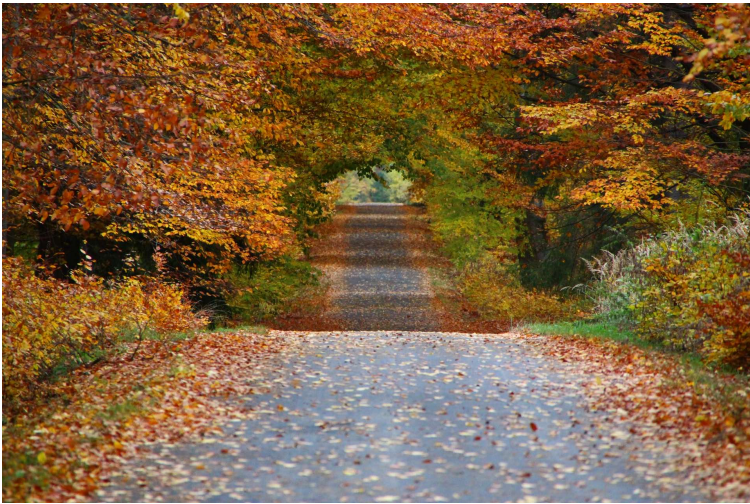


Breathe 7 November 2020: Autumn

Rev. Wendy Sellers

Looking up – autumn leaves



Isaiah 60:13

The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the cypress, the plane and the pine, to beautify the place of my sanctuary, and I will make the place of my feet glorious.

I cannot think of anything better at helping us to understand God's glory than His creation. Living where we do, we get to enjoy the drama of autumn, with its incredible changes of colour. For now, let's not think of the fact this is a sign that winter is coming. Let's, instead, pause to give thanks for the beauty of autumn, and for all God's gifts to us.

So, let's start by saying 'thank you'.

Thank you, Lord God, for all your gifts and blessings to us...

Open prayer...

Amen

Looking in – conkers



Job 14:7

For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again and that its shoots will not cease.

I just love conkers.

They are so beautiful. They are also unexpected when you consider their prickly casing. And every time we open a case and see a conker, we are the first person to see that small piece of creation, so full of potential and life.

Is that how God views us – beautiful and full of potential?

Yet, not all conkers become trees. Not all of us are given the chance to become the people God wants us to be. Let's search now for those things that hold us or others back, and ask God to help us change that. And let's take comfort from the fact that a tree that is cut down may sprout again.

Silence

Thank you, Lord God, for seeing the potential in our lives. Forgive us the times when we have turned away from you and followed our own paths. Amen

Looking back – ferns



Ezekiel 17:24

And all the trees of the field shall know that I am Lord; I bring low the high tree and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and

make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken and I will do it.

When lockdown began in March, I posted pictures of the ferns in my garden, and wrote about them reminding us of the fact that growth comes in unlikely places and unexpected ways.

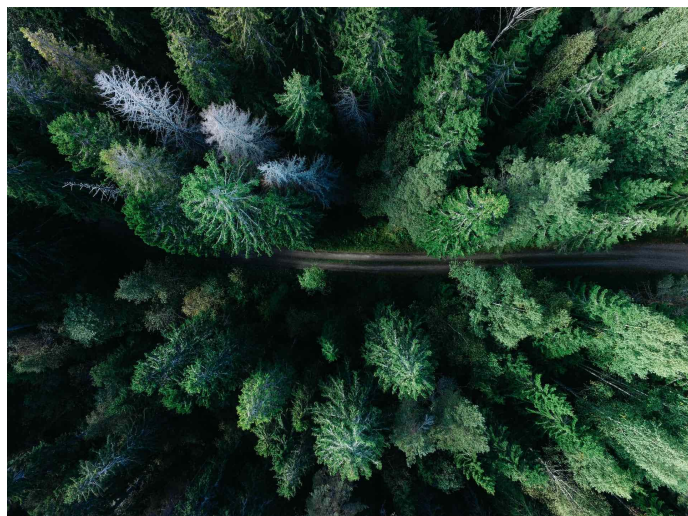
As my ferns prepare to take on their autumn hues, let's look back to what has happened in the past month – to things that have flourished and also, perhaps, things that seem to be withering or dying back.

This might be something personal in your life. It may be our current situation as we enter a new lockdown. It might be the disappointment of seeing things begun in church now to be suspended or the anticipation of new things we can attempt through our online presence.

Open prayer...

Amen

Looking out – evergreens



Psalm 1:3

*They are like a tree
planted by streams of
water that yields its fruit
in season, and its leaf
does not wither. In all
that they do, they
prosper.*

Not all plants are deciduous, of course. The spectacular colours of autumn can blind us to the fact that many plants retain their leaves and green colour all year. They keep on growing throughout all the seasons and some fruit and flower during the winter. We call these evergreens. As we head towards the new seasons of remembrance, Advent and Christmas, we need to keep growing – to be evergreen. And I suspect that might feel even harder than usual this winter – as individuals, as a church, as a society.

Lord God, we offer to you our concerns and fears for ourselves and your world...

Open prayer...

Amen

Looking forward – buds



Daniel 4: 10-12

The visions of my head as I lay in bed were these: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

It never fails to amaze me how prepared nature is. As the leaves fall and we are still in autumn, so the trees and shrubs are already planning the next cycle of growth. You may have to look carefully but the small buds are there already - from which will sprout leaves and flowers. So, we, too, need to look forward to what might lay before us. We need to ask God to share his visions and let us be part of them.

Lord God, we ask your blessings on the coming month and season. Be with us in our planning and help us to dream your dreams...

Open prayer...

Amen

To end, a prayer from the African Sisters Education Collaborative:



**Abba Father,
The trees are
ablaze with your
glory.**

**The seasons
change, but you
never do.**

**You are always
beautiful,**

**in the green and freshness of spring,
as in the golds and reds and chills of autumn.
Make me like you.**

**Let my life reflect your beauty, season after
season, as the calendar of my life turns and
turns.**

**The trees are letting go of this year's foliage.
Help me to let go of both blessings and
burdens, and surrender them both your loving
care.**

**Fallen leaves pattern the ground with variety.
So, design my own fallings and failings into
whatever design will please you most.**

In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.