

Staying fruitful

One of the benefits of the recent lockdown is the freedom to have a daily walk. Even if you can't find green space to do that, just getting out of the house has brought a sense of liberation as well as providing vital physical exercise after all that chocolate!

I know not everyone has access to green space and I am extremely thankful to have been able to enjoy countryside nearby. One thing I love about nature is the way it provides so many spiritual pictures – vivid images of the Christian life. It's perhaps not surprising that the world around us points us to truths about its Creator!

I recently came across this partially uprooted tree – photos attached – in some woods a few weeks ago. In fact, what I noticed first were the roots itself and their intricate structure, some of which had been pulled up and exposed above ground as the tree fell to one side. I took a closer look, took some artistic (I thought!) photos and then walked on.

However, as I looked back at the tree trunk, I was surprised to see (and you can see in the photo) that there was still growth on the tree, although it seemed that the roots had been exposed for some time. The leaves looked green and healthy despite what seemed like a devastating fall. They were clearly still benefitting from the life-giving sap remaining in the branches and perhaps from the fact that some roots were still deep in the soil. As long as those branches were connected to the tree, the leaves would remain green it seems. I am no tree specialist and how long the growth will remain I can't say (and you do have to be careful with borrowing an image!) but for that moment it was a vivid picture of the believer's life. It reminded me of the wonderful truth that if we are trusting in Christ, we are united to him and therefore constantly receiving his life-giving power. We can bear fruit whatever the circumstances, however tenuous our hold on Jesus might feel, because we are firmly, inseparably and forever connected to him.

As I reflected on this I remembered a “book- yet- to be-read” on my shelf dealing with this topic in what I subsequently discovered to be a really helpful, practical way by Natalie Brand – “Crazy but True – connected to Jesus for life”. I would thoroughly recommend it. Brief, yet packed with solid Biblical truth, Natalie shows how truly grasping that we are united to Jesus for life can change the way we live each day.

She explains how believers are joined to Christ, through his death and resurrection and so “he is in us and we are in him and he is *all we need*.”. In fact, as Ephesians 3:4 tells us, this was God's plan for us from the beginning – “he chose us in him before the creation of the world.” And when we first put our trust in him Ephesians 2:3 tells us that “God made us alive with Christ”. United to Jesus we are safe for ever because, as Paul writes to the Colossian believers “your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” Colossians 3:3.

It gives us enormous confidence knowing we are not only totally secure in Christ for salvation but also that his ongoing life-giving power within us gives us all we need to live for him day to day “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” 2 Corinthians 12:9. Jesus goes further in his image of the vine (which you have surely been already thinking of from the beginning!) telling his disciples that it’s actually impossible to please God and be fruitful for him without the life and power of Christ within us – “If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” John 15:5. We need Jesus in every way, every day – and God has, in his great mercy, graciously given him to us – now, today and forever! Jesus himself has promised “And surely I will be with you always, to very end of the age” Matthew 28:20 and

Isn’t that a huge encouragement that even when life seems to throw us off-course, maybe in an unexpected and unwelcome direction, and we feel we’re barely hanging on as a Christian (rather like that tree!) we can still bear fruit and bring glory to God! Christ in us enables us to do that with a power that is his. He’s continually at work, changing us, making us more like him. He can give us that patience, kind word, uncomplaining spirit, grateful heart, self-control, perseverance, the ability to take that worry to him in prayer – whatever it is we need at any moment. Maybe your responsibilities and ministry activities have changed or been frustratingly restricted in recent weeks. God can still work in and through us because of Christ within us, in new and perhaps surprising ways.

Maybe this current season prevents some of us from putting our roots down deep into Christ, in prayer, reading God’s Word, concentrating as we’d like during the Sunday services due to small lively distractions! We can trust Jesus is still at work within us and is able to sustain us through whatever few verses or prayer time we are able to snatch during the day. It’s important that those of us with more time/fewer distractions can be holding up others in prayer and maybe sending encouraging Bible verses.

We all need to find ways to get God’s Word into our lives to nourish and sustain us as believers (LIFEgroups, Ladies@10 and Ladies@8 are other helpful ways too, even by Zoom!) But it’s good to remember that we can flourish in the most unfavourable circumstances and that because of Christ who is in us we can be like the tree in Psalm 1:3 “planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither..”

To think about...

How does it encourage you specifically today, knowing that you are always, in all situations, in Christ and that he is powerfully at work within you?