

# Thought for the Day: 9 – 15 November 2020

## by Jane Chaplin

### Monday

During lockdown, I decided to try to paint the flowers in my garden. I have always been fascinated by plants and remember the excitement of finding rare wild flowers with my father, studying them with

a magnifying glass and them trying to paint them in botanical detail. This summer, I've been reminded that 'not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these' (Luke 12:27).



Take a moment this week to study the petals of a flower (there are some beautiful autumn flowers around) or the veins of a leaf or the intricate spiral pattern in a pinecone.

The poet Mary Oliver, who is known for her powerful meditations on nature, says that we have only to 'pay attention' to the wonder of the world - even its less beautiful bits - to step through the doorway into that contemplative 'silence in which another voice may speak'.

*Praying -*

*It doesn't have to be  
the blue iris, it could be  
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few  
small stones; just  
pay attention, then patch  
a few words together and don't try  
to make them elaborate, this isn't  
a contest but the doorway  
into thanks, and a silence in which  
another voice may speak.*

(*'Praying'*, from *Thirst - Poems by Mary Oliver*)

**[Tuesday]**

## **Geraniums**

France in the summer conjures up, for me, window boxes overflowing with vibrant scarlet geraniums. What a cheerful sight! I'd never thought about when or why window boxes came into being, but it turns out they serve a practical purpose. For centuries, people have opened their windows to allow a fresh breeze into the house (unless, of course, their window happened to overlook a street that was an open sewer). Most towns were built along rivers that served as trade routes. Mosquitoes flourished. Back in the days before citronella candles, the French learned that geraniums repel mosquitoes. With geraniums in a window box, people could have the benefit of fresh air without the unwelcome visitors.



God has created numerous things in nature that help solve some of our daily problems. From the start, he built in cures and protective resources - even before those cures and resources were needed. God's creation is deliberate and thoughtful, and we can see his care wherever we look in

nature. The world is his garden, filled with provisions for us. It's up to us to discover them and use them wisely - and with thankful hearts.

*"There lies all about us, if only we have eyes to see, a creation of such spectacular profusion, such spendthrift and extravagant richness, such intricate and absurd detail, as to make us drunk with astonished wonder."*  
(Michael Mayne)

## [Wednesday]

### Sweet Peas

The scent of sweet peas brings back many happy memories for me. In particular, a visit to the village of Down Ampney when we were on holiday in the Cotswolds many years ago. We turned aside, recognising the name as being the title of the tune for the hymn '*Come down O Love divine*', which we had sung at our wedding. We realised that Vaughan Williams, the composer, had been organist at the village church. As we entered the church, we were overwhelmed by the scent and profusion of colour; they were having a Sweet Pea Festival!

The Bible makes a connection between incense, with its rising fragrance, and prayer. We may not use incense much in our churches today, but it was a vital part of worship in Old Testament times, first in the Tabernacle and then in the Temple. The incense altar was to be placed just outside the curtain to the Holy of Holies - the sacred place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. The high priest, Aaron, was to offer incense on the altar twice a day, and the Lord promised to meet him there (Exodus 30:6). Burning incense released a sweet aroma that was seen as an offering to God.

Our prayers are an act of worship because, when we pray, we are acknowledging that God is there, that he is Lord, and that we need him. God breathes in our prayers and delights in them, answering in his time, in his way, and for our best.



Let's offer him prayers of thanksgiving for the many blessings he has given us - including the scent of summer sweet peas.

*"When (the Lamb) took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God's people."* (Revelation 5:8)

**[Thursday]**

## **Daffodil /snowdrop buds**



Last January was unseasonably warm. We had blue skies and no hint of frost, and bulbs were pushing up their noses all over the garden, fooled by the warm weather into thinking it was spring. But were those little sprouts basing their hope of spring on something solid enough to help them survive the possibly troubled times ahead?

In this busy world, packed with technology and knowledge, do we look to the pundits and seemingly powerful to give us hope for the future? Or do we trust in the Lord and the power of his strength to show us the path to walk? Faith

is not merely wishful thinking that makes us feel better when we're having a bad day. The writer of Hebrews tells us that, 'Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen'. Faith is real and tangible because it is grounded in God, who is the ultimate reality.

The tiny shoots gave me reason to ask myself, 'Where is my faith planted?' If I look to the world for solutions, my faith will be weak and will wither and die. If I look to the Lord and his promises, my faith will be strong, based on what is true. He will help me to grow even in the hardest of circumstances.

*"The Lord is my strength and my shield;  
my heart trusts in him and I am helped" (Psalm 28:7)*

**[Friday]**

## **Autumn Cyclamen**

Recently I popped up the hill to the garden where I was a child and my eye was caught by a tiny cyclamen flower just poking through the ivy. My mind went back to my childhood when there used to be carpets of these baby cyclamen just there. So, I bent down to have a closer



**It's only as we realise  
how much God loves us  
that our love for him  
will grow.**

look. I started to pull back the ivy and discovered more little plants completely smothered. As you pull ivy back, everything else gets torn, so I found myself very gently releasing each little cyclamen plant, and as I did so, I seemed to hear God saying to me:

*"You are my precious plant. I know where you're hiding. You've let yourself get choked and strangled by worrying about things that don't really matter and that are preventing you from blossoming and being the beautiful plant I made you to be. Be patient and let me rescue you."*

I went on for a good half hour until lots of little plants were released, and several of them have flowered since.

I believe that's the most important thing for us to know - that we are precious to God, that each one of us has been chosen and is special to him. Perhaps we need to stop and let him tell us that, because it's only as we realise how much God loves us that our love for him will grow. Has your love for God grown in this past year, or has it shrivelled? Because nothing in the garden stands still - it's either growing or shrivelling.

*"Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name. You are mine."* (Isaiah 43:1)

## [Saturday]

### Roses



I love roses, but I know that my favourites will only produce beautiful flowers if I prune them hard at the correct time. Pruning cuts away disease and strengthens the plant for flower production and shapes it into something of beauty.

We need to be pruned if we're going to flourish, and not just once a year. What does God use to prune us? Scripture; life experiences, both good and bad; the natural world; others' words. We sometimes have to learn through hardship and through pain. Anything can become a tool in God's loving hands.

But we have a part to play in the process, too. God calls us to examine our lives. What useless, time-consuming, needless things need to be cut away so I have the time to listen to the Holy Spirit? Whatever obstructs my relationship with God must be cut off and put on the bonfire.

Pruning brings new life and fruitfulness - the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." (John 15: 1-4)*

## [Sunday]

### Pansies

*Pansy* comes from the French word *pensee*, which means 'thought'. In the fifteenth century, this little flower was the symbol of remembrance. With over 400 varieties, pansies are a popular annual and biennial for gardeners who once considered 'heart's ease' (another name) a weed. These lovely, multi-coloured flowers are a favourite, because they are hardy, require little care, and spread quickly.

Pansy seeds blow and grow wherever they land, often in unexpected places. They're able to take root even in a tiny bit of soil in a cracked pavement. Against all odds, they grow.

I think of Christians who live in countries where the soft soil of religious freedom has been covered by the hard cement of oppression. From a human perspective, faith seems impossible in the midst of persecution or trial. Yet God plants a seed of faith, and the seed sprouts and grows. A person's life, planted where only God could bring growth, becomes beautiful, and that life is noticed - a marvel of beauty in the barrenness.



In Ephesians 3:20, the apostle Paul reminds us that God is capable of doing far more than we can even imagine or would ever dare to ask. He can change the hardest of hearts. He can make faith flourish in the worst of circumstances. He can create beauty out of ashes. Nothing is impossible for him.

*"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."* (Ephesians 3:20)