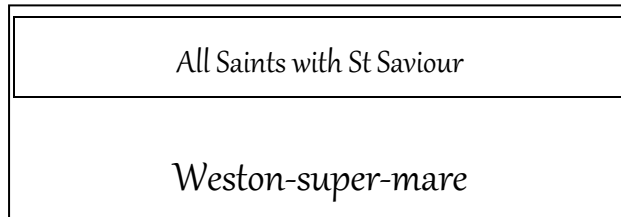




Arms of St Saviour



Arms of All Saints

3rd March 2024

Dear friends,

My theme in these Lenten reflections (of which there are four – there won't be one for Mothering Sunday) is the Tree of Life.

I invite you this Lent to consider trees, or perhaps a single tree; it may be a tree that is in your garden, or one that you can see from your window, or a tree that you walk past on your daily travels. I hope that particular tree will minister grace to you this Lent. Sometimes, on solitary walks, I will stand beneath a great tree. I think of its roots beneath my feet; an intricate web anchored deep into the earth; a broad, expansive system, balancing the canopy above; its roots drawing water and nutrients, sustaining life, enabling growth and fruitfulness. I think of the trunk, strong, enduring; the hidden internal rings of the passing years; the life the trunk itself sustains, as insects feed in it and from it. And then the canopy; stark and mystical in winter; luxuriant in summer; glorious in autumn; full of promise in spring. A single tree to be with us during Lent.

III

'But there's a Tree, of many, one'.

Here's a catena of New Testament quotes that refer to one particular Tree:

The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree (Acts 5.30).

They put him to death by hanging him on a tree (Acts 10.39).

When they had carried out everything that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb (Acts 13.39).

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree' (Galatians 3.13).

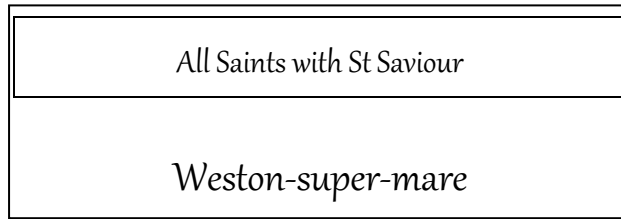
Christ himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed (1 Peter 2.24)

Now none of these references refers explicitly to the Tree of Life. But notice, how in 1 Corinthians, St Paul links the Cross and wisdom:

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1. 21-24).



Arms of St Saviour



Arms of All Saints

And so it is but a small leap in imagination that comes to see the Cross as the Tree of Life, for after all, the New Testament is clear that life, healing, forgiveness, the gift of immortality, spring from the Cross.

If you visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, directly under the site of Calvary there is the Chapel of Adam. This reflects a belief that the first Adam was buried on Golgotha, the place of a skull, the place of fallen-ness and death which Christ, the Second Adam, redeemed. Moreover, theologians and mystics also came to regard Mount Calvary as the place where the Tree of Life in Genesis once stood. Where paradise was lost, paradise has been restored. The Cross is the Tree of Life; it stands again on earth and it gives us access to the Father. In art and poetry, its wood bursts into life, just as in our Northern hemisphere, Easter is the great spring festival, when nature itself welcomes and illustrates the Lord's resurrection.

Nowhere is this more beautifully expressed than in the 6th century hymn *Crux Fidelis*.

*Faithful Cross! Above all other
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peer may be;
Sweetest wood and sweetest iron!
Sweetest weight is hung on thee.
Bend thy boughs, O Tree of Glory,
Thy too rigid sinews bend,
For a while the ancient rigour
That thy birth bestowed, suspend,
And the King of heavenly beauty
On thy bosom gently tend.*

Crux fidelis, Venantius Fortunatus (530-606), tr. Percy Dearmer

In Lent we seek to behold again the beauty of the Cross, the Tree of Life.

God our creator,
by your gift
the tree of life was set at the heart of the earthly paradise,
and the bread of life at the heart of your Church:
May we who have been nourished at your table on earth
be transformed by the glory of the Saviour's cross
and enjoy the delights of eternity;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Post Communion prayer for the Second Sunday before Lent