

Third Sunday before Lent, 13th February 2022; Canongate Kirk

Jeremiah 17: 8 *Blessed are those who trust in the Lord.... They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream.*

Having marked Accession Sunday last week, and therefore the beginning of The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, our readings this morning – or at least the Psalm and the Old Testament reading – somehow encourage us to continue the theme but with particular reference to the Queen's Green Canopy, the current initiative to mark the Jubilee with a flurry of tree-planting across the country. *Those whose delight is in the law of the Lord*, suggests the Psalmist, *are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.* And likewise Jeremiah, *Blessed are those who trust in the Lord.... They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream.*

We have two trees in our ground that were planted by The Queen herself, the first - a cherry tree - by the Kirkyard Gates in June 1952 on Her Majesty's first visit to Edinburgh after her accession, and the second – a copper beech - in the front garden of the Manse, planted in 1969 during The Queen's visit to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. And elsewhere in the Kirkyard we have trees planted by other members of the Royal Family including Prince Philip and The Queen Mother, and various Lord High Commissioners to the General Assembly. I hope very much that we will be able to add to them in due course a new tree as part of the Queen's Green Canopy, though it might involve some delicate negotiations with the City Council who are responsible for the upkeep of the Kirkyard. A number of years ago I asked them to remove a tree that had died. It was one of a pair that had been planted together by the steps over on the north side behind me. The other one had survived but when I caught up with the Council workers they had just cut both trees down. I ran round to complain that only one was dead and needing to be removed. Oh well, I was told, "they're both deid noo". It sounds like our Biblical trees fared rather better, *trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. Blessed are those who trust in the Lord.... They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream.*

Both the psalm set for today and the Old Testament reading refer to the planting of a tree, with the emphasis not so much on who plants it but on where it is planted, in each case by water, and in each case a classic example of the lengths to which Biblical writers would go to find an image or a metaphor to illustrate their teaching, an image or a metaphor that those who would hear this teaching could quickly grasp and understand. *Blessed are those who trust in the Lord.... They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream.*

Similarly the hymn-writer Horatius Bonar, himself buried in the north east corner of our Kirkyard, painted pictures with words, but the tune we've just sung is also significant and symbolic. The Rowan Tree is a Scottish traditional melody and according to Scottish traditional folklore such trees were often planted near gates and doorways to keep witches at bay. They were considered to be symbols of protection and prosperity, but beyond the familiar folk tune the words of Bonar's hymn recall the encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well in the heat of the day, and remind us of a surer source of protection and prosperity:

*I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in him.*

Today's Gospel reading reminds us not only of those who came to Jesus but who responded to him in ever widening circles. *He came down with them and stood on a level place, St Luke tells us, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed...*

Like ourselves in our own day, they came to Jesus from different places and for different reasons. But they all came because they trusted him. *Blessed are those who trust in the Lord.... They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream.*

Amen.