**Chapter 4: The Tools for Good Works**

January 19, May 20, September 19

*Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of Christ must come before all else. You are not to act in anger or nurse a grudge. Rid your heart of all deceit. Never give a hollow greeting of peace or turn away when someone needs your love. Bind yourself to no oath least it prove false, but speak the truth with heart and tongue.*

*“Do not repay one bad turn with another” (1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9). Do not injure anyone, but bear injuries patiently. “Love you enemies” (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27). If people curse you, do not curse them back but bless them instead. “Endure persecution for the sake of justice” (Matt. 5:10).*

*“You must not be proud, nor given to wine” (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim. 3:3). Refrain from too much eating or sleeping, and “from laziness” (Rom. 12:11). Do not grumble or speak ill of others.*

All tools require practice and guidance if we are to grow in their use. Community is the place of this practice and guidance. Here it is okay to make mistakes; we can hit our fingers with the hammer and break drill-bits, that is, we can fail and flourish in the practice of kindness and acceptance, in grumbling and anger.

In a community of love this listing of the tools of good works is not a litany of shoulds and performance musts. We practice until grace makes it natural. This is the adventure. Grace can shape our nature into ever fuller manifestations of divine presence. This is what grace can do with us when we practice the tools.

And yet some of this can seem perplexing. Why bear an injury, why endure persecution? Is it not best to speak of injustice, to attempt an end to persecution? Surely we can at least try this among those we know and want to love?

In community we learn that nuances of perception and reality can be subtle, so much so that we confuse them without knowing it. We come together with our own ideas and understanding, our own trauma, our own colourings of people and the world. And while our perceptions of a happening, a circumstance, a person, might be close to the real, what could be the consequences of us acting on our perceptions? Is it, in that instance, loving another? Is it loving ourselves?

The tools are about the challenge of growing into Christ’s perspective and vision, Christ’s wisdom and intuition: Christ’s mind. This is especially hard when there are in us habits and attitudes of impatience, pride, anger, and laziness. We are all works in progress and so it is all the more vital that the love of Christ be first in life, and practically so.

Too many times our reactions to injustice can be just that – reactions. There is risk here that we are reacting more from our own biased perspective and hurt. A more considered response comes from a freedom that arises from within a space of ongoing healing. And yet healing so often can seem illusive.

Healing seems illusive if we focus on its lack. This is easier said than done. Once again, we remind ourselves that meditation is the practice of attending *only* to the love of Christ – this before all else. Then the grace active in and with the mantra can make our attention Christ’s attention. We practice until grace makes it real, as only grace can.

The tools are the Gospel life; they are practice and guidance into a full human life *in* the Holy Spirit. This is what Christian spirituality is. In the practice we come to see that the foundations of a Christian spirituality are in our abandoning to Divine Love. This is a life’s work. As we practice the tools we are healed into a self-forgetting wholeness – bit by bit, by bit.

…work out your salvation in fear and trembling. It is God who works in you both the desire and the practice of his good pleasure. Do everything without murmuring and discussion[[1]](#footnote-1) so that you remain faultless and pure, unspoilt children of God in the midst of a cruel and perverse generation, among whom you shine out like stars in the world, holding fast to the word of life. (Phil. 2:12b-16a, RNJB)

1. ‘…without murmuring or complaining’ (see NJB) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)