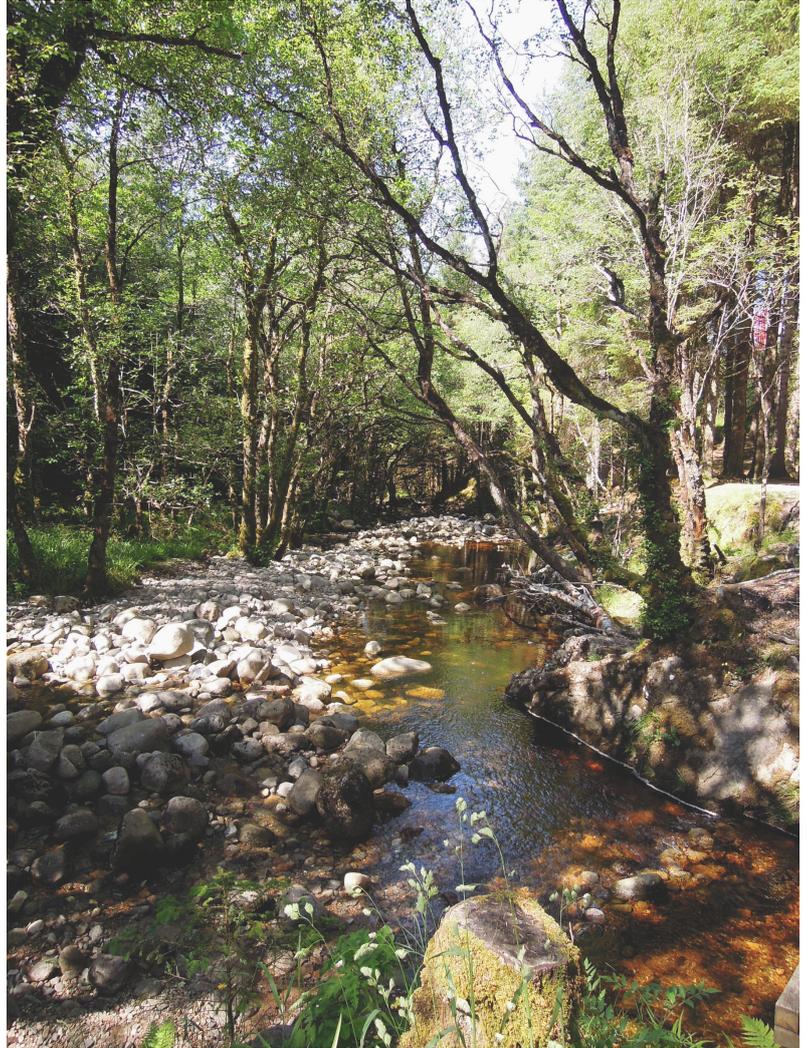


7TH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Revd. Cara Heafey, Associate Minister, Summertown URC

READ: PSALM 1

"They are like trees
planted by streams of
water, which yield
their fruit in its
season, and their
leaves do not wither."



Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

REFLECT:

Our Covid lockdown experience has made many of us more appreciative than ever of the nature on our doorstep. My favourite thing about where I live is Hidscope Wood, the small area of woodland behind our house. Carolyn and I had our wedding ceremony there, in a lovely sunlit glade, almost 6 years ago. Trees are the first thing we see when we open the bedroom curtains in the morning. On days when I don't have to rush off to work we often sit in bed looking out, noticing seasonal changes unfold and watching the clumsy wood pigeons and lithe squirrels among the branches.

Judi Dench has said that she considers trees "part of [her] extended family", and I feel I sort of know what she means. There's something restorative and somehow companionable about standing or walking among trees. Oceans and mountains are

awe-inspiring, but I prefer the quiet, intricate beauty of a forest to anywhere else on earth.

The more we learn about trees, the more fascinating and important they seem. They are a crucial component of the fight against climate change. Trees lock away carbon, help prevent flooding, put nutrients into the soil, improve air quality and even cool the temperatures of cities. Woodlands, particularly ancient ones, promote huge biodiversity, providing havens for all kinds of wildlife. And a more recent discovery has been the way the trees in a forest actually support and communicate with one another, working together as a community. Via vast underground networks of fungus, stronger trees send nutrients they don't need to weaker, struggling trees.

All of this can enrich the lovely metaphor used by the writer of the first Psalm. We are to be like trees, planted by streams of water, nourished by and rooted in Scripture. The Hebrew word translated as "Happy" actually goes deeper: it comes from a verb meaning to "go straight" or "advance." It conveys growth, rather than an absence of sadness or struggle. The verb translated "meditate" can also be rendered as "speak", "plot" or "groan," which again suggests a more dynamic relationship, one where we enter into dialogue with Scripture, something these weekly reflections have attempted to do!

May we be like trees. May we enjoy the company of trees. May the natural world be our teacher. And may the enforced pause in our lives that this pandemic has brought be a wake-up call; to mend our broken, abusive relationship with the earth.

CONNECT:

- Plant a tree, or consider sponsoring or dedicating one via the Woodland Trust.
- Spend some time among trees, or in the presence of a tree. Maybe you're fortunate enough to be able to see trees from your window. Perhaps there is a particular tree that's familiar and beloved.

PRAY:

- Give thanks for the nature on your doorstep and in your neighbourhood
- For healing for the earth and our relationship with it
- For India and all who are suffering as a result of Covid or climate change
- For a living, growing faith, supported by community and rooted in God.

ACT:

Are there steps we could take to make our churches more eco-friendly?

RESOURCES

AND CONTACTS:

Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to and are regularly posting new resources on their website:
www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

Pauline and myself, and your elders, are here for you if you need someone to talk to, have a prayer request, or just fancy a chat! Ping us an email or give us a ring.