

Thought for the Day: 20-26 September 2021

by Melanie Seward

Monday 20th



Prayer Plant

In the various lockdowns, like many, I have been nurturing a new interest in house plants. This week, I'm going to offer a few of the thoughts triggered by my new friends. The first is one variety of the 'Prayer plant', Calathea, Maranta Leuconeura.

The plant is native to the Brazilian tropical forests and grows on the forest floor. It thrives in humidity and prefers indirect lighting; it will grow best in a shady room.

Prayer Plants respond to the presence / absence of light. The movement is most noticeable at sunrise or when you open the curtains first thing in the morning and is more gradual as the light dips at the end of the day; the leaves slowly fold inwards until they stand on their stems and face the ceiling, rather like hands held in prayer. In fact, the leaves can move throughout the day adjusting to the changing conditions. Movement is inherent to the way the plant has evolved to survive.

Similarly, we are created in such a way that we are hard wired to function as God intended by allowing the rhythm of prayer to flow, day and night. Scientists are not sure why Calathea have leaves that do this but for us the rhythm of prayer provides us with hope and strength not only to survive but to thrive.

Life has its rhythms. We all need to cope with its ebb as well as its flow. We have to survive its darkness as well as its light. We face dry times as well as times of richness. To survive this

intricate pattern, we need to have an overriding rhythm of prayer. We need to know that whatever is happening, we are loved by God, and in him we live and move and have our being.

(Summary by SPCK of the book 'The Rhythm of Life, Celtic Daily Prayer' by David Adams)

Tuesday 21st

St George's Sword

Also known as the snake plant, mother-in-law's tongue, and viper's bowstring, *Sansevieria trifasciata* hails from West Africa.

It's tough to kill, can go without water for over a month and copes with dry air easily, be it in the spotlight or in a quiet corner. It will grow in full sun and the leaves will be light coloured; or in lower light and at a cooler temperature, leaves will be darker and grow more slowly. Put it in a larger pot and the plant will grow to fit the pot! The only way to make it poorly is to over water it or allow water into the crown.



What a great metaphor for living out the Christian Faith. We need to be adaptable, being able to practise to acknowledge God in all aspects of our lives, whatever happens. God is with us when the sun shines as well as when our lives feel coldness and darkness. Often, we are unaware that our growth as human beings continues through everything we endure. Whenever and wherever we find ourselves, when we encounter other people and new places, we can share the love of God and, through this process, the people of God have space to grow.

Our connection or relationship with a personal God is the equivalent of the crown of the plant. We need to take care of this. To maintain our spiritual health, we need only to discover and nurture our sense of being loved by God and trust that our lives have meaning and purpose. The water we ultimately need is the Water of Life - Jesus and his teaching.

Note to self: Remember to be open to receiving and nurturing the Living Water.

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

(Gospel of John chapter 4, verses 13-14)

Wednesday 22nd

Chalk Stick



I was immediately drawn to this attractive plant. On the label, the instruction to avoid touching the plant should have warned me that this plant needs more than just a little care and attention. It is covered in a light film that acts as a sunblock during the summer. When you touch the leaves, you remove the protection permanently. On top of this, the plant must be kept away from hot and cold draughts and is prone to a soggy bottom! It needs to be watered sparingly; too much and it rots, too little and the leaves go flat. Oh... and it likes rainwater.

The warm, light, draft-free, colour contrasting space it loves in our house is just in front of the TV socket. It has taken us months to remember not to knock the plant.

Some of us need more care than others; some are more sensitive to knocks physically, psychologically or spiritually. I guess that we have all been in a place where we feel vulnerable and open to getting knocked. Just as a gardener tends plants and cares for their individual needs, so God is the Greatest Gardener of all. He is not just a Creator God but a personal God who knows each one of us better than we know ourselves.

Jesus says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener."
(John 15. 1)

All of us are called to work in the name of Jesus to be co-workers and co-carers of God's Creation. This doesn't mean just working with the plants in the best spaces or with the ones that are easy to look after, it includes the people in our lives, no matter how difficult they may be or how challenging their circumstances. After all, we are all Chalk Sticks at some time or other!

Thursday 23rd

Artillery Plant

Any gardening is an act that looks forward into the future. Simply by planting or tending any vegetation we are envisaging the next day and beyond. When we acquire a new plant, whether we buy one or receive one as a gift, we are already waiting for what it will become, hence hope is part of looking after any garden or plant.

My small and scrappy Grey Artillery Plant was very cheap so I put it in a cheap pot that I didn't really like and sat it on the north-facing bathroom windowsill. It didn't get watered until the leaves began to drop.

Little did I know that the grey artillery plant does best in medium light and, ideally, you let it dry out before thoroughly watering. It doesn't need much feeding and prefers higher humidity - the bathroom is ideal!



Sometimes people turn up or pass through our lives and we don't take too much notice of them; simply because of their size or appearance or background, we don't expect too much. Yet my Artillery Plant reminds me that if people are respected as individuals, given a home and a little space to be themselves, then with a little love we will be surprised by what happens.

The passing acquaintance becomes the most dependable friend, the unnoticed demonstrates creativity and technical skills, and the person who is nothing like us turns out to have an amazing back story. As for Jesus who, to some, perhaps has seemed an outdated story, empty of meaning, he can become the key to love, liberation and salvation.

Friday 24th

Arrowhead Vine

Also called Nephthytis, American Evergreen and Five Fingers, this was yet another 'spur of the moment' buy.

I found out belatedly that it prefers a warm position, humid conditions (daily misting and pebble tray) and fertilising monthly. It is a vine, so it should be grown in a hanging basket or trained on a pole or trellis.

Our plant lives by the kitchen sink – no pebbles, no misting, no fertilising and no pole/trellis.

It looks healthy and has grown in size and number of leaves. It seems perfectly happy to keep me company when I am washing up. Maybe it is saying to me that we don't always need all the physical things we are told can ensure a 'proper' or 'successful' life.

The plant is sometimes called 'Five Fingers' because as the plant matures, the leaves change from an arrowhead shape into three to five finger-like sections. I fear my specimen may continue in perpetuity to be 'arrowhead' and the leaves will never attain five fingers.

Maybe I do need to offer my Arrowhead a little more, to make sure it has the things it needs to lead the life it is intended to have and to become a vine. Perhaps it will be re-potted and I will give it a 'moss-covered pole' up which it can climb.

What things might be the unnecessary, irrelevant things that detract from our peace of mind and sense of purpose?

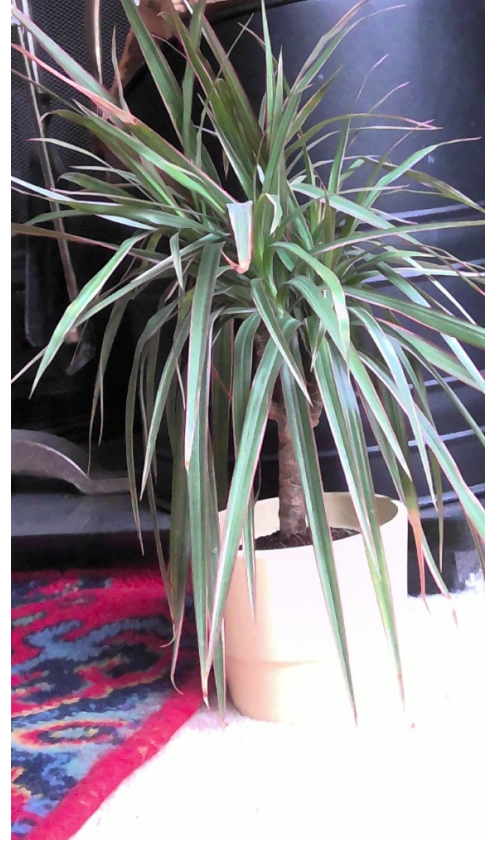
How might we need to change our lives (and help others change their lives) so that we can become the people who God intends us to be?



Saturday 25th

Dragon Tree, a plant with a distinctive appearance and personality.

Dracaena Marginata can survive for years. It tolerates most light levels, is happy with room temperatures, survives a cold winter, likes fresh air in summer and dislikes stuffy overheated rooms in winter. It can live with erratic watering and will simply let go of any leaves it does not need. Native to Madagascar, it is nevertheless excellent at removing harmful chemicals from the air in our homes.



If this plant was instead a person, what kind of person would it be? Not into niceties or formalities, it could be considered a tad scruffy with a dislike of stuffiness; someone who is a straight talker. Sometimes their leaves will drop off - their ideas or actions might not seem appropriate but they offer a different perspective and make us take notice.

Remember that all of the great biblical prophets had some, or all, of these characteristics. Their appearance often drew attention - sack cloth and ashes, clothing of camel hair! Sometimes they did things deliberately to get their message out - smashing large pots on the ground; saying things that were confrontational and challenging; telling others of the need to live differently.

We need Dragon Trees today. Dragon Trees are to be found in our churches, in our towns and throughout the world. Can we be generous to them, listen to their words and take up their challenges to care for ourselves, each other and our world as God intended?

Look around and try to identify our Dragon Trees or prophets. It is our responsibility to make space for their calling in life and to encourage them in their work.

Sunday 26th

Chain of Hearts



Two small pots of *Ceropegia woodii*, with very little in the way of fronds, came into the house over a year ago. I knew very little water was needed and to

stand them in direct sunlight. It took me several months to find a position with the right light and to give it enough water (but not too much).

Basically, in growing season I ignore it until the dry soil comes away from the sides of the pot and then I let it take up as much water as it wants. During winter, even less water is needed. Just a little moisture, once the soil is almost fully dry, is enough to keep it alive.

By rights, this plant should not survive, let alone thrive, but it does. The heart-shaped leaves have kept coming all spring and summer - they have become a fixture of the room. They remind us of how love can endure through all manner of things. The love of God is this kind of unfailing love.

In Jesus, we see the love of God most clearly. Through him we can all be connected and held in his unfailing love. Together we become a community based on, and held in, love.

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."

(Gospel of John: chapter 15, verses 9-12)