

Quiet Space – Sunday January 17th 2021

‘The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be, and that which is done is that which shall be done’ – Ecclesiastes 1:9

Oak – copyright Jenny Gaffin 2014 – taken from ‘The Bright Field’ – Meditations & Reflections for Ordinary Time, Canterbury Press

The oak stands resolute in the field.

Alone, the company it grew up in long since gone, it has come to play host to much life – the fungus around its roots, the moths laying eggs in its leaves, the lichens on its branches, the nesting birds, the insects, the small animals gathering to feed. From its highest branches to the depths of its roots there is so much colour, so much movement, so much busyness inspired and fed by this graceful tree.

This is a space to marvel and wonder. The mind cannot compute the minutiae of the breadth of such complex interwoven life. Nor can the imagination conceive of the changing humanity that, through centuries, has run its course here. Even now, this tree must witness some happenings – young people escaping the watchful eye of family and friends; grieving people taking solace under the branches. Countless people must have argued and loved, hurt and hoped and aged as they came here through the years, until they came no more and the oak was left to wonder at their absence.

And I too take my turn through the seasons. In high summer I envy the oak in its resplendent vivacity. The breeze breathes life into every last leaf, and as I approach a frantic flutter of wings propels another creature to the safety of high branches. Insects race up and down, chasing or being chased, pursuing a course hidden from my most minute inquiry. And all has meaning, all has energy and purpose.

But as the months pass, when the abundance has gone, most of the creatures that fete and flatter this tree in high summer will prove themselves fickle, seeking out warmer climes and richer pickings. Only the few will remain, to suffer the cold and the lack in solidarity. And as winter deepens, this glorious tree will be stripped, its old, exposed body divulging the history of injuries and indignities it has suffered through the years – branches broken by high winds or careless human vandalism; holes bored into its bark by insect or bird; weakness inflicted by long-past drought.

Yet of course the oak has seen it all before. ‘The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be, and that which is done is that which shall be done’, go the ancient words, the branches of the oak nod their stately assent. This tree has seen out countless cycles of life: the tough spring survivors battling for ascendancy, the born-again high expectations, the excited abundance of summer, the starved winter giving way once again to hard-won spring hope.

The oak will not be flattered by the youthful attentions of spring, nor disheartened by winter’s deficit. Even in the harshest month, this tree will stand proud and receptive, upholding its ancient dignity. It is as if it made its decision long ago, injury and indignity notwithstanding, to offer up its

body as host, welcoming and protecting without question those drawn to its outstretched arms; and it is strong in its hidden purpose.

So it is in harsh winter months that I most seek the counsel of this tree. I want to grieve with it in its bleakness; to believe with it in new life. Beginning as I am to bear in some small way the marks of time's passing, and wrestling in small part with the claim upon my life, I want to enter the roots of its resoluteness; to be strengthened by its endurance; to learn from its ancient generosity, as the youthful creatures prepare once more to claim their imagined entitlement, with such careless high spirit and such incessant demands.

'The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be, and that which is done is that which shall be done', insists the cherished text. Embraced by the ever-generous reach of these branches, wrestling with its wisdom, there is still much to learn. The seasons will turn and turn again; there is time under the sun to listen and rebel, pray and acquiesce to such an ineluctable calling.

Reconciled long ago to that which is, and silently rejoicing in that which shall be, the generous branches of this ancient oak nod their fulsome concurrence to my still hesitant amen.

'The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be, and that which is done is that which shall be done' – Ecclesiastes 1:9

Cheshire Oaks – photographed through the seasons on walks during Lockdown

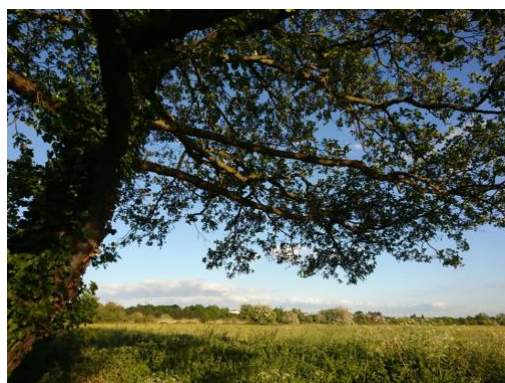
Winter into Spring 2020



Spring 2020



Summer 2020



Autumn 2020



Winter – January 2021

