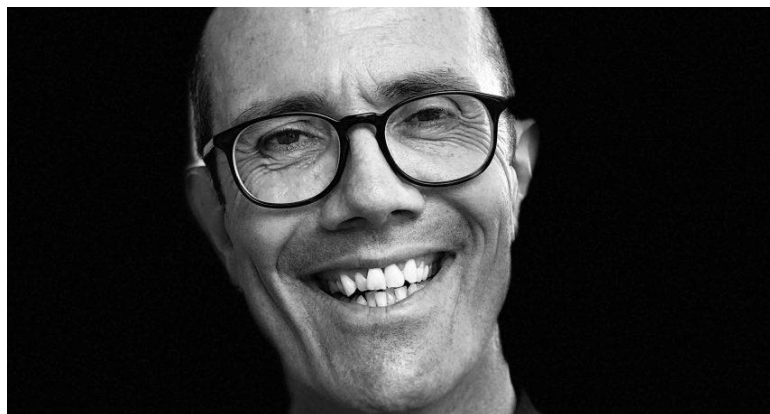


Learning from trees...



I think we live in a culture that encourages and applauds busyness. For when we ask each other what we did on the weekend, it would be unusual to say that on one afternoon we'd sat quietly on the veranda with a pot of tea thinking about nothing in particular! Much more likely that we'd respond with a tally of small achievements: that we'd weeded the garden, done the washing, called the kids, and responded to the never-ending requests of work-related emails.

Even in our down time we have extraordinary opportunities to be entertained and distracted with endless streamed TV series and movies, and many rabbit holes to go down on Facebook and Google.

In his three years of ministry, the Gospels tell us that Jesus took time out from his busyness and the demands of the crowds that followed him to be quiet and still. Perhaps recognising the wisdom of that, and seeking to model our life on his, we could resolve to make such times a priority next year?

For each of us the rhythm and places would be different, but the principle would be the same. In God's grace we seek to become better calibrated in such activity and find through it, among other things, renewal, peace, and insight.

Over the years, I have found trees to be helpful companions in times of reflection, particularly trees that are older than me! For, when we look at a tree we have to stop because they are stationary...and sit or lie down. We might contemplate some of the things that the tree has had to endure in the course of its long life: many months without rain; destructive storm winds; fire, perhaps; borers, termites and fungal disease...and, yet it has endured. Recognising this we might bring to mind the tough stuff of our own lives and be encouraged, or even inspired, to keep going.

We might also consider the many living things that the tree gives life to in some way. The creatures that are fed by flower and fruit, and the creatures that find shelter in its bark and branches. And we might consider those who look to us for food, shelter, and life-giving friendship, as well as those who share such things with us.

I've probably fallen into another trap of our culture and which is to think of what a tree might teach us as individuals and not what trees might teach us collectively.

So, let's imagine trees living together in a forest and us being in that forest quietly observing. What do you imagine? Are there many kinds of trees in your imagined forest, or are they all one species?

In natural ecosystems there are many kinds of tree and each supports a variety of insects, birds and animals. The greater the biodiversity the more there is to see, and the noisier it is. A good example are the tropical

rainforests of North Queensland. According to people who understand these things, the greater the biodiversity the healthier the ecosystem because in these there is greater resilience to disease, and everything is interdependent.

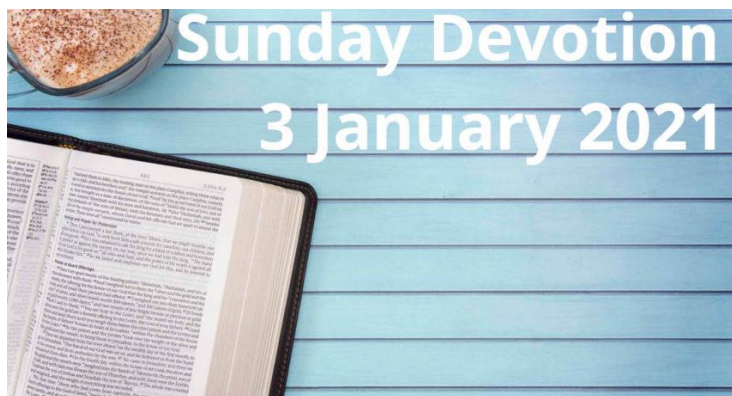
In contrast if there is only one tree species present – like the large plantings of conifers created by forestry – there is very little biodiversity – invasive species are controlled by herbicides and pesticides – and there is an eerie silence.

With this in mind, if we were to imagine our Diocese, or national Church, as a forest...what kind of forest would we imagine ourselves to be? Would there be many kinds of trees offering different flowers and fruit – or the monoculture of a single tree species? Do we recognise the value of theological diversity and interdependence, or do we reject this in favour of a theological monoculture?

Sunday Devotions • Monday 21 December 2020 • By The Rev'd Alan Moore

Sunday Devotion: 3 January 2021, Second Sunday after Christmas

For what can we praise God?



Main Readings: [Jeremiah 31.7-14](#) or [Sirach 24.1-12](#); [Psalm 147.12-20](#); [Ephesians 1.3-14](#); [John 1.\(1-9\) 10-18](#)

Supplementary Readings: [Psalm 147.1-11](#); [John 5.19-25](#); [Isaiah 44.1-8, 21-23](#); [Psalm 104.11-25](#);

“Praise the LORD! How good it is to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.” ([Psalm 147.1](#))

When I first became a conscious believer in Jesus, I had great difficulty understanding how I could offer praise to God. I heard other Christians giving such praise; however, I was unable to do so.

Today's reading from Psalm 147 ends with three words, “Praise the Lord!”, which also start the Psalm, as I have quoted above. The writer of the Psalm then lists the significant matters he encouraged Jews of his day to use as a guide for their praise of the Lord. I have learned from these sorts of lists to make my own list of items to enable me to give praise to the Lord, including strength to live, peaceful surrounds, nutritious and life-giving food, seasonal changes, sunshine and rain.

I have also added the great blessings every believer in Jesus receives because of his life, death, resurrection and ascension. Over the years I have kept such lists and added to them as I have read the Scriptures. When I read these lists, I can give praise to the Lord no matter what else may be going on around me or within me. The Apostles, Paul and John, help me a great deal to expand my list with what they have written in the two New Testament readings for today, [Ephesians 1.3-14](#) and [John 1.10-18](#).

You may struggle with some of the phrases used in these passages, but I want to encourage you to put into your own words the blessings Jesus brings you.