

Thought for the day: 3–9 May 2021

by Rosemary Willis

Monday 3rd - Trees

Winter and just before spring is a great time to really look at trees – not in their full-leaf glory, but the shapes and structure they have. Naked of leaf, you can see them for what they are. Some stately and magnificent like oak and horse chestnut, some less so – the pioneer species more spindly, like birch or hazel, the beautifully symmetrical shape of hornbeam or aspen.

Some are torn and twisted by the storms, droughts and floods that life has thrown at them. Gnarled and broken with injuries.

There is one I have seen that has melded its bark around a horizontal railing, and incorporated it into the tree as if it is holding the railing in its teeth. Another has a spear of a railing through its heart. Some others have lost all their insides though still growing; branches are sprouting out of the edges of the bark but the tree is hollow and no heartwood. They will never reach their full potential now.

I wonder if people are like trees – storm-blown, twisted with life's ravages – especially in these times. Like the trees, we need our faith and our hope to be deep rooted in God and from the heart, so that we might reach our full potential and bear fruit.

What solid roots do we need to put down now? Where is our heart for our faith and our reliance on our God? Look to your God with hope and do some digging to get the roots firmly in place.

*Blessed is the person who trusts in the Lord,
has confidence in Him.*

*They will be like a tree planted by the water,
that sends out its roots by the stream.*

*It does not fear when the heat comes;
its leaves are always green.*

*It has no worries for the year of drought and never fails to
bear fruit. (Jeremiah 17. 7-8)*



Tuesday 4th - Stuck in the Mud

You may have heard this story before, but I think it bears telling again with a different slant.

The Meads have been very waterlogged in the past year (though bone dry now). I don't mind a boot full or two when I am walking. Usually, I like a circular walk to take in all the sights. However, this exploration was a bridge too far.

On this particular walk, the mud was very, very wet and I was sinking in with each step. The strength of the suction on each step made it harder and harder to release my foot from the soggy mass. As I lifted one foot, I could see the sole being sucked from my (non) walking boots. With each step, more and more sole pulled off making it increasingly difficult to keep going.

Finally, I ripped the sole off and carried on - I was not to be defeated! My feet went in knee deep and it became almost impossible to get each foot out again. In fact, so difficult that it couldn't be done. I couldn't get either foot out - what now? I couldn't just stand there.

Well, the only way out was to crawl, and so I did - I crawled 20/30 yards, laughing to myself about what a pickle I was in! I even crawled back to pick up my hat. And so I reached the end and finally stood up - covered in mud.

It did make me think, though. Sometimes, there are times when there is no way out, nothing we can do but to drop to our knees and pray. Maybe we have no words left and it's all we can do. There's no laughter then, but there may be tears.

When we have nowhere to go except to our God, and no words left to say, our God hears us.

God will be with us in the mire – the sadness, the confusion, the lostness.

God of all comfort, remind us you are with us when we feel so lost, confused and devastated.

'Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid.' (John 14. 27)



Wednesday 5th - Be the change you want to see

In my adventures on the Meads this year, I have seen so many glorious things.

The sunrises, each one unique, show the meadows and hills in a glorious light revealing the castles in the air and the colours of nature.

Even when I think it's going to be dull, dull, dull and the weather poor, something happens, and I see a treasure; a fleeting kingfisher or the sighting of a short-eared owl or badger. The calmness and serenity of the Meads makes me feel good. And it ministers to my soul.

What I don't like is the Meads being treated like a trash heap, my attention being drawn away from the beauty of the area by piles of beer cans. The detritus from a takeaway left strewn over the fields makes my blood boil.

Well, it's no good just moaning, so I have taken up the litter picker and I clear away the beer cans and rubbish. It all starts small, doesn't it? Some people thank me for what I am doing, but that irritates me now. What I want them to do is help keep the place looking good. Some people tell me they go litter picking in their road or have joined a group. Great stuff.

And that's what Gandhi was talking about: 'Be the change you want to see in the world'.

It is not enough to just talk about things that need changing. It needs action.

What change do you want to see? And what does that mean for you to do or to be?

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

(Romans 12. 2)



Thursday 6th - Walking in the light

People think it may be frightening to walk on the Meads very early in the morning in the dark before the sun has thought about rising, or at night even when the moon is full. I actually find it very soothing. It's quiet and the dark wraps itself around me.

I know the Meads well now. I know the paths – the muddy quagmires, the pools, the humps and bumps. I can make out the shadows of bushes, tall reeds and trees. At night with a full moon, it is often easier to see than it is before dawn when there is no moon; then it's just dark and no clues that the light will be changing.

Imperceptibly the dark slowly turns to something akin to light. At first I can barely see the change and don't notice anything. As the light grows I can see the path more clearly and the full colours of the trees and plants become alive. It is not guesswork anymore. The way is clear ahead.

How much better if we have a guide to the path we might take than all the guesswork in the dark?

You are a lamp to guide my feet and a light to my path.
(Psalm 119. 105)

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*
(Psalm 23. 4)



Friday 7th - Communication

I think the best communicators are flocks of tits. In winter, the flocks build up and you may have a flock of 20 or so birds moving across their territory. There is safety in numbers in winter; they huddle up together to keep warm. In the spring, they are finding out where the best food sources are and everyone keeps an eye out for the young ones so they don't get picked off by predators. In the spring, they are small family groups but, of course, they keep in contact with each other.

I watch a group working their way over a copse of willow trees. They call to each other incessantly, letting everyone know where they are and when they are going on to the next tree, so that everyone will pile over to the same tree when they are ready. This is living in community.

The community of people that we care for has built up well over lockdown and we have formed good means of communication with different groups, making sure we are all ok. New methods have been employed and we have all made great leaps with technology, for which we are so grateful. It has been an opportunity to really get to know people beneath our polite exterior.

Now that lockdown may well be coming to an end and we might get back to 'normal', how will we continue? How do we keep these relationships alive? How do we keep these new communication channels open? Or do we go back to

the 'old normal' and rush about with our 'busy, important' lives and forget about the value of community?

'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

(Matthew 25. 40)



Saturday 8th - Dead or Alive

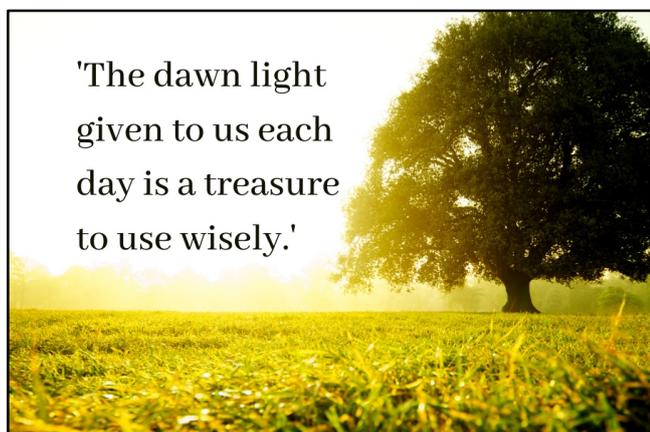
I don't see much death on the Meads (it's not like *Death on the Nile*). Very little, in fact; it's mostly cleared away by foxes, crows, magpies and anything else that forages for carrion. I saw a dead swan on the railway line, and a lapwing that just seemed to have expired.

The swan appeared to have been electrocuted by the lines, lying dead between the rails – a nasty accident, a misjudgement/miscalculation in take-off or landing?

The lapwing, I can only surmise, was sickly and came to its natural end. Ok, a bit gruesome. Then, when the crows and

magpies had cleared up, I went to investigate the commotion and look at the remains – there was hardly anything left. They had done a good job – only wings remained. Enough for flight for the new resurrection?

The kingfishers of Monet's bridge did not survive the winter either. I did not see their demise. I have not seen them since January. I miss them. I treasure seeing them, however fleeting. In their place, a family of mallard and seven ducklings hoovering up the insects over the water.



'The dawn light given to us each day is a treasure to use wisely.'

Normally we have death pretty cleared up, too. However, we have had to face it head on in this past year.

The dawn light given to us each day is a treasure to use wisely.

From one of Alan's recent [sermons](#):

'Famously Jesus once said, "I am the resurrection". I am the life that has the last word, the love that ultimately wins. Our question then, today, is: 'How will I be the resurrection? How will I live this truth out through these hands, these feet?'

'Each time we love again after having our love rejected, we share in the power of the resurrection. Each time we hope again after having our hope smashed to pieces, we share in

the power of the resurrection. Each time we pick up the pieces, wipe our tears, face the sun and start again, we share in the power of the resurrection.'

(Jesuit Pratap Naik)

Sunday 9th - Where is God?

For most of the year I have been looking for birds on the Meads, although I've also loved all the different flowers and trees I have seen. I keep a list of all the birds I see, and I have now reached a total of 77 different species. Not bad for a small area with its differing terrain; two rivers, a large lake, scrubland, open fields and Ware Park with its arboretum.

It has been a great pleasure for me to go out on the Meads and Ware Park to walk and to think; listening to birds chorusing in the early morning and watching them in their various habitats; long-tailed blue and great tits searching the willows for grubs; a gold crest among the fir trees; pied, grey and now yellow wagtails along the new river.



So, which birds were missing from my list? Throughout the year, I had not seen or heard a tree creeper - a mouse-like bird that travels up trees looking for food; pure white below and mottled browns above.

I was watching around the arboretum in Ware Park this last week thinking, 'How come I have not seen one at all? These trees look the right sort'. I sat for a while and watched the daffodils waving in the breeze, the squirrels playing, a red kite flying over, a few tits flying around. It was not a very lively place, but still and beautiful.

I moved on. The next area was much greener, with many birds flying to and fro, busy nesting or feeding. And then a tree creeper arrived at a silver birch in front of me. It travelled up and moved on to the bottom of the next tree. It flew away and then came back to another and continued its work up the trees, visiting seven of them in all. After not seeing a tree creeper for the year, this was great. It felt as though one place was alive and the other dead, and this reminded me of the quotation:

'Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen'

(Luke 24. 5)

We can find a little bit of God in every person we meet. God speaks to us and we can encounter Him in amazing, unlikely and unexpected places, people and situations.