

80 *The tree of life*

I'm definitely on a journey; I don't know where that journey will take me, but I know I'm not alone. Yes, I have human companions, but the sense of God's presence is wonderful.

On Tuesday morning, I finished my article [79] about (my) dogmatism, but when I had put it on my website, it somehow felt right not to send an email round to those people I alert when 'the next exciting episode!' is released.

On Tuesday evening, at our service of silence + compline, and Val shared a couple of scriptures. I haven't a clue what the other one was because this one came to me so strongly:

*Gen 2:9 And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were [two trees!] the tree of life **and** the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

I had always thought it was 'the tree', singular, that was the focus of Genesis 2 and 3, so later I followed this up and was again struck by what I read:

2:16. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

The implication there seemed to be "but you **can** eat from the tree of life".

Then in Genesis 3 it all goes pear-shaped:

1. Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree ['the tree', singular] that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

22. And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever." 23 So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil brings death, but it looks as if the tree of life is, if you like, the antidote; it means we can live for ever.

Then there are four mentions in Proverbs, but they are about 'a tree of life', not 'the tree of life'. Proverbs 3:18 has "She [wisdom] is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed." Isn't 'wisdom' supposed to be God personified? But the others seem to be about human activity, and in all four, 'tree of life' means something like 'a source of good stuff'.

But **the** tree of life returns, of course, in Revelation:

2:7 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*

22:1. *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.*

With my editor's hat on, how can 'the tree of life', singular, be on 'each side'?! Clearly, this isn't a tree as we know it, but something much more glorious!

22:14 *Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.*

18,19 *I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*

I got the sense that there is some gold to be dug here in the scriptures, between (1) the earth as created, (2) it all going pear-shaped, and (3) the new heaven and new earth. Exciting, but where do I start? But God knew ahead of time.

On Wednesday, I started reading Tom Wright's *The Day the Revolution Began*, and I was rivetted. His thesis seems to be that the theological confusion of people like me, concerning the meaning of the cross, is as a result of not seeing it in context of God's wider purpose, from Genesis to Revelation (eschatology), and he specifically mentions the tree of life in that context. (I suspect you'll be hearing more from me, via Tom Wright, in the coming days.)

So that's Tuesday and Wednesday; what happened on Thursday? I came here to Beccles so that Sue could set up an exhibition of her latest quilts. It's a joint exhibition with Jackie Smith, the lady who started the Christian quilting group, Sew Spiritual, and from whom Sue has learned so much over the past few years.

Jackie is exhibiting, for the first time, her series of seven very dramatic quilts based on Revelation. They have been 14 years in the conceiving and making, and they aren't just a pictorial representation of the images in Revelation. Rather, she has combined her love of trees with her close encounters with mental illness to interpret, rather than just represent, the themes of Revelation, using trees as the form of expression. (This doesn't do the slightest justice to Jackie's quilts, but Norwich folk can see them at St Peter's Ringland in August.)

And yes, that's right, you've guessed it, Jackie's quilts actually start from Genesis, using the exact same scriptures I 'discovered' on Tuesday; the whole series is focused on the tree of life.

I rest my case.