

Meditation – The Tree of Life - 10th May 2022

I am a lover of trees and this Spring I have been especially aware of their fresh beauty, the myriad greens shown in their new foliage, their striking and contrasting forms that their “leafing” has created in the landscape.

We are so blessed in Riding Mill to live in a place much-endowed with trees but as John and I drove back from Lancashire this past weekend I was inspired by the richness of the tree-studded countryside set against a backdrop of the rounded, majesty of the Pennines. God has given us such a beautiful world in which trees renew themselves annually. A miraculous gift!

My watching of the Spring explosion of leafing trees set me to thinking about *the Tree of Life* – so many meanings and contexts.

My first thought was of the cross-stitch samplers I stitched for my parents and parents-in law. The central motif in each of those samplers was a traditional Tree of Life.



This tree has been planted in an urn which is said to be the source of life. There are fruits on the tree which confer immortality, alluding to that other tree in Genesis, telling us that in the garden in Paradise, in Eden, there were all kinds of trees ...

“Trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Genesis 1, verse 9.

These were God’s gifts to Man but they were abused.

In Revelation 22, 1-3 we read of the River and, again, the Tree of Life

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him."

So, for us, Jesus Christ is the Tree of Life, the source and means of maintaining life.

John 15:5 *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."*

John 14, 6 *"Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

As I was thinking about the Genesis story and the fall of Man from eating from the tree of knowledge, I was coincidentally reading a book - Monk: **Art and the Soul**, an Imaginarium.- a collection of discussions with poets and artists.

One of the interviews was with a contemporary artist, Mark Cazalet, whose work is often associated with a spiritual view of the world. One of his most famous works is a painting, oil on panel (2003), a commission for Chelmsford Cathedral, entitled *The Tree of Life*.



(Taken from the Chelmsford Cathedral website)

“Mark wanted the symmetrical design of the tree to represent opposing ideas with the tree bursting into life on one side and dying back on the other. His favourite part (of the painting) is Judas resurrected. Its aim is to confront the viewer with the fruits of the Industrial West’s exploitation of the planet and its people, signified by the landfill site in the lower left corner, on the tree’s dying side.

The surface question posed by the work is ‘**can death be transformed to life?**’; the deeper question is ‘**can humanity be redeemed?**’. These are focused on the fate of one individual: Judas. The dead body of Judas hangs from the lower dying branches, his discarded silver tumbling into the landfill, as if to say, ‘This is where love of money has got us’. But in the upper, living branches, populated by birds and butterflies, we find Judas resurrected, eagerly climbing higher and higher, fortified on his journey with a thermos and sandwiches.”

To return to my meditating on the Tree of Life -So how do I gather all my thoughts and imagery together about the Tree of Life.

It is a story, for me, about God’s provision to us of all that is good and feeds us.

Man rejects His bounty and suffers as a consequence.

However, ours is a generous, forgiving God who had a plan for our salvation. Once again a tree is involved, the Tree of the Cross.

Through His death on the Cross, that tree of suffering led to Christ’s Resurrection, new life which has set us free. Jesus has shown us that forgiveness is possible for our sins.

Linking this to Cazalet’s painting, even Judas, Christ’s betrayer, can be forgiven. And be brought to new life. And even our abuse of God’s beautiful world can be reversed and renewed.

For The Healing Of The Nations,
God, We Pray With One Accord;
For A Just And Equal Sharing
Of The Things That Earth Affords.
To A Life Of Love In Action
Help Us Rise And Pledge Our Word.
