

And all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well - An Advent Reflection

I was going to apologise to Julian of Norwich for using one of her most famous sayings as a sound bite but then wondered if I had failed to understand the concept. We have become familiar recently with sound bites such as ‘America First’ or ‘Get Brexit done’. We respond to them with a cheer or a groan depending on our political perspective. But Julian’s words go beyond the sectarian, the polarised and the ‘either or’ to something far far deeper.

And all shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well

When I first read these words I thought that Julian was being far too optimistic. My attitude changed when I discovered the context in which they were written. Julian lived through a pandemic (the Black Death), social and political unrest, famine and economic disaster. Her times seem to parallel ours. We are living through a pandemic, political and economic uncertainty because of Brexit, societal unease linked to increasing social polarisation, economic collapse and fears about climate change. Can we really say:

And all shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well

On the surface it is difficult to say these words, especially when loved ones are seriously ill or have died from COVID, when we have lost our jobs or our jobs are under threat or when we feel powerless or overwhelmed. But the words were not addressed to us at that level. They go deeper and assure us at that deep level that whatever happens, and no matter how bad it is:

And all shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well

We can put everything we are currently enduring into God’s hands and know that at the deepest level:

And all shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well

To put everything into God’s hands is not naive optimism. It is based on a deep and enduring hope, a hope that is not looking towards a bright future that we wish for. Rather it is a deep hope founded on trust in God that enables us to say:

And all shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well

Underpinning that hope is a trust in God’s enduring love for each one of us and for our beautiful world. After years of reflecting on the visions of Christ’s passion that God had given her Julian concluded that ‘Love was his meaning’. That love is expressed through the Incarnation that we are looking forward to celebrating soon. It was for that reason Julian could say:

And all shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well