

IN THE GARDEN

There in the Garden was a Tree
Beautiful to behold -
A beauty beyond the singing of it
Full-square, rooted in the humus of the sweet-smelling earth;
Delicate in its latticed leaf-work, like a galaxy of stars.
And God had given us this Tree.

There in the Garden was a Tree
Marvellous to behold was its Fruit
And God walked in the cool of the day
Among the trees of the Garden and saw shameful Man-
The Apple of His Eye-
Had plucked that forbidden Fruit.

There in the Garden was a Tree,
Sorrowful to behold and beyond the singing of it.
Full-square, rooted in humility in the bitter earth.
Full-spanning the stars with its two pruned branches;
The Apple of His Eye hung on that Tree
So we could bear a sweet fruit.

There in the Garden is a still more glorious Tree
Whose leaves will breathe songs of healing,
A healing beyond the singing of it.
For this bitter earth has become sweet again,
And after the pruning comes the blossoming,
And so we will walk with God in His Garden.

It was early morning on Easter Sunday in 1991 that I woke at around 5am with the first line of this poem rattling around in my head. I had recently lost my Granddad, a wonderful man who had a big influence on my life. He was a gardener. His huge hands loved the earth and his back garden was as fertile as it possibly could be. Granddad did not believe in using pesticides. One of his favourite funny sayings was (and if you can imagine him speaking with a strong Suffolk accent it helps): "Foisons are scientifically poisoning the 'ole world!"

He was a man of the land from rural Suffolk who was forced, in the 1920s, to find alternative work in Ipswich because of the mechanisation of farming and the slump. And although he worked as a mental nurse for 30 years, his true calling was to find fruitfulness in the garden.

That was where he came alive, with his rose trees and his spuds and his God. There was fruitfulness and healing in that garden as he carried the scars of those he cared for on the wards.

The picture of the garden as a place of promise plays a pivotal role in the story of God and humanity. The beauty of a wild and fruitful garden starts the bible account in Genesis, with all the accompanying tragedy of the one Tree. And at the end of the Christian scriptures, in Revelation Comes the wonderful picture of a city garden with a river flowing and a superabundance of trees, this time Trees of Healing. And in the middle, between earth and heaven, is the Tree which is both tragic and healing - Christ's tree, our tree; the tree that speaks of his wounds and our salvation, his death and our life, his horror and our hope.

Each year, the mystery of Easter—the cruel cross and the revival of resurrection—weaves its story into our story. We seek to remind ourselves of the cost of Christ's cross and at times are knocked sideways by it. We try to fathom the costly grace of God freely given. And we, with all our wounds and scars, seek afresh to live in the power of Christ's resurrection.

The good news is this: that the risen Jesus still had wounds. In our pilgrimage of faith we seek healing for our wounds, our painful memories, our sufferings and our sorrows—but these do not disqualify us from living in the power of Christ's resurrection. We are not called to be unfeeling triumphalists, instead we are called to be courageous realists. We trust that Jesus Christ has accomplished all that is required for us to live forgiving and forgiven lives. And the more we know how much we are forgiven, the more we learn how to forgive. We walk on this earth in the sure hope that we will one day roam free in heaven's garden of healing. This side of heaven we live prophetic lives.

As we were planting the apple tree outside church at the start of Lent I was reminded by a member of the congregation of that beautiful and mystical carol, Jesus Christ the Apple Tree. Its final verse is:

This fruit doth make my soul to thrive
It keeps my dying faith alive
Which makes my soul in haste to be
With Jesus Christ the apple tree

And as we learn to trust God more and more, may we walk with God in the Garden of his Grace. And may we find the fruit that makes our souls and bodies to thrive here on earth and the life to come.