

Renew...Refresh...Restore...Retreat

**... Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest ...
(Mark 6:31)**



Sacred Spaces – the branches of a sycamore

Trees are mentioned quite frequently in the Bible. In fact, the created world is a theme that runs through Scripture from beginning (the creation of the Garden of Eden) to end (the fruitful, healing trees of life in the restored Eden). God often speaks to his people using trees as metaphors, and many of Jesus' parables feature trees (or plant-life) of some kind.

One very interesting story is how a tree was used to bring about a healing encounter between Jesus and a wealthy government worker.

Once again, we are exploring how unusual places and situations become sacred spaces of encounter – and here, we encounter Jesus from within the branches of a tree.

Let's reflect together on what God is saying to us through this encounter – and broaden our perspective a little to think about what the trees of the earth have to say to us.

Here is the video link if you would like to follow this on-line:- <https://youtu.be/iBFo08TxYdY>

Sacred Spaces – the branches of a sycamore

Call to Worship

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let them say among the nations, “The Lord reigns!”
Let the sea resound, and all that is in it;
let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them!

Let the trees of the forest sing,
let them sing for joy before the Lord,
for he comes to judge the earth.
Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

1 Chron 16:31-34

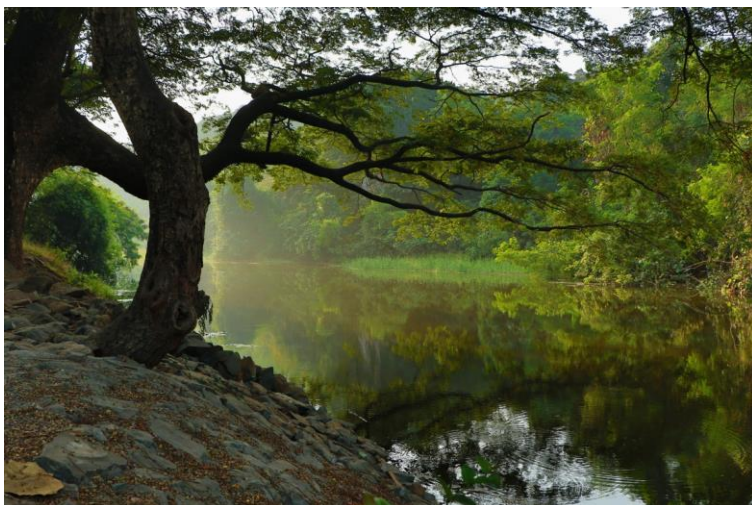


Scripture

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,
²but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.
³That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers. Ps 1:1-3

Prayer

O Lord, I come rejoicing before you like the trees of the forest!
Let my roots grow deep into the fertile soil of your love so I can stand firm and be fruitful for you.
Thank you for the fruitfulness and beauty you bring into my life.
May I be like an olive tree, flourishing in your house,
trusting in your unfailing love forever.
I sing for joy for all you have done for me.
I shout aloud with the earth beneath me,
And burst into song with the mountains, forests and trees,
For you have blessed us and your glory is displayed everywhere we look.¹



Scripture

But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD,
whose confidence is 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 heat comes;
its leaves are always green.
It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit.
Jer 17:7-8

¹ From Ps 1; 52; Is 44; Jer 17

Reflection

The story is told of a man who wanted to see who Jesus was. He was not tall, dark and handsome – well, strictly speaking we don't know all of that for sure. We do know he was short, wealthy and unpopular, given that he was a tax collector and possibly wealthy because of how he collected the taxes. There is much we don't know about Zaccheus, but we do know he was considered by others to be a sinner and certainly not worthy of Jesus' time or favour. We don't know what he had heard about Jesus, yet obviously he had heard enough to make him curious.

We catch only a glimpse of this man in Luke's account of Jesus' life. He was a seeker. He wanted to see – and he went to some effort to be able to do that properly. Because of his height, he needed to be above the crowd – and perhaps because of his unpopularity, he also wanted to be separate from the crowd, unnoticed, hidden away in the foliage of a sycamore tree – unseen, yet able to see.

Amongst the crowd of people, Jesus knows Zaccheus is tucked away above them, nestled in the branches. Unexpectedly, he stops – he looks up – he calls Zaccheus by name.

And he calls him home – in inviting himself to Zaccheus' home for the day, Jesus is giving Zaccheus the opportunity to come home. To be at home. To find his true home – to discover who he is, other than a wealthy, unpopular tax collector.

Zaccheus welcomes his guest gladly, despite the mutterings of disapproval from the crowd, despite the thoughts that must be going through their minds about his unworthiness.

Jesus sees – names – recognises the longing and need for healing in Zaccheus.

Zaccheus welcomes the invitation to be at home with Jesus

– and immediately proclaims his intention to make things right.

From a desire to see, and the commitment to do whatever necessary in order to see, comes an encounter that leads to transformation.

Zaccheus' immediate response, after a warm welcome, was the commitment to make things right, to restore what needed to be restored –

this is a whole-hearted and life-transforming commitment that would impact his whole household.
(from Luke 19:1-10)

Spend some moments in quiet reflection on this sacred encounter with Jesus.

What speaks to you from this story?

Are there times in your own life when you have longed to truly see Jesus, or to see him more clearly?

Are there 'trees' you have needed to 'climb' to get a clearer perspective?

When have you truly felt seen, known and understood by Jesus?

What does it mean for you to welcome Jesus into your home?

How do you experience being home with Jesus?

*As you draw closer to Jesus, perhaps seeing him and being seen in new ways,
are there things in your life that you feel need to be made right?*

How have such sacred encounters with Jesus brought transformation, healing and new life to you?

How has God used the beauty of Creation to draw you deeper into relationship with him?

Pause for silent prayer and reflection



Scripture

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God.

They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.

Ps 92:12-15

Prayer

Open my eyes, Lord, that I might see you as you pass by.

Open my heart to where you are already at work within and around me.

Give me courage to confront obstacles that stand in the way
of me truly seeing who you are.

Give me courage to stand in vulnerability before you,
knowing that you see me more clearly and more deeply than I am sometimes comfortable with.

I welcome you into the home of my heart, into the dwelling-place of my life.

Please show me what it means to live whole-heartedly at home with you.²

Scripture

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

Revelation 22:1-6

Prayer

Creator God, anchor me in your love.

Jesus, living vine, move and grow in me that I may move and grow in you.

Spirit of life, flow in me that I may bear the fruit of love, joy, peace and patience.

You, Lord, are the vine; we are the branches.

Help us to remain connected to you, as you dwell within each of us.

Remind us of the hope we have that all will be renewed and restored,
and that one day we will celebrate together the healing of the nations
and the flourishing of all your people.³



Benediction

May you flourish like an olive tree in the house of the Lord – even during times of drought and sorrow.

May you grow strong in faith and endure, like the cedars of Lebanon – even when you feel weak.

May you produce fruit in season and your leaf never wither, though you may not always see it.

May you rejoice and clap your hands with the trees of the field,

and burst into song with the mountains and hills – when you least feel like singing.

And may you see and know the breath and presence of the Creator Spirit in all things and at all times.⁴

² Jo-anne Brown 2020

³ J.B.

⁴ J.B.

REFLECTION:

How does nature help you to connect with God?

Think of the ways you have experienced God in the beauty of the created world.

What have you learned about God or yourself from these experiences?

GOING DEEPER: Here are some suggestions that may help you to engage more deeply with this theme.

- **The Bible** has a lot to say about trees. They are often used as a metaphor to speak about rest, growth restoration, new life, abiding in Christ. Read some of these verses and reflect on what they tell you about God and about you. Think about what God might be saying to you in your circumstances through his words: Gen 2:9; Ex 15:27; Deut 8:7-9; Ezekiel 47:12; Micah 4:4;
- **Reflect** on how you have encountered God unexpectedly through nature. What that was like for you? How did you experience God in this time? What have you learnt about God (and yourself) and how has that impacted your relationship? Are you facing a situation now where you are longing to see God more clearly? What is God saying to you in the midst of this situation?
- You could use one of the Bible passages or prayers provided in the material to practise **Lectio Divina**. (see page 7)
- **Visualise Scripture!** Jesus often uses trees in parables, or as metaphors. Choose one such Bible passage and reflect on what truth is hidden within. (It may be helpful to use a concordance). Read it through slowly – all of it or some selected verses. Close your eyes and picture what is being described. What do you see, smell, hear? How is God revealing himself to you through this? How could you act out these verses? You could either record this experience in your journal or share it with someone. Some examples are: Matthew 7:15-18; 13:31-32; Luke 13:6-9; Matthew 21:18-22;
- **Meditate:** There are many passages that talk about the trees rejoicing, praising God or flourishing. One such passage or verse may be good to meditate on: e.g., 1 Chron 16:34; Ps 96:11-13; Ps 1:3; 52:8-9; 92:12-15; 148:7-13; Is 55:12-13
- If you enjoy being **creative**, find some way to express how nature helps you to connect with God. You can create a collage, or draw, paint, use clay, write a poem or compose a song. If you enjoy working with clay (or plasticine) take a piece of clay and knead it in your hands. As you feel it moving beneath your fingers, let it move into the shape of something that speaks to you about this.
- Go for a **walk** – look at, listen to and notice the trees around you. How do you see God at work? Is there anything that challenges or inspires you to respond to God's work or word in you in a different way? What Scripture verses come to mind?
- If you are **sharing** this retreat day with someone else, spend some time sharing your experiences. Pray together.
- If you like to **journal**, make a note of what you have experienced during this retreat time in your journal. A simple way to do this is to:

Thank God for Who He is and what He is doing in your life

Notice what is happening around you and in you

Respond to what God has shown you, by thanking Him, repenting, or recommitting yourself to Him

- **Simply sit in His presence.** We don't have to do anything to enjoy being in His presence! We are in His will when we are fully and completely in His presence, with our hearts focussed on Him.

CREATIVE IDEAS FOR EXPLORING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

Create a Collage using words, images of pictures cut/torn out from magazines or old books. When you have collected enough, begin gluing them on to a piece of paper. Notice the words and images that stand out for you. Is there a theme? Is God revealing something to you, or inviting you to respond in some way.

You can begin this activity with a question or a theme in mind, or just pray quietly and ask God to guide you in choosing what should be glued on your page.

If you don't have access to magazines, you can create a word image by writing words, in **different sizes, shapes, COLOURS**

Explore using different markers and pencils on paper.

Contemplative Photography

Take your camera, or an iPhone/iPad that can take photos and go for a walk - this can be either inside or outside.

Don't choose the usual subjects to photograph (a beautiful scene, etc) but allow God to draw your attention to something. The goal is not to take a lovely photo, but to use your camera to see where God is present and to capture how He is speaking to you.

Look at it for a few moments before taking a photo. Ask God what He wants to say to you through this object. You might find your attention drawn to several things so feel free to take several photos. But then choose the one that most speaks to you.

When you have your image, you might like to reflect on it...

Look at the image and let your eyes stay with the very first thing that you see. Keep your attention on that one part of the image that first catches your eye. Try to keep your eyes from wandering to other parts of the picture. Breathe deeply and let yourself gaze at that part of the image for a minute or so.

Now, let your eyes gaze at the whole image.
Take your time and look at every part of the photograph. See it all.
Reflect on the image for a minute or so.

Consider the following questions:

What emotions does this image evoke in you?
What does the image stir up in you, bring forth in you?
Does this image lead you into an attitude of prayer?
If so, let these prayers take form in you. Write them down if you desire.

Now, offer your prayers to God in a final time of silence.

(from Christine Valders Painter, *Seeing with the Eyes of the Heart*,
Sorin Books: Notre Dame, Indiana, 2013, Ch 1 & 2.)

Explore different ways of using words: write a Haiku

A haiku is a three-line, beautifully descriptive, form of poetry, with just 17 syllables. The first line is 5 syllables, the second is 7 syllables, and the third is 5 syllables like the first. For example:

Breathe deep, salty air
Dance in cool blue foaming waves
Breathe, breathe deep, be healed

LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina is an ancient spiritual practice from the Christian monastic tradition. Its title derives from the Latin words meaning reading and divine/holy. In Lectio Divina, we seek to experience the presence of God through reading and listening, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. Lectio Divina can be practiced both by individuals and in groups.

Practicing Lectio Divina Individually

1. Text

Begin by choosing a section of Scripture that you would like to read and pray. You can choose the text randomly or use a liturgical book, such as The Book of Common Prayer. Try not to set a goal for how much content you will cover; the goal is to listen for God and to experience his presence.

2. Preparation

Do what you must to quiet and prepare yourself to hear from God. If you need to find a quiet room, sit in silence for several minutes, or sit in a comfortable chair, take whatever posture will help you prepare to receive and experience God's presence.

3. Reading/Listening

When you sense that your heart is prepared, begin by slowly reading the passage of Scripture that you have selected. Move slowly through sentences and phrases. As you read, pay attention to what word, phrase, or idea catches your attention.

4. Meditation

Begin to meditate on the word, phrase, or idea that has captured your attention. Repeat it again and again.

Consider:

What thoughts come to mind as you meditate on this word, phrase, or idea?

What are you reminded of in your life?

What does it make you hope for?

Meditation is no easy task—as you try to concentrate don't be disappointed if random thoughts enter your head. As they do, offer them to God.

5. Prayer

Now begin to speak to God. Tell God what word, phrase, or idea captured your attention and what came to mind as you meditated upon it. How is God using this word, phrase, or idea to bless and transform you? Tell God what you have been thinking and feeling as you've listened and meditated. Tell God how you hope this word, phrase, or idea will change your heart to be more like His.

6. Contemplation

Finish by focusing your attention on the fact that God's presence is with you. If as you try to focus on God's presence you sense a need to read the text again, to continue meditating, or to simply continue talking with God, allow yourself to do so. As you do, know that you are in the presence of God.

THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN - Finding the movement of the Spirit in our daily lives as we review our day.

This is something that can be done throughout the day or at the end of the day. It helps us to become more aware of and focused on the presence of God in the midst of everyday life.

1. Recognize the presence of God

Be still and know that you are with God.

2. Look at your day with gratitude

Acknowledge God in the big and small things of life.

3. Review your day

When or where in the past 24 hours did you feel you were cooperating most fully with God's action in your life? When were you resisting?

Ask yourself

- What habits and life patterns do I notice?
- When did I feel most alive? Most drained of life?
- When did I have the greatest sense of belonging? When did I feel most alone?
- When did I give love? Where did I receive love?
- When did I feel most fully myself? Least myself?
- When did I feel most whole? Most fragmented?

4. Reconcile and Resolve

- Seek forgiveness
- Ask for direction
- Share a concern
- Express gratitude
- Resolve to move forward

Mars Hill Bible Church marshill.org/teaching/sp