

# JULIAN OF NORWICH

INTERVIEW WITH DR CLAIRE GILBERT



published in the spring.

## How did you come to know Julian of Norwich's writings?

She was a bright star in the middle of an unbelievably dull, dry theology degree at Oxford in the 80s. I chose to do mediaeval mysticism as a specialist subject, and she was one of the four mystics we studied. I think I fell in love with her then. She re-emerged when I took a course called the Roots of Christian Mysticism. We talked about Julian, and I learned about the contemplative tradition in Christianity.

Dr. Claire Gilbert has spent much of her life walking alongside Julian of Norwich – through a doctorate on Julian and the environment, during cancer treatment and the publication of her book "Miles to Go Before I Sleep" and in a new imagined autobiography of Julian, to be

## Why did you choose Julian to be a spiritual companion through the challenge of cancer treatment?

She kind of presented herself to me. It wasn't a rational decision. I had just spent four years writing a doctorate

about her. So, I was deeply embedded in her texts. However, instead of her being an object of academic study, she became somebody who walked beside me. I could just receive her as this incredible balm.

## How did Julian's writings help you spiritually and psychologically?

Julian's way of writing is to say "Look, I can see this. Can I just stand to one side and describe it to you in such a way that you can see it directly yourself?" And this just stayed with me. So psychologically, it is a kind of softening process that made me porous to what was happening to me. What was happening to me through the cancer was pretty grim. But instead of pushing it away, I opened myself to it. This way of being with the world that Julian offers is so porous, you receive it, you say yes to it. And so, there was this extraordinary psychological strength that came from Julian.

## Are there other ways in which you've engaged with Julian's writings?

As I came to the end of my treatment, I wanted to honour her, because she'd given me so much. This idea presented itself to me that I might tell her story. Because we know so little about her, it would be an act of the imagination, a creative act. And the book just emerged. It will be published for May 2023, which is the 650th anniversary of the revelations.

A lecture by Dr. Claire Gilbert, "Miles to Go Before I Sleep: My Journey with Julian" is being held at **Our Lady Saint Mary South Creake on 30 September at 19:00.**

**The event is free.**

*Ellen Davis*

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