
As may have had no trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life;
His little, nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lighten'd:—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on”*

The imagination of the mind's eye, mystery and ordinariness find their home within the body of our being; "this corporeal frame". As the river Wye flows through the forest, so too blood flows through the body giving it life; a living soul.

The eye now within is able to see the life of things. Life is not just of things, there is a "life of things" that goes far beyond the objects and subjects we see. In tune with nature's flow and the breath of life your embodied being is filled with the deep power of joy.

*“Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.”*

O sylvan Wye!
The wanderer of the woods is joined by another pilgrim who walks through the woods of life. The fever of the world and the darkness of many shapes find no rest.
Return to the river.
Return to the river.
Return to the source; a well that never runs dry.

*“If this
Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft,
In darkness, and amid the many shapes
Of joyless day-light; when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart,
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee
O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the wood
How often has my spirit turned to thee!”*

And now, the light under the dark sycamore tree casts shadows always moving between this and that. One moment gleams of bliss and the next a sad perplexity.

Now is the moment between times.
Time past and time yet to come.
Now is the time when youthful energy that has been tamed by the
elements of deep rivers and lonely streams.
Now is contemplating what will the future hold?

Looking at the ruins of Tintern Abbey there is both sadness and beauty.
Sadness for a time gone by, now in ruins, of a prayer now silenced and
success turned into ruins. Yet these stones are not silent, shaped by the
light of a new day, the story lives on.



"Unborrowed from the eye" sees grief, pain and loss through a lens
seldom seen.
Could it be that loss could also come to me as a gift of new love?
Could the scars of life dare be seen as beautiful (abundant recompense)?

"And now, with gleams of half-extinguish'd though[t,]

*With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. And so I dare to hope
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was, when first
I came among these hills; when like a roe
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led; more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
And their glad animal movements all gone by,)
To me was all in all. —I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite: a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, or any interest
Unborrowed from the eye. —That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts
Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompence."*

There is a moment of learning that becomes a turning, where you come to that which you had known through one set of eyes and now see through completely new ones.

Nature viewed through the eyes of youth are to chasten and subdue, to tame and to conquer.

But now through the eye of one chastened and subdued by nature a disturbing presence brings joy.

This disturbing presence is the realisation that we are not ALL powerful and ALL knowing.

Humility grounds your feet upon the earth (humus) and opens a door to a new way of being.

This is the glory of a mind set free from the illusion of a self made man and then at one with the majesty and glory of creation.

A mind thinking of things, all objects of thought, and rolls through all things opened to see and create.

It is from this humility ("disturbing presence") that true north becomes the guardian of heart and soul.

*"For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,*

*A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,*
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being."*

Friends are the witnesses of our lives.

A TRUE friend is one who witnesses your life and chooses to still be your friend.

A friend demonstrates with-ness "for thou art with me" through all of life's pilgrimage, who speaks a word in season when others would flatter or condemn.

For Wordsworth this true friend was his sister.

Familial love is a bound of blood but the love of a friend is a choice.

Friendship of this nature is a gift of grace, present in the moments of sheer delight and through the dreary intercourse of daily life.

The silent image of the Abbey returns again.

While Wordsworth does not mention the Abbey or God throughout the poem their presence runs through the poem in the same way as the river Wye runs through the valley.

While God voice may be silent the words of Psalm 23 resound as a constant echo.

"Lead us" - He leads me
"We are laid asleep" - He makes me lie down
"This green pastoral landscape" - in green pasture
"Tranquil restoration"- restores my soul
"Thou art with me"
"The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul" - path of righteousness
"Nature never betrayed" - even though I walk though the valley
"Abundant recompense." - Thou spreads a table



*"Nor, perchance,
If I were not thus taught, should I the more
Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
For thou art with me, here, upon the banks
Of this fair river; thou, my dearest Friend,*

*My dear, dear Friend, and in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart, and read
My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was once,
My dear, dear Sister! And this prayer I make,
Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith that all which we behold . . ."*

Blessing is generosity of words.
It is a prayer that needs no intermediary,
Love that needs no explanation
and a work of art that needs no interpretation.

It is a song sung by a sky lark,
the sun spilling light.
A life giving breath.
It is to gift courage from one heart to another.

The word courage comes from an old French word "corage" which means "heart, innermost feelings; temper". It was used as an expression to tell your story with your whole heart.

Blessing is communication that goes from heart to heart!
How sad it is that language has been reduced to the world of things, of
this and that, for even the greatest of ideas will need wings to catch the
wind and to soar.

Simple language is too small for such blessings
and so must borrow bigness,
a language big enough to wrap around your heart.

*"May the moon shine on your solitary walk
And let the misty mountain winds be free
To blow against thee".*

So let it be!

*". . . Is full of blessings.
Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
And let the misty mountain winds be free
To blow against thee: and in after years,
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
Into a sober pleasure, when thy mind
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
For all sweet sounds and harmonies; Oh! then,
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance,
If I should be, where I no more can hear
Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams*

*Of past existence, wilt thou then forget
That on the banks of this delightful stream
We stood together; and that I, so long
A worshipper of Nature, hither came,
Unwearied in that service: rather say
With warmer love, oh! with far deeper zeal
Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,
That after many wanderings, many years
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake."*



POET AS LEADER

Leadership has become an elitist sport. A few pros take to the circuit while the crowd watches and applauds or condemns. Sideline debates, often heated, break-out on what a leader is and isn't. Score sheets are created on the function and form of leadership describing their characteristics, successes and failures. Few ever venture to put any flesh into the game. Occasionally, one of the pros will write a book on what leadership is and if you're really lucky you'll get a personally signed copy.

The language of leadership has predominately been shaped by Newtonian physics and military strategy. These two forces have been adapted by the corporate world to give us leadership as we know it today. When people say "I'm not a leader", what they are really saying is "If that is what a leader is, I'm not that."

But what if the language of leadership is too small to capture the vast range of human experiences of leadership?

What if there is more to leadership than command and control?

What if the science of leadership is found wanting to describe its art and mystery?

What if the corporate ladder of leadership is up against the wrong wall?

To answer these kinds of questions you will need to hear a different voice; the voice of a Poet.

The Poet's task is to invite people into conversation about their experiences of life, ask the questions that no one else is asking and to create a sacred silence that speaks of identity and meaning. This is the task of a leader.

To do this will require stepping into a new space and learning a new language. This is a space you enter into without preformed and formulaic answers; it is a disruptive and disturbing conversation that requires courage. It takes courage because you may be changed by the conversation. It is a conversation about who you are and who you are becoming, and about relationships rather than "things".

The voice of the Poet is one way you can begin to venture into this territory.



THE POET

Who has time to read between the lines and tell the untold story?

Who can foresee the changing seasons by the falling of a single leaf?

Who has the courage to tell the Emperor he is naked?

Who has the strength to do the heavy lifting, with silence?

Who is the one in your organisation who can split the knottiest of wood with a solitary word?

Who can describe a bird in flight, without words?

Who arm wrestles with Ambiguity and goes fifteen rounds with Paradox undefeated?

Who picks up the broken and makes a sculpture of beauty?

Who breathes life into the corporate soul?

Who is never seen at award ceremonies?

The Poet

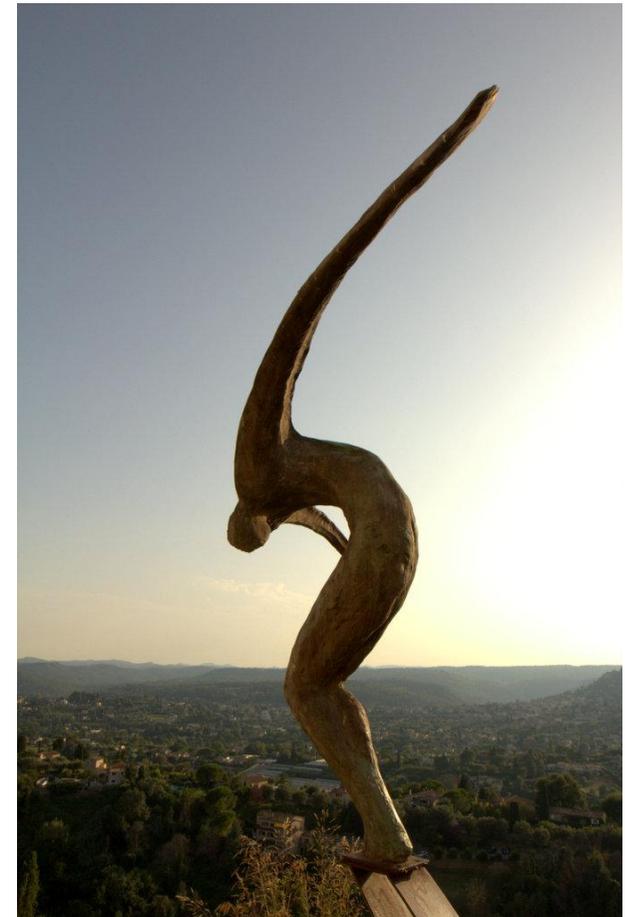
Andrew Norton 2012

Many of the challenges of leadership cannot be resolved in an email, another restructure or a strategic plan. They require conversations that drill down deep beneath the surface.

Does your work make you more or less fully alive?

Where does vision come from?

Do you have the courage to be you?



Envol St Paul de Vence, France

THE PROPHET

Like lightening in a bottle,
the Prophet speaks against all odds.
A force of nature striking the gods of Babylon into a thousand splinters.

Undefinable by the org chart,
untamable by the bureaucracy,
wild at heart,
tender of hand,
the Prophet speaks of
injustice and hope.

The Prophet sees with eyes on fire a land of promise and plenty yet is
fierce in conversation about what is, as one who is in this world but not of
this world.

No wonder most prophets get stoned or fired.

Andrew Norton 2012

Leadership is the courage to speak up, to speak out, to speak for and to
speak against. Without this, leadership degenerates to “the blind leading
the blind”.

What is your experience of injustice in the workplace?

Who speaks up, out, for and against?

THE PRIEST

Sometimes words are too small to capture the magnitude of our life
together.

Words like . . .

Gratitude
Fear
Failure
Forgiveness
Betrayal
Pain
Loss
Grief
Celebration
Hope
Wonder
Intimacy
Community

These words belong to the Priest,
who collects them in the chalice
of human experience, and offers them as
wine to nourish the soul.

Andrew Norton 2012

With the pressures of life and work, people are increasingly searching for a language that adequately describes their experience. When work overwhelms, they describe it as “soul destroying”. No matter how you define the soul, the leader’s task is the care of “souls”. This is about building a community where celebration, grief, fear and hope are expressed in authentic ways.

Is your work big enough for your soul?

In what ways is your soul nourished or damaged at work?

What is your deepest fear?

Leadership is not for an elite few. Leadership is the experience of everyone because everyone has an experience of leadership. Leaders make followers; followers make leaders therefore the act of following is leadership.

It takes all types to be leaders.



Renoir's paint brushes

THE POET LEADER - WORKSHOP

What if the language of leadership is too small to contain the breadth and depth of experience for those who would lead and follow? This workshop offers an opportunity for participants to experiment with the use of poetry to expand their vocabulary of leadership experience and to develop their observation, creativity and thinking skills. Leadership is more than a transaction or function. It is the engagement of people and organisations in the essential conversations of being and doing. Poetry is a 'bridge' to that conversation.

The end is not poetry. The end is the engagement in a conversation of which poetry is a means. It is not about like or dislike of a poem or poetry.

Introduction

Overview

1. **Practice:** some ways in which Poetry is being used in Business (10 minutes)
2. **Theory:** (15 minutes)
 - Philosophy of Thinking
 - Social Science
 - Emotional Intelligence
3. **Personal engagement:** Using poetry to engage with participants' personal leadership experiences. (40 minutes)
4. **Reflection and learning:** Participants reflect on the learning of the workshop. (25 minutes)

Practice

Clare Morgan in *What Poetry brings to Business* 2010

- Lt. Gen. James Lennox (West Point curriculum development) . . . "Poetry gives our cadets a new and vital way of seeing the world." Cadets at West Point spend 16 weeks studying poetry. "In teaching cadets poetry we teach them not what to think, but how to think." (Morgan 2010: 184)
- Professor Johanna Shapiro, director in Medical Humanities and Arts at the University of California, uses poetry as an important means of widening doctors understanding of patient care.
- Neuroscience Prof. Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, director of the centre for Brain and Cognition, University of California, "Poets, novelists and artists are seven times more likely than the general population to have synesthesia (a mingling of the senses). These people are also adept at making cross-nodal connections, including connections through metaphor." (Morgan 2010: 210)

John Coleman HBR 2012 "We should not overlook poetry" lists a number of studies that show the benefits of poetry producing. . .

- Insight and understanding - of the world, self and others
- Developing empathy in younger children
- Enhancing empathy and compassion in doctors

- Fostering creativity
- Driving innovation
- Infusing life with beauty and meaning

Peter Senge

“W. Brian Arthur, a noted economist of the Santa Fe Institute, told us, “Every profound innovation is based on an inward bound journey, on going to a deeper place where knowing comes to the surface.” This inward bound journey lies at the heart of all creativity, whether in the arts, in business or in science.” (Senge 2004)

Boston Consulting Group (an extract from their web page)

“Poetry keeps clean the tools of thought.”

T.S. Eliot

Poetry can help us think strategically. A poem is thought, experience, and emotion distilled into a tightly controlled form that uses words, images, sound, and rhythm patterns to create a complex set of meanings that constantly form and reform themselves. A poem's components take it beyond argument into a realm where expectations of a single analyzable meaning are deliberately questioned and subverted.

All art does this, but poetry does it in a particularly condensed and therefore intensive way. A poem is a puzzle with multiple, inexhaustible, co-existent, and interchangeable "solutions"—each more or less dependent on the others for validity.

The desire for closure (which drives most business considerations) and the desire to pursue the shortest route between A and B won't get us anywhere at all when we're faced with a poem. Business leaders too often develop their abilities in quantitative linear thinking at the expense of non-quantitative response. Reading poetry encourages a fresh focus on these emotional, contextual, and cultural issues. It also requires that one enjoy the experience of poetry and to become an astute reader. The skill can be learned, and once acquired, should be transferable, for example, to responding to complex, strategic situations.

Reading poetry encourages a fresh focus on these emotional, contextual, and cultural issues.

My own practice as an Executive Coach and Retreat Leader . . .

- Creating thinking spaces for people – out of the box
- From transactional to transformative leadership – the experience of leadership
- Discovery of “True North” / values
- Engaging the heart
- Realignment – the conversation you know you need to have but don't know how to have
- Knowing your personal leadership story

“The ability to think the way poetry demands you to think is a real differentiator. A complex world requires complex responses, and a poem is its own little engine of complex meanings. Like the world itself, it lures and frustrates and evades and teases. And then, when you start to really reach out towards it, it can come down over you in a shock.” (Morgan 2010: 12)

“A poem is a vehicle that uses language to get beyond language. It's a meaning in motion that inhabits both logical and non logical realms.” (Morgan 2010: 53)

“A poem extends its readers, requiring of them patience, persistence, flexibility, adaptability, humility, a taste for paradox, a thirst for precision, and comfort in chaos.” (Morgan 2010: 123)

"Poetry is organised violence committed on ordinary speech" Roman Jakobson 1896 – 1982 (Morgan 2010: 123)

“Poetry can ... Provide something called a ground of surrender that acts as a basis for reframing and re visioning apparently intractable issues. Reframing and revisioning are essential first steps in opening up the possibility of a change of mind. And that possibility, can act as a catalyst in the trust process.” (Morgan 2010: 163)

Theory

Thinking Leadership

“But what if something is holding the strategist back, causing her thinking to happen "inside the box"? What if something is stopping her envisioning the new possibilities, preventing her from tapping into what is not - yet?

Like a pair of spectacles luring the fine distinctions between things, making “A” look very much like “B”, casting differences into shadows, and ironing out differentials in colour and tone?

Dominant systems of knowledge based in the dominant discourses that control and direct the way we think, act like these spectacles and constrain our ability to be creative.

These dominant systems constrain our creativity because they inhibit not only how we express ourselves but also what we see.” (Morgan 2010: 116)

Could our thinking be the very thing that is holding us back?

For all the talk of “thinking outside the box” few have managed to dismantle the box let alone think outside it!

Heidegger challenges the nature of scientific thinking that has results in suffocated thinking in contrast to what he describes as the “country of thinking” that is open in all directions. Possibilities are not predetermined by method but allow for thinking to come. In this “country” there is the neighbourhood of poetry.

Poetry when not tortured by analysis (scientific thinking) opens the country of thinking to unlimited possibilities and the opportunity to have the conversations of being, essence and beauty.

“Poetry leads us to the unstructured sources of our beings to the unknown and returns us to our structured, rational selves refreshed.” (Morgan 2010: 175)

Self Understanding

“Man is a story teller! He lives surrounded by his and others’ myths. With them he sees everything in his life, no matter what befalls him. And he seeks to live his life as though he were telling it.” Sartre

The early work of Gergen challenged the nature / nurture understandings of self as being mechanistic and synchronic and not allowing for the possibility of reflexive reconstruction of self understanding. He then developed a model of “Narratives of Self” (stability narrative, progressive narrative and the regressive narrative) each opening endless opportunities to self understanding in any given context. Gergen’s later work expands on this by seeing self in the context of a relational being where there are multiple narratives of self and narratives of belonging. These narratives intersect with one another giving rise to a multiplicity and malleability of relations giving an understanding of self while at the same time freeing self from the disconnectedness of individualism to become whole by finding ourselves in relations.

An ancient proverb “You can never cross the same river twice” could equally be applied to a poem.

Each time you cross the river (poem) things change, you are not the same person you were when you last crossed and neither is the river. The poem then gives you a mechanism to engage with the narratives of self and of self in relations with others in an ever changing dynamic.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence is “The ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions.” The two critical components of Emotional Intelligence consist of emotional awareness, emotional recognition, and emotion regulation (Salovey and Mayer 1090, Goleman 1995).

Research is showing that the use of Poetry and the Visual Arts is an effective tool for developing emotional self awareness (Morris 2005).

Poetry has the potential to connect with sensory experience and to then evoke understanding as it is formed into words, images and metaphors (Fraiberg 2010).

This confirms the findings of neuroscience that maps the different parts of the brain to process emotion, language, and logic (Morris). Poetry gets the different parts of the brain talking to one another.

“Poetry creates an emotional engagement that can be lacking in scientific discourse.” (Morgan 2010: 126)

Personal Engagement

INTRODUCTION TO POETRY

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

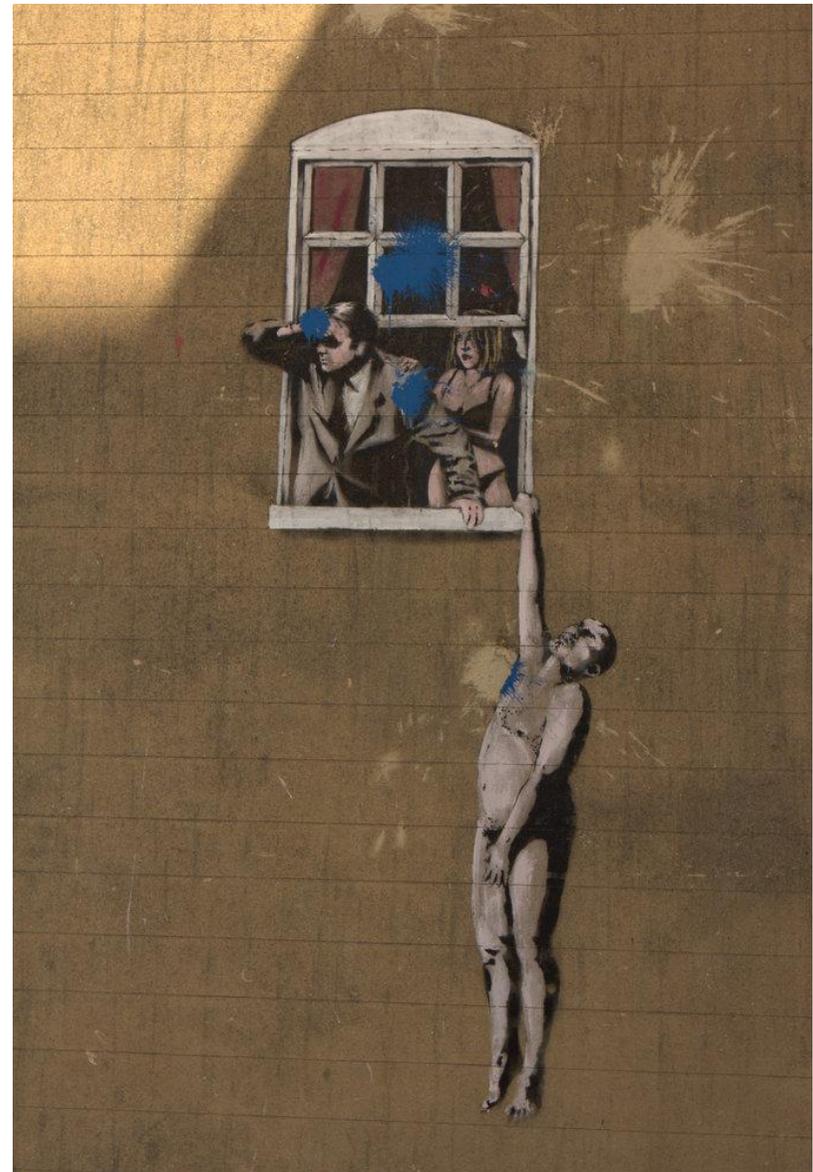
or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

Copyright © 1988 by Billy Collins



Banksy, Bristol England

THE WAY IT IS

There's a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt
or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.

William Stafford



WHEN SOMEONE DEEPLY LISTENS TO YOU

When someone deeply listens to you
it is like holding out a dented cup
you've had since childhood
and watching it fill up with
cold, fresh water.
When it balances on top of the brim,
you are understood.
When it overflows and touches your skin,
you are loved.

When someone deeply listens to you
the room where you stay
starts a new life
and the place where you wrote
your first poem
begins to glow in your mind's eye.
It is as if gold has been discovered!

When someone deeply listens to you
your bare feet are on the earth
and a beloved land that seemed distant
is now at home within you.

John Fox

Exercise

How does this make you feel?

What senses are touched as you hear this?

An Invitation To Lead

THE BLUE DOOR

The hinges told you,
"This door has been around forever",
but the light inside made you feel
you were the first to accept its invitation.

The colour blue was simultaneously cold and warm.
You wanted to resist and accept its invitation knowing
that no one who came to this door,
remained unchanged.

The door handle held out its hand
as you were welcomed by name.
Past, present and future
stood on the door step as one.

As the door slowly opened
you could see stone steps
leading to a way unknown.

Andrew Norton

What are some of the “push, pull, draw and resist” factors in your leadership story?

What are some of the key words that lead you into the unknown?

THE IDENTITY OF THE LEADER

Self Portrait

Before you say who I am,
I must first find myself
freed
from the bad advice
and flattering applause,
of sideline voices
and those inside my head.
Cross currents of agendas
and wind-chilling judgements.
To reconcile inward discord
and outward appearances.
This is not for the faint-hearted,
assailed by the unrelenting elements
of wind and tide,
until all that is left
is,
what remains.
Only then can I
be
be- coming
me.

Andrew Norton

What are some of the voices that get in your way? What has to be stripped away?

THE HARD CALLS

Travelling through the dark

Travelling through the dark I found a deer
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.

By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;
she had stiffened already, almost cold.
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.

My fingers touching her side brought me the reason—
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,
alive, still, never to be born.
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;
under the hood purred the steady engine.
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

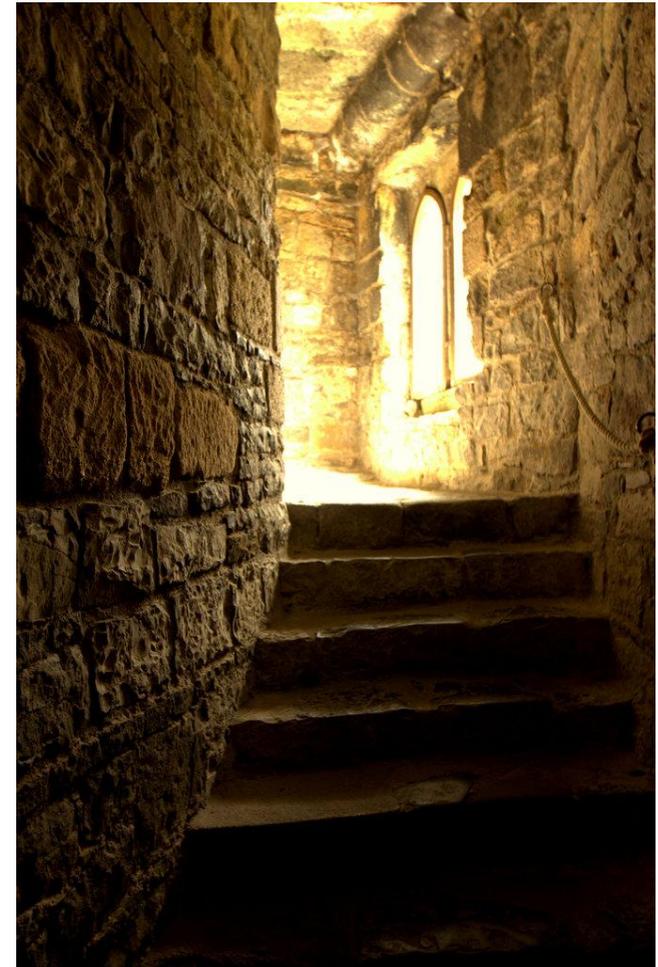
I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—,
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

William Stafford

When have you found yourself in the dark?

Describe the loneliness of making a hard call?

Who witnesses what can't be seen?



The Imagination Of Leadership

ALL IN A DAY

I was kissed by the rising sun,
I climbed a mountain,
stood on its crown and raised my arms in surrender.

I rode a Harley one thousand miles.
I sailed to the edge of the world
where the land lost its sight.
I walked on golden sands,
swam in a symphony of
tropical colour.

I mounted on eagle's wings,
saw the world through its eyes.
I drank wine with dear friends in the world's four corners.
I was held by a baby whose eyes saw
a me I didn't know
and experienced the miracle of grace,
that broke me and made me whole.

I painted a canvas with words, that danced into life,
I was watched by the man in the moon
who sees all in the dark of the night.
I folded the corner of today's page,
so I could remember my place when I awoke.

Andrew Norton



FOR A NEW BEGINNING

By John O'Donohue

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,
Where your thoughts never think to wander,
This beginning has been quietly forming,
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire,
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,
Noticing how you willed yourself on,
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

It watched you play with the seduction of safety
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,
Wondered would you always live like this.

Then the delight, when your courage kindled,
And out you stepped onto new ground,
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,
A path of plenitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not yet clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;

Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.



A BLESSING FOR ONE WHO IS EXHAUSTED

By John O'Donohue

When the rhythm of the heart becomes hectic,
Time takes on the strain until it breaks;
Then all the unattended stress falls in
On the mind like endless, increasing weight.

The light in the mind becomes dim.
Things you could take in your stride before
Now become laborsome events of will.

Weariness invades your spirit.
Gravity begins falling inside you,
Dragging down every bone.

The tide you never valued has gone out,
And you are marooned on unsure ground.
Something within you has closed down;
And you cannot push yourself back to life.

You have been forced to enter empty time.
The desire that drove you has relinquished.
There is nothing else to do now but rest
And patiently learn to receive the self
You have forsaken in the rush of days.

At first your thinking will darken
And sadness take over like listless weather.
The flow of unwept tears will frighten you.

You have travelled too fast over false ground;
Now your soul has come to take you back.

Take refuge in your senses, open up
To all the small miracles you rushed through.

Become inclined to watch the way of rain
When it falls slow and free.

Imitate the habit of twilight,
Taking time to open the well of color
That fostered the brightness of day.

Draw alongside the silence of stone
Until its calmness can claim you.
Be excessively gentle with yourself.

Stay clear of those vexed in spirit,
Learn to linger around someone of ease
Who feels they have all the time in the world.

Gradually, you will return to yourself,
Having learned a new respect for your heart
And the joy that dwells far within slow time.

LEADERSHIP RETREAT: THE TEN KEY LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS

The following ten questions are designed for a retreat setting.

There are three different levels at which these questions can be applied;

- a) For leadership development
- b) Organisational change and
- c) For personal spiritual growth.

While I have used the term organisational change in a broadly I also have in mind that these questions apply to the reformation of the church and are questions that need to be addressed by local churches at a leadership level.

Each retreat will have time of personal reflection and guided writing along with time of facilitated dialogue.

Each retreat would range between 2 to 5 days in duration.

1. WORDS

If you spoke to others like you speak to yourself would they want to be your friend?

Language shapes the way we live in the world. The words we use have within them the power of life and death; to create and to destroy. If only you could hear yourself speak!

Listen carefully to your words, those you speak and those you say to yourself. Are they loving, gracious, encouraging and kind or are they judgemental, worrisome, discouraging and critical?

For leadership

What are the four or five key messages other people hear you saying?

If you don't know ask them.

What is missing from your conversation with others that you would like to be part of your conversation?

Is your leadership language able to take others on the journey into the unknown?

What are the four or five key messages do you say to yourself?

If you don't know you may need to start some form of journal to have a conversation with your own self talk.

What would you like to hear more of, less of, or not at all in your personal self talk?

Do you like the person you are becoming?

Would you want to be your own best friend?

For organisational change

What is the self talk of your organisation?

If your customers listened to your "inside" conversations would they want to do business with you?

Is there a difference between the "inside" and "outside" talk of your organisation?

To what level do you have transparency of conversation in your organisation?

In what ways are gratitude and encouragement expressed in your organisation?

For spiritual growth

Reflect of your the words you use to yourself and to others. Are they life giving or life taking?

"The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit." Proverbs 18:21

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is worthy of respect, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if something is excellent or praiseworthy, think (speak) about these things." Phil 4:8

To love others as you love yourself means speaking words of encouragement and love to yourself.

In what ways are words used to express love to others and to yourself?



2. BODY

If you listened to your body what conversation would it want to have with you?

It is easier to lie with your lips than with your body. Your body holds within the truth. Your body knows; it carries the weight of decisions you are unwilling to make and waits patiently for the conversation only you can have with yourself.

Your body keeps the score of the private lies you tell yourself until one day it says "enough!"

Integrity is the alignment of your inner and outer life; when words of your lips and the direction of your feet follow the same path.

For leadership

The decisions are made not only in the mind but in the whole body. Listen to your body. Difficult decisions are often felt in different parts of our bodies; the head, chest, heart, stomach, back, shoulders, feet and hands. Listen to your body as well as the rational process you employ. It is also important to care for your body. Leadership is an embodied experience, you can't lead without it. The way you care for your body is a very strong message to others.

What is your body language saying?

How well are you sleeping at night? (What keeps you awake?)

In what ways do you feel decision making?

What part of your body is like the anchor of your integrity?

What would that part of your body want to say to you?

Are there any contradictions between what your body is saying and your mind is thinking?

In what ways are you caring for your body?

For organisational change

Draw a picture of your organisation as a body (if you can't draw sketch a mind map).

What parts are connected or disconnected?

To what extent is there structural integrity between what say and what you do?

What parts are talking (or not) to each other and what is the content of those conversations.

If you were to listen to your organisation as a body what would it want to say to you?

What is the courageous conversation that your organisation is not having that it needs to have?

For spiritual growth

Read 1Corinthians 12:14-26. Although this image is being used to describe the function of spiritual gifts, it never-the-less can stand on its own as a description of how your body functions as a whole.

Your body is what you do life in!

Is it fit for purpose?

What happens when you fail to listen to your body?

3. BE STILL

If you were really silent long enough, what do you think the "still" voice within would want to say to the "busy" you?

The greatest unexplored territory in today's world is the frontier of silence, solitude and rest.

Busyness and noise fill every waking moment of your lives. We believe the "busyness myth" that our value is measured by how busy we are.

If silence does not punctuate sound you will only hear noise.

If solitude is not given space, creativity will dry up and community will become superficial.

If rest has no rhythm you will suffer the barrenness of busyness.

For leadership

Is your work life balance sustainable?

Who and what fills your schedule?

Is there any quality time in your schedule for you?

Do you have any quality time for reflection and creativity?

Are your relationships with others meaningful or superficial?

In what ways do you need to make space for silence, solitude and rest?

For organisational change

How do you measure success?

Is busyness or effectiveness rewarded?

In what way does your organisation create quality time and space for creativity?

Is there any time scheduled for "best thinking"?

For spiritual growth

God is seldom heard in the noise or from noisy people.

"The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools." Ecclesiastes 9:16-18

God speaks in the stillness and leads with quietness.

Psalm 23:2

1 Kings 19:11-13

Psalm 46:10

God restores in rest

Psalm 23:2-3

There is more instruction in the Bible on over work (not enough rest) than on laziness. Sabbath keeping is God's provision for a busy world.

The command for keeping the Sabbath holy was not for the benefit of God but for us (Mark 2:27, Exodus 20:8-11).

In what ways have you built a regular rhythm of rest into your schedule?

4. A BEAUTIFUL QUESTION

If you were to ask a beautiful question of yourself what would it be?

A beautiful question is a gracious, invitation and engages your imagination to see how you want to live.

We all have questions but many of those questions are harsh and demanding; where am I going? What have I done . . .? Why is this not working? What is wrong with me? How can I be more . . .? These questions are demanding of answers and beat up on us as we try to answer them.

A beautiful question is the question on the other side of the question.

"What is wrong with me?" could become "If I were fearless how would I live?"

"Where am I going with my life?" could become, "How can I live fully in the present?"

Often when we feel that our life is stuck it is because we have lost our imagination. A beautiful question opens the door of imagination.

For leadership

1. Make a list of as many questions as you can about yourself personally and in your role as a leader. You should be able to get at least fifty to one hundred.

2. Reflect on those questions and note any emerging themes.

3. Once you have the themes rewrite them into three or four questions.

4. Of those three or four questions ask "what is the other side of that question?"

5. Now if not already, reframe those questions into beautiful questions.

A beautiful question should come to you as an invitation to be curious and to embark on an adventure.

A beautiful question is not about the answer but about the quest within the question. It is not a destination question but one that will sustain your journey on the path of leadership.

If you are still not sure it is a beautiful question say it out loud a number of times. How does it make you feel? Does the question have a invitational sound to it or does it have a demanding and judgemental tone?

For organisational change

Make a list of questions that are being asked in your organisation. You should be able to write at least fifty to one hundred.

Categorise these questions into the following headings:

Informational questions (how long, many and when?)

Questions you already know the answers to but ask just to make a point

Rhetoric questions that you don't want to know the answer (because you already think you know)

Fault finding questions

Fear based questions

Curiosity questions that foster learning

Questions you are too afraid to ask but need asking.

Questions that ignite the imagination for future possibilities.

What kind of questions does your organisation most need to ask right now?

What are the questions your organisation is not asking?

For spiritual growth

"As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" John 9:1-2

The disciples asked the question "Whose fault is this?"

The question could well have been asked of the cripple by the pool of Bethesda. (John 5:6) Jesus has no time for judgemental questions but asked a beautiful question "do you want to be made whole?"

No fault finding, no excuses; do you want to grow?

The book of Job is a series of questions as Job's friends seek to console Job in his sufferings with questions that may hold the answer to his pain.

None of the questions asked satisfy. In fact the questions just make things worse!

In Job 38 God asks Job a series of questions with no blame or judgement but questions that invite him to view God and his own suffering in a totally new light.

What are the questions you would like to ask God?

What are the questions you think God might like to ask you?

Where do your questions lead you, to hope or despair?

See psalm 139:7 how are these questions answered?



Steps leading to the pool of Bethesda

5. HOME COMING

How far have you gone from yourself?

There are times in our lives when we are far from home. These are times of exile; either self imposed by the decisions we make or is imposed upon us by time and circumstance.

Exile is a time when we become disenfranchised from our dreams and experience the silence of our song. It is a dark night without ending; a ghostly shadow with a semblance of life.

Exile is often unknown to ourselves yet a gradual realisation comes that "I'm far from home" or "this is not me" or "I'm out of sorts". This becomes evident in times of boredom, depression or a general disquiet within. It is like going through the motions, the lights are on but no one is at home. William Butler Yeats describes this as "an outworn heart in time outworn".

In the parable of the prodigal son it was in this moment that "he came to himself". Homecoming begins by coming home to yourself.

The invitation of exile is that it is a threshold to a conversation about identity and an invitation to your homecoming.

For leadership

With the demands of leadership it is very easy to lose your way.

The dream fades with the dictates of time.

The seduction of success dehumanises your soul.

Weariness weighs with the unending weeks of pressure.

Demands dressed in other people's ways compete for your undivided attention.

How do you stay true to yourself?

How do you stay fresh as a leader?

When are you functioning at your personal best?

What could it mean to come home to yourself?

If you came home to yourself would you like yourself?

CAUTION: if this condition of exilic weariness is not attended to it will result in some form of causality. You will reach a point of derailment. Homecoming may not be a quick fix. You may need to seek some help from a coach, counsellor, or spiritual director.

For organisational change

Without constant renewal it is very easy for an organisation to lose its way.

Three main causes:

Complacency

Complacency is business as usual be it success or nostalgia.

Don't ask questions that you don't want to know the answers to.

Don't rock the boat.

Success

Success can prevent an organisation from seeing its own vulnerabilities and may cause it to be caught off guard to both threats and opportunities.

Success can be a blind belief in one's own press release.

Nostalgia

Nostalgia looks back to the "good old days" and longs for their return.

Nostalgia repeats the methods of yesterday in the blind faith of a different result.

Which of these conditions do you think your organisation is most vulnerable to?

How does this impact the morale of your workplace?

Who are the keepers of the dream of the organisation?

What is the dream?

Is it clear?

Is it believable?

Is it achievable?

For spiritual growth

When the people of Israel were in exile and were asked by their captives to sing a song (Psalm 137) they couldn't sing. They had lost their joy, song and their dream.

What do you weep about?

What do you sing about?

What do you dream about?

In Luke 15 the prodigal comes to the realisation that this was not the life he had dreamed of (so much for the "good life" and all its false promises). It was at that point "he came to himself" and started the long journey home.

What could it mean for you to come to yourself?

Have you ever given yourself to false promises?

What could your journey home look like?



6. *SHAPE*

In what way are you shaping and being shaped by the elements of life?

We are shaped by the world we live in. In the same way as ice aged glaciers have carved mountain valleys out of stone so also we are shaped and formed by the elements of our environment. We are formed in families within time and space, and contexts of opportunity and crisis. Each of these elements, along with our response to them, uniquely shapes us into the people we are today.

If formation is not a conscious process we end up becoming unconscious actors in the drama of life, or victims of a script handed to us.

The age old question, "are leaders made or formed?" fails to allow us to engage in the conversation of "both". Yes, there are some givens but we are also active participants in the formation process. The key question is how do we shape and have we been shaped?

For leadership

There is a leadership DNA that has been imprinted upon us through our earliest memories or experiences of leadership. For better or worse, these memories and experiences shape the kind of leader we become. Awareness of these can be accessed through telling stories of your earliest memories and experience of leadership. These are the stories that have shaped us and this is our leadership narrative. While the themes of our narrative have historic elements it is possible to reinterpret your narrative for the new.

(Exercise: if you haven't already, it is a very worthwhile exercise to write your leadership narrative.)

What is your earliest memory of leadership?

What are the key elements that have shaped you to be the kind of leader you are today?

What can you learn from your leadership narrative?

What can you build on?

What do you want to change?

Another story of significance in our formation as leaders is the crucible of leadership.

The crucible is the melting pot, which when heated, changes the elemental structure and forms the new.

The crucible comes in times of crisis, testing, failure and deep pain.

Have you experienced the crucible of leadership?

How has the crucible of leadership shaped you?

How have you responded in the midst of the crucible?

For organisational change

What are the environmental factors that are currently shaping your organisation?

What are some of the internal assumptions that predetermine how you see your environment?

How do you recognise the difference between a crisis and an opportunity?

To what extent are you being proactive or reactive to these?

When was your organisation's last reformation?

In what ways do you need a reformation now?

What are the conditions for health and growth for your organisation?

For spiritual growth

The parable of the soils (see Luke 8:5-15).

Environment sets the conditions for growth.

This parable is in tension with the fact that soil cannot change its condition by itself and yet the hearer is being encouraged to be the kind soil that produces a great harvest.

To what extent are you already “set” and how can you become more receptive to growth?

The parable is talking about the physical conditions of the soil yet the interpretation is talking about the attitudinal conditions of the heart.

In what way has your physical environment shaped you?

In what ways has your attitude shape you?

What, if any changes, would you like to make to become more productive?

The potter and the clay (see Jeremiah 18:3-6)

In what ways are you being formed and reformed?

In whose hands are you?



7. INVITATION

In what ways do you respond to the invitation to life?

Carpe diem!

The day cannot be seized unless you first have a day to seize.

Today comes as an invitation, it is a gift. It is not mine, as of right, but is a gift to receive, and this gift is an invitation to life.

When the invitational nature of life is lost we take life for granted and assume life as of right. When this happens we become ungrateful and demanding.

The hallmarks of living an invitational life are gratitude and service.

What happens when you stop living an invitational life?

For leadership

A leader is invited to lead by others. If leadership is not invitational it will be positional leadership that claims the rights as a leader and becomes demanding of followers. There are no inbuilt rights of leadership. It is an invitation to serve.

The power of the speaker is that they have first been invited to listen. Only a listener truly has the right to speak to those who would be listeners.

The “call” to leadership comes in many different ways; a response to a need, a tap (or push) on the shoulder, a falling into it, a gradual realisation or a selection. Each comes with its own unique invitation to lead.

How has the invitation to lead come to you?

Why would others want to follow you?

Why would they want to listen to you?

In what ways to you wrestle with the invitation to lead?

What happens when you try to lead beyond the invitation you have been given?

Can the invitation be withdrawn?

For organisational change

The invitational nature of an organisation is most clearly seen in the attitude of customer service. Does the customer exist for you or you for the customer?

A business cannot exist for itself; it is people, it is people, it is people!

What happens when your organisation becomes self serving?

What is the need or purpose your organisation is being invited to meet?

Why do you exist? You may need to ask this question at least ten times.

Why would people want to do business with you?

Who are you serving?

For spiritual growth

Matthew 20:25-28

The invitation to lead comes as an invitation to follow. The invitation to follow is an invitation to serve.

Rather than reading this passage, allow these words of scripture to read you.

What is the invitation you hear from these words?

What will that invitation look like in the way you live your life?

8. SOURCE

What is the source do you draw from?

Why drink water downstream when you could drink from the source?

The source is pure and is life giving.

Many people today are content to live a downstream life. Unwilling to make the journey to the source they drink second hand water and think second hand thoughts. For others the well they have been drawing from has become dry or bitter. If change is to have any hope of transformation you will need to draw from a new well.

If you keep doing the same thing you will get the same result.

If you keep thinking the same thoughts you will keep thinking the same things.

If there is to be any possibility of change you will need to do something differently, you will need to draw from a new well.

For leaders

If you want to be inspiring you must first be inspired.

Have you got into a thinking rut?

Where do you do your best thinking?

What are you reading?

Where is the source of your inspiration?

Where does fresh thinking come from?

What are your sources of personal refreshment and renewal?

For organisational change

A system is perfectly designed to produce what it is producing.

An organisation needs to be fit for purpose. Over time the origin of that purpose may become diluted or may not be what it needs to be today.

Using the metaphors of "the source" or "the well" what is it that your organisation needs to draw from to sustain its life for the future.

Is your current organisation sustainable?

Are there any signs of organisational renewal?

For spiritual growth

John 4:6 -15

What is the significance of Jacobs well?

What well do you draw from?

How do you draw from the well?

What is the condition of your well? James 3:11, Hebrews 12:15, Psalm 84:5-6



9. RISK

How can you risk yourself for others?

There is no such thing as a risk free life. Even a so called “safe” life comes with its own risks. The greatest and the most rewarding risk is giving yourself away. This comes at a very high cost and the risk of losing self, yet the gains have the potential of being far greater.

Hospitality is the welcome and care of others. Hospitality requires a radical move from self centeredness to other centeredness.

How can I risk becoming more hospitable?

What could I do today that I and others will be thankful for tomorrow?

In what ways has hospitality been shown to you?

For leadership

It is often said that the “door to my office is always open”, is it really?

When does it need to be closed and when does it need to be open?

How open to others are you really?

What boundaries of self do you need in place to protect yourself while being open and hospitable to others?

What fences of protection have you built that are really defences that need to come down?

For organisational change

Within organisations there is always a boundary of “insiders” and “outsiders”. Over time these boundaries become part of the cultural fabric of the organisation. These boundaries may have had a “risk”

aversion purpose at first but over time they may have become walls of exclusion that restrict health and prevent growth.

A risk adverse organisation is closed to the welcome of new people and new thinking because the “in” and “out” are so entrenched.

In what ways has your organisation defined the “insiders” and “outsiders”?

In what ways are “outsiders” perceived as a threat?

What are the risks you face with a protectionism mentality?

In what ways does your organisation demonstrate radical hospitality of people and thought?

For spiritual growth

Matthew 16:25-26

What does it mean to lose your life so that you can find it?

Luke 10:30-37

In what ways are you blind to the needs of others?

What are your practiced excuses that you have developed for not caring?

What do you think the motive of the Samaritan was?

What was the cost of hospitality?

What do you think the benefits are?

“He that tends only to himself will end up the poorest” Proverbs 11: 24
(Norton translation)

10. PAIN

What is the name you give yourself under which all loss can live?

We live in a society that is drunk on success and achievement, so much so that failure and pain have no place. In everything we do, we want to mitigate suffering, so much so that we want immunity from life's greatest teachers.

The name you give yourself under which all loss can live is a name big enough to allow for the possibility of suffering and woundedness.

For leadership

Jim Collins speaks of level five leaders who have the character of humility.

Unfortunately, the road to humility can often be a very hard one. The word humility comes from the word "humus" which means the dirt or ground. It is not until a leader is brought low to the ground that they become humble. Humility is groundedness.

When the student is ready the teacher appears.

What have been your most significant teachable moments?

What have been the times of your greatest learning?

What has been the role of suffering and failure in your development as a leader?

Do you have the courage to live with failure as an option?

What is the name you give yourself?

For organisational change

What is your organisations capacity to cope with failure?

Is success only rewarded?

How is the learning from failure valued?

Where in your organisation are the greatest learning opportunities now?

For spiritual growth

Read the book of Job.

Notice the type of questions Job's friends asked of him.

What kind of questions does Job ask of himself?

What questions are you asked and ask yourself in times of suffering and pain?

Are these questions of any help to you?

What do you most need from yourself and others in times of suffering?

Do you have a Psalm that encourages you during a time of trial or suffering?

How do you apply Hebrews 12:2 and James 1:2-5?

"We are happy when for everything inside us there is a corresponding something outside us" William Butler Yeats

APPENDIX

LOST

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.

The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you,
If you leave it you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

David Wagoner

I'M TIRED

I'm whipped
too dumb to quit
too smart
to let life go by

I'm working hard
to find truth
in my own backyard
I've done everything
but die

Took the long way around
on a short ride to town
found a pass

where few have been

Gained a love
lost a friend
scraped my knee
learned to please

started out
with no choice
somewhere
somehow
found my
voice

Nevin Compton Trammell

THE LAYERS

I have walked through many lives,
some of them my own,
and I am not who I was,
though some principle of being
abides, from which I struggle
not to stray.

When I look behind,
as I am compelled to look
before I can gather strength
to proceed on my journey,
I see the milestones dwindling
toward the horizon
and the slow fires trailing
from the abandoned camp-sites,
over which scavenger angels
wheel on heavy wings.

Oh, I have made myself a tribe
out of my true affections,
and my tribe is scattered!
How shall the heart be reconciled
to its feast of losses?
In a rising wind
the manic dust of my friends,

those who fell along the way,
bitterly stings my face,
Yet I turn, I turn,
exulting somewhat,
with my will intact to go
wherever I need to go,
and every stone on the road
precious to me.

In my darkest night,
when the moon was covered
and I roamed through wreckage,
a nimbus-clouded voice
directed me:
“Live in the layers,
not on the litter.”
Though I lack the art
to decipher it,
no doubt the next chapter
in my book of transformations
is already written.
I am not done with my changes.

Stanley Kunitz, "The Layers" from The Collected Poems of Stanley Kunitz. Copyright © 1978 by Stanley Kunitz.

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