**Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17.5 Ascension 17.2.2019**

A year ago, Mrs McEntee sought council permission to add an en suite to our small villa, in which to lodge a perpetual procession of her friends, as free-swilling guests. The house, if ever we get to reside there, is overshadowed by an immense-trunked gum, with up-reaching limbs, not distorted like arthritic arms. The giant stands as a defiant last performer in a divine ballet begun as the Kew Forest rose many hundreds of years ago. The tree thrusts great gnarled roots deeply into some subterranean stream to slurp up its nourishment, so that, no matter any devastating drought, its leaves never wither, but remain green.

The first words of Psalm 1 are “Happy are those” (that is) “blessings on those” who do not follow the advice of the wicked. An abundance of blessings comes from being truly “planted in streams of water,” rooted in the life-giving word of God. The deeper we are immersed in God’s word, the more we will grow to bear fruit in season.

Alas! in our past Australian story, instead of the word of God, some churchgoers “sat in the seat of scoffers” and “took the path that sinners tread” [verse 1]. They let the stream of water, the word of God, become clogged with the noxious green algae of inter-church hatred.

In those tempestuous days, hopefully now gone, reverend Ulster-born low-churchmen, using language warm enough to warp the brass tablets on a church wall, gripped the open-mouthed attention of the black bombazined ladies and their vacuous minded men, with awful disclosures of lurid rituals behind the convent grilles of the inoffensive Catholic Carmelite nuns, and the further disasters that befell already fallen girls (but never the boys) shamed and sent by their Catholic parents to the slave-laundry at Yarra Bend nunnery. These scoffers loved to recite how often was used the priest’s tunnel from his vicarage to the adjacent steaming convent.

On the other side, purple-nosed, whiskey-sodden Irish priests drove their roots deeply into centuries’ old stagnant sloughs, to slurp up and belch forth a continuous windy hatred against Henry V111 and the adulterous rent that his filthy lust had made in the formerly seamless robe of the Church of Rome. Ignorant celibates scoffed further profanities at Elizabeth 1, the true founder of Anglicanism: “The Virgin Queen they call her! The Virgin Queen! Bejasus! She’s no more virgin than I am.” And, so we grew up Christian.

The great sadness was, the churches so sinfully squandered their energies on spite-filled spitting and spatting, that they let ecumenical outreach and inter-church relations to wither and die, and caused the leaves of evangelism to crumple brown to dust. Recently, the Brexit leaving was supported by immigrant-hating older folk. But, overall, it was rejected by their “with-it” accepting inclusivist youth, who cried in disbelief “You hate the migrants more than you love us!”

Jeremiah’s reading today tells us, in those sad years long ago, the parental choice of interfaith bitterness made the (quote) “hearts of the young turn away from the Lord.” Without the Word of God, they became religiously (quote) “like stunted shrubs in the desert and in the parched places of the wilderness,” Still, they gave their generous talents 100% to this-earthly conservation concerns to save the Daintree or Lake Pedder, or, more recently, the bleaching of the Barrier Reef. But our young were no longer to be seen in church. They were not consciously seeking the blessed assurance of praying to learn “when peace like a river attendeth my soul, when sorrows like storm billows roll, whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.”

At present, in society, there is a real hatred of religion, perhaps ignited by the royal commission on sexual abuse. Churchgoers may be scorched by the hurtful, hot winds of sarcasm, which suck us dry: “You Sunday hypocrites! You’re yesterday’s people! You follow Jesus? He’s a back number! Ah! Get real! He’s fake news!”

Jesus’ Gospel assures us today that “Blessed are you, happy still are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you and defame you on account of the Son of Man.” A modern translation of this reads “Count yourself blessed every time someone cuts you down, or excludes you, every time someone smears or blackens your name to discredit me.”

What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort for them and makes that person uncomfortable. Our green leaves will never wither, nor die, from the attitude of scoffers, if we continue to widen our welcoming acceptance of, our tolerance to all others, in their variant styles of life. Our green leaves will never be desiccated and blown away if we ensure that the word of God dwells richly in us to reach out in loving embrace of all others. Our green leaves will never fade and fall if we have no fear of the future, for nothing living can separate us from God’s love. [Romans 8.38]. As the Lord’s human trees, we will be vibrantly evergreen because God’s love continues constantly to flow into our capillaries.

If a sapling is kept in the darkness, it will grow spindly and stunted. The old BCP Holy Communion, with its quintessential Archbishop Cranmer English once served its prayer purpose perfectly. But, like the 39 Articles of Religion, the theological thought patterns of Tudor England are now not so apposite for Prince Harry and Meghan or our young ones. Imagine going to your doctor today and to receive blood-letting, cupping and sniffing an excreta stool, all on Medicare? The hymn “Once to every man and nation” urges “New occasions teach new duties, time makes ancient good uncouth. They must upward still and onward, who will keep abreast of truth. Though the cause of evil prosper, yet, behind the dim unknown, standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above God’s own.”

At Ascension, we practitioners of godly religion must continue to let sink down our roots trustfully into the life-giving stream of the nourishing word and sacrament. Then, we may continue to branch up and branch out to the most needy, the most forgotten ones, who are the most precious ones in God’s sight. May God bless your work.