

A Quiet Day in Lent, March 2020

by Rosemary Willis

Opening – Part 1

(If you have the opportunity, this may be best outside)

You might look at this link for art work on trees - there are some evocative images:
<http://www.fionafouhy.com/forests.html> (Fiona Fouhy is Jane Chaplin's daughter)

*The Lord reigns. Let the heavens rejoice and earth be glad
Let the sea resound and all in it
Let the fields be jubilant
Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy
They will sing before the Lord.*

(Psalm 96. v12)

*Blessed are they who walk with the Lord
Their delight is in the Lord
They are like trees planted by the streams of water
Which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. (Psalm 1, adapted)*

*Blessed is the person who trusts in the Lord
Has confidence in Him
They will be like a tree planted by the water
It sends out its roots by the stream
It does not fear when the heat comes
Its leaves are always green,
Has no worries for the year of drought and never fails to bear fruit. (Jeremiah 17. 8)*

Allow yourself to just be still and listen and take a moment.

You may remember the trees in the garden at The Grove; they were planted some 200 years ago – seeing years of people coming and going. Changes of the land and houses.

Can you picture...

The majesty of the **BEECH TREE** towering over the garden – standing strong and fruitful for 200 years in the garden.

The **WEeping ASH TREE** with its mis-shapen boughs, broken by years of wear. They once were the playground of the children swinging on boughs – making a shelter of boughs enough to hide underneath like a lady's crinoline; a complete house.

The **MULBERRY TREE** – a tree that gives luscious fruit and boughs that break and then root again to regrow. What an amazing feat.

The **OAK TREE** – standing solid – slow growing, a useful and workable wood. A tree being able to support the most diverse set of creatures – birds, insects, fungi – a home and shelter for all comers – protecting more creatures than any other tree.

Remember your own favourite trees and forest.

Let's follow the invitation of these majestic trees simply to stand still and allow earth and heaven to meet within us. Let's listen to the whisperers of wisdom from these gentle silent giants.

Trees put down deep roots, seeking nourishment, water and a place of belonging. Our being, too, has deep roots, sustaining us through all that life throws at us. The space of prayer we might call the forest invites us to become still and quiet to reconnect with those deep roots.

What nourishes your heart?

What ground water feeds the depths of your soul?

Where is your place of belonging?

Trees raise their crowns to the heavens, straining towards the sun, the source of their natural energy. They spread their branches out to embrace the world around them, to give shelter to the birds and other creatures of the forest. Their leaves give oxygen, their blossoms joy, their fruits give us food.

Simply stand still in your forest and notice your own roots and your own crown, your own unique and necessary place in the forest.

Which parts of your life give life to the world?

Which aspects of your heart most long to reach out to others?

What fruit does your life give to those around you?

Sometimes when we feel lost, we find ourselves by standing still. The answer to our question "Where am I?" lies right there in our own hearts. You are who you are.

(Margaret Silf - Landscapes of Prayer)

Be silent

Be still

Alone, empty before God

Say nothing

Ask nothing

Be silent

Be still

Alone, empty before God

That is all

He knows

He understands

He loves you with an enormous love

He just wants to look upon you with his love

So silent and still be

Let God love you

Part 2

He himself bore our sins in this body on the tree so we might die to sin and live for righteousness by his wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2. 24)

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The Coming

*And God held in his hand
A small globe. Look, he said,
The son looked. Far off,
As through water, he saw
A scorched land of fierce
Colour. The light burned
There; crusted buildings
Cast their shadows; a bright
Serpent, a river
Uncoiled itself, radiant
With slime*

*On a bare
Hill a bare tree saddened
The sky. Many people
Held out their thin arms
To it, as though waiting
For a vanished April
To returned to its crossed
Boughs.
The son watched
Them. Let me go there, he said.*

(R S Thomas - Collected Poems)

*The tree stripped bare
is the tree of life for us.*



Take some time to allow the images and thoughts to coalesce – what does this mean for you?

We are forgiven people ...

*Truly dust we are and to dust we return
In the dust of Ash Wednesday*

*For all those days you felt like dust, like dirt
as if all you had to do was turn your face to the wind and be scattered to
the four corners.*

Did you not know what the Holy One can do with dust?

This is the day we say we are scorched

So let us be marked

Not for sorrow

Nor shame not for false humility or thinking we are less than we are

But for claiming what God can do within the dust, within the dirt

Within the stuff of which the world is made

*And that the stars blaze in our bones and the galaxies that spiral inside
the smudge we bear.*

(Jan Richardson - Circle of Grace)

Part 3

Do you remember the storm of 1987? So many trees lost - you may remember it, the devastation around. It transformed the face of Britain overnight. Sevenoaks became One oak. I heard a story recently about the trees of Kew – one spindly tree that has been ailing before the storm; they wondered what was wrong with it. Does it need to be cut down as it's not thriving? They thought it would never survive the storm. But no. There it was, still hanging on; although the storm had picked it up and dropped it down again. They thought, well, we will clear up the rest of the thousands they lost and come back to this one. I don't know how long it took for them to clear up the lost trees but when they finally came back to this spindly one – it had made the most glorious recovery and had flourished. And it is still flourishing now, putting on years of growth and height. It just needed a shake-up. The storm had stopped its roots being compacted and now it had set down more roots that gave it a firm foundation and a new lease of life.

“Hard pressed but not crushed”

Look again at the pictures by Fiona:

<http://www.fionafouhy.com/forests.html>

I love her picture of the Tree “Hard pressed but not crushed”.

We are going through a testing time. Fiona’s picture encapsulates that for me.

We may be lost in the forest at present, but we can listen to the wisdom of the trees. The answer may be hidden in the very place where you feel you are lost.

How deep are your roots and what really nourishes your soul?

We may feel like a tree stripped of its protective bark, but even when trees are stripped they have the energy to re-grow; there is a spring coming. Can you trust this?

God our father shelters us all like the Oak Tree, a place of refuge for all comers - He is the place of rest and home like the Weeping Ash Tree.

Your life is like a tree, it is an indispensable part of the mighty forest. What fruits would you want to bear for all the creatures of that forest?

In what ways do your roots need a good shake-up so that they can be replanted to flourish even more?

What boughs need to be broken off, that they may be replanted and provide new growth?

How, in the present time, can you do something socially, for those around you or in the wider community – helping top-up Foodbanks, making contact with the community?

Environmentally, changes to your practices – think about joining a pressure group or volunteer for one.

Prayer life – spend more time – taking time mindfully and being kind to yourself?

Something else?

Take some time to recall a forest you loved to walk in and imagine yourself there. Let timeless stillness bring you peace, clarity and new directions.

A blessing

I should tell you at the outset
This blessing will require you to do some work.

First You must simply let this blessing fall from your hand

As if it were a small thing

you could easily let slip through your fingers

As if it were not most precious to you

as if your life did not depend on it

Next, you must trust that this blessing knows where it is going,

that it understands the ways of the dark,

that it is wise to seasons and times.

Then- and I know this blessing has already asked much of you -

It is to be hoped you will rest and learn

that something is at work

when all seems still

seems dormant, seems dead.

I promise you

this blessing has not abandoned you.

I promise you this blessing is on its way back

to you.

I promise you this blessing will rise

green and whole and new.

(Jan Richardson - Circle of Grace)

And, as you go, carry with you two stones – one for peace and the other for courage.

Hope where we had ceased to hope

Hope amid what threatens hope

Hope with those who feed our hope

Hope beyond what we had hoped

Hope that takes us past our fears

Hope that calls us to life

Hope that holds us beyond death

Hope that blesses those to come.

(Jan Richardson - Circle of Grace)

Acknowledgements:

Fiona Fouhy

Circle of Grace – Jan Richardson

Landscapes of prayer – Margaret Silf

The Coming – RS Thomas