

## Roots and Fruit

Our garden is waking up or, more accurately, we are waking up to the garden. It began in February with the first trip to the farm for manure, then muck spreading, as they say in the country. The dog, who is always keen on the outdoor life, suddenly sees an opportunity to feast on our hard work. Life outdoors takes off. The tomato seeds are planted as we enter March and soon, unseen by us, tiny roots begin to take nourishment from the soil. Weeks later we see the first signs of green leaves. Our beautiful daffodils are beginning to fade, the leaves pouring their goodness into the bulb buried deep in the earth.



No plums on the tree this year!

The Bible is full of illustrations from agriculture. Recently we have been studying Hosea who instinctively uses words taken from the farming in Israel. He writes of the vine, the early fruit on the fig tree, poisonous weeds in a ploughed field, thorns, thistles and the roots of plants. It was this word “root” that caught our eye. Hosea refers to Israel as a blighted plant whose root has withered and therefore, they yield no fruit.<sup>1</sup> We have learnt a lot about pests in our garden, pear midge, black fly, canker worm, the list is endless. Sometimes the root is attacked and sometimes the foliage;

whichever it is, there is no fruit and sometimes the plant dies. We know what happens when the root withers. What happens in the ground, quietly, gently and beyond our sight is vital for a healthy plant.

It isn't only the Old Testament that uses illustrations that would be familiar to the hearers; Jesus did it too – often. As the word “root” seemed to lift from the page in the book of Hosea, a passage in the Gospels came to mind. One day the disciples, looking around, no doubt, at the motley crowd that surrounded him, came to Jesus with a question. How, they asked, could you tell the genuine article, that is, distinguishing the true from the false follower of the Lord?<sup>2</sup> It is a question that is as relevant today as it was when it was first stated. There have been catastrophic results when those without discernment have followed leaders whose lives did not match up to their words. Jesus gave an immediate answer to his disciples; you will be able to discern the true from the false by the fruit in their lives. Further illumination is given by St. Paul when he writes that the fruit of the Spirit is, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”.<sup>3</sup> If we are real novices to gardening we may not be able to tell the difference between an apple and a pear tree but once the fruit appears we will have no doubts!



Recently a friend of ours died. We said after his death, there was the touch of a saint about him. Someone visiting us a few weeks later had not the slightest doubt and said with certainty, “He was a saint.” This is where we come back to the word, “root”. If the root is

not nourished a plant is weak; if it is diseased the plants dies and there is no fruit. Exactly the same is true of the Christian life. When we speak of someone being a saint, we usually mean that they have an abundance of the fruits of the Spirit in their life. We are not meant to go around judging each other, i.e. are they an abundant fruiter, mediocre or none at all! Some discernment would not come amiss in some situations but they are few and far between.

It is a good idea to look at our own lives from time to time. If the roots of our Christian life are not being nourished then the fruit will be weak, and if it is diseased we are in even greater problems. All is not lost: Jesus is the good Physician, the Horticulturist who knows how to deal with a diseased root, whether that is overweening pride, hidden addictions of various kinds or judgmental attitudes, to name but a few. One never-to-be-forgotten occasion our tomato plants were “watered” with weed killer. Prompt action i.e. gallons and gallons of clear water saved them! Our spiritual roots shrivel when we pour the equivalent of weed killer into our lives.

With most of us, who have begun the Christian journey, it is lack of nourishment that is causing the problem. There are some essentials and the first one is prayer that includes listening to the Lord and being nourished by his love. Also important is being obedient to His Holy Spirit speaking to us in the Bible – making the time for this! We can add, being sufficiently humble not to try to make it alone, meeting with other Christians and when necessary accepting correction.

The saints love Jesus before all else and that is their secret; the fruit follows.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hosea 9:16

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 7:15-20

<sup>3</sup> Galatians 5:22-23