

**Carlops Parish Church Eco Service, 2008**  
*First delivered at the harvest season, but may be used at any time of year*

**TREES**

*Hymns are Church Hymnary, Fourth edition (CH4) unless indicated otherwise*

**Welcome**

We'd like to extend a very warm welcome to everyone worshipping with us this morning. And we would like to thank you, the congregation, for giving us the opportunity to present this eco-service.

The service is led by the church's Eco Group and in this harvest season, we have chosen *Trees* as the theme of the service, with particular reference to the bounty they provide and their vital contribution to life on earth.

Throughout our worship this morning, we will be introducing short pieces about trees that are mentioned in the Bible and we move on now to the first of these.

**The date palm tree**

*If desired, illustrate with a large photograph – or a box of dates!*

The dates that we eat in this country are borne on the date palm trees that grow in oases in Sinai and the warmer parts of Palestine and elsewhere in the middle east.

The date palm is a tall tree surmounted by a tuft of huge leaves.

When Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem riding on an ass, the people carried palm branches and laid them on the ground before him in welcome. These branches were really the large leaves from the tops of the palm trees.

**First hymn – No 232: Pears and apples, wheat and grapes ...**

**Prayer**

God, when we think of your creation, we're amazed; we walk through a masterpiece every day. Your imagination has created such beauty. We can never come to the end of your wonders. How incredible it is that you trusted us to take care of your prized possession!

You've shown us how to sustain life; help us to use this knowledge for the good of your world, the benefit of your people and the glory of your name.

We praise you – you are the painter of creation's harvests.

And now, let us join together to say the prayer that Jesus taught us.

Our father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done – in earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.

Amen

## **The Frankincense tree**

The trunk of this tree has a thin, peeling bark. It grows in Africa, Arabia and India. A cut into the tree trunk allows a pale greenish resin to ooze out. When the resin is collected it is sold as frankincense which was burned as a fragrant incense by older civilisations in their acts of worship.

We read in the nativity stories that an offering of frankincense was brought as a gift from the wise men to the baby Jesus.

## **Children's address**

We see trees growing all over the countryside around us and we take them very much for granted – they are “just there” – but, when we stop and think about it – they really are amazing plants.

They grow from a small seed or nut and yet over the years they can become huge, with a tall trunk and spreading branches. It's not unusual to find, say, a beech tree so large that when an adult stands close to it and spreads his or her arms round the trunk, they don't even reach half-way round! In California in the United States, there is a redwood tree with a trunk so thick that it takes twelve children with their arms spread out to reach right round the tree, and another so thick that it has a road cut through the middle of its trunk. You can drive through the living tree!

And it's not just their size. Think about how necessary trees are to us.

They provide us with fruit to eat (apples, pears, plums, chestnuts) and wood for hundreds of uses, like the floor beneath our feet and the rafters that hold the roof up.

But trees do even more than this:

Huge areas of trees, like the tropical rain forest, absorb gases like carbon dioxide that we humans put into the atmosphere from our burning of various fuels. And in turn, they regenerate the oxygen we need to breathe. That is why we should try to do what we can to save the forests that are still standing.

The roots of trees, spreading widely under the ground, keep the soil stable and in some countries, where forests are cut down, the soil is being washed away by flooding and people can no longer live there because they cannot grow food for themselves.

It is important to know and think about these things to learn about what is going on in our world and work out how we can look after it best. We need to try to preserve more and put a stop to destruction. Even apparently small actions, like using less paper and recycling paper packaging and re-using shopping bags, can help.

Because without trees, life would not be able to survive on this earth. Yes, that means that eventually, we would not be able to survive! Trees matter.

People are perhaps very different from trees, but we depend upon them and in some ways, it would be good if we could all try to do some of the things a trees does naturally.

Every tree provides food and shelter for hundreds of animals, birds and insects that live below ground among the roots, or on the trunk, or in the canopy of leafy branches.

We could be a friend and support to the other people in our families and our school and our community. Just remember to think about other people and what they feel and what they need and the things we could do to help and bring them happiness.

Then we would be doing something useful in God's world – just like the trees.

## **Prayer**

First the seed and then the tree,  
Thank you God, for loving me.  
First the flour and then the bread,  
Thank you God that we are fed.  
For the fruit upon the tree,  
Thank you God for bird and bee.  
Yes, thank you God for all your care,  
Please help us each to love and share.

Amen

## **Offering**

We will continue worshipping God with our offering

## **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we ask for your blessing on this offering and our gifts to you. Let them be a symbol of our responsibility to give to those in need throughout the world and let them to be used in your service and according to your will.

Amen

*Children may go out at this point if desired*

## **The Fig tree**

*Illustrate with photographs and fresh and dried figs*

Figs were important fruits in biblical times. Fig trees were frequently found beside the road, around houses and in vineyards. They grow very large with a broad canopy, so are valued for their shade as well as their fruit. The leaves develop very early in the season, making the fig tree the herald of spring; the fruits develop early too, while it is still summer. And because fig trees can grow to a great age, many cultures revere them as symbols of wisdom.

Jesus used the fig tree to illustrate many of his stories and parables.

## **Second Hymn – No 137: All things bright and beautiful ...**

### **Two trees; a story**

Those who have had any involvement with the charity “Medical Foundation for Victims of Torture” may know that one man who was helped by the charity is Mark Hill, who came to Britain from Iran in 1989.

*The charity is now named “Freedom from Torture”; [www.freedomfromtorture.org](http://www.freedomfromtorture.org)*

Mark Hill served in the Iranian army as an officer in the Iran-Iraq war. He was taken prisoner and ended up in a prison camp in Iraq. He has written several poems and articles; this is a shortened version of a disturbing story he wrote about two trees.

It took me some time to know that tree. I used to pass it on my way to school.

One wintry day, when the roads and trees were covered in white snow and I was passing that tree, she dropped some snow on my shoulder and when I looked at her, she smiled and said, “Hello, little boy.”

Yes, it was on a cold wintry day that I found my new friend. She was so beautiful, especially when she was dancing in the wind. I introduced her to my other friends and we used to climb up and play in her.

Every time I was passing, I gave that tree a cuddle, but first I had to make sure that nobody

saw us, because they might have thought that I was going mad.

Years passed and I grew into a young man. I remember when, for the first time, I fell in love with a girl, and we painted our names on the body of the tree, and I could feel how happy she was for me. She gave some of her yellow flowers to the girl that I was in love with. Yes, I learned from her that girls love flowers.

Some years later, madness started; madness and destruction which called itself revolution; fanaticism that called itself freedom.

During one of these days when all the roads and all the towns were on fire, and smoke and bullets came from all around, my beautiful tree got shot. When I asked her if she was in pain, she said "Yes; pain and sadness, but not from bullets, from this madness that tries to replace life with death, love with hate, laughter with crying, and light with darkness."

I remember her death; it as a cold wintry day when revolutionary guards hanged the girl I was in love with from a branch of that tree.

My girlfriend had been in prison for some years. Her hair was grey and she had become so thin that the only thing left shining was her beautiful deep blue eyes.

Yes, on that day, I lost both my loves; my girl and my tree. It was on that cold wintry day that I felt the pulse of love dying in me.

Years later, after being loveless and in darkness, I was in a different place in another part of the world when it happened again.

It was on a nice spring day when I was passing a tree and she dropped her pink and purple flowers on my shoulder and smiled at me.

And I could feel the pulse of love within me again.

## **Prayer**

God of justice, God of love, we keep praying for peace, while harbouring resentment in our own hearts.

Have mercy on us; help us live what we pray.

We keep praying for an end to the world's hunger, while enjoying the comfort of more than we need.

Have mercy on us; help us live what we pray.

We keep praying for suffering people, forgetting that we could be sharing their load.

Have mercy on us; help us live what we pray.

And teach us again to keep praying, not only with words, but in all that we say and all that we

do, so that your love and your justice may be known upon the earth in every generation.

Amen

### **Third hymn – No 259: Beauty for brokenness ...**

#### **The almond tree**

The beautiful blossom on an almond tree is white, or less usually in Palestine, pink. It flowers early in the year, being one of the first fruit trees to bloom. Almond nuts are delicious.

The tree and its fruit are mentioned many times in the Bible, perhaps the most famous reference being Aaron's rod, and almond rod which budded, flowered and produced ripe almonds overnight when placed by Moses in the Tabernacle of the Covenant.

#### **The message of three trees**

Once, there were three trees on a hill in the woods. They were discussing their hopes and dreams when the first tree said “Someday, I hope to be a treasure chest. I could be filled with gold, silver and jewels and decorated with intricate carving so that everyone could see the beauty.”

The second tree said “One day I will be a mighty ship. I will take kings and queens across the waters and sail to all parts of the world. Everyone will feel safe in me because of the strength of my hull.”

The third tree said “I want to be the tallest, straightest tree in the forest. People will see me on top of the hill and look at my branches and think of the heavens and of God and how close to them I am reaching. I will be the greatest tree of all time and people will remember me.”

After a few years of praying that their dreams would come true, a group of woodsmen came upon the trees.

When they came to the first tree, one of them said “This looks like a beautiful tree; I should be able to sell its wood to a skilled carpenter.” And he began cutting it down.

The tree was happy, because he knew that the carpenter would make him into a treasure chest.

When the woodsmen came to the second tree, one of them said “This looks like a good, strong tree; I should be able to sell its wood to a shipyard.” and he began cutting it down.

And the second tree was happy, because he knew that the shipyard would make him into a fine, strong ship.

But when the woodsmen came to the third tree, who wanted to be the straightest and tallest in

the forest, the tree was frightened, because he knew that if they cut him down, his dreams would not come true.

One of the woodsmen said “I don't need anything special from my tree, so I'll just take this one.” And he cut it down.

When the first tree arrived at the carpenter's, he was made into a feed box for animals, then he was placed in a barn and filled with hay. That was not at all what he had hoped and prayed for.

The second tree was cut up and made into a small fishing boat. His dreams of being a mighty ship and carrying kings seemed to be at an end.

The third tree was cut into large planks and left alone in a shed in the dark.

The year went by, and the wood from the trees almost forgot about their dreams. Then one day, a man and a woman came to the barn. She gave birth to a baby boy and placed him in in the feed box that had been mad out of the woof of the first tree. The man wished he could have made a proper crib for the baby, but this manger would have to do.

The tree could feel the importance of this event and what was happening to him and he knew that now, he held the greatest treasure of all time.

More years passed and a group of young men got into the fishing boat made out of the wood from the second tree. One of them was tired and went to sleep. While they were out on the water, fishing, a great storm blew up and the tree didn't think he was strong enough to keep the men safe. The men woke the one who had gone to sleep and he stood up in the boat and said “Peace” and the storm stopped. And then the tree knew that he had carried the king of kings in its boat.

Finally, someone went into the dark shed and picked up the planks made from the third tree. It was carried through the streets of the town and people mocked and made fun of the man carrying the planks. When they came to a stop, the man was nailed to the tree and it was raised into the air on top of a hill. When Sunday came, the tree realised that it was strong enough to stand at the top of the hill and be as close to God as possible, because Jesus had been crucified on it.

The moral of this story is that when things don't seem to be going your way, always know that God has a plan for you. If you trust in him, he will give you great gifts.

Each of the trees got what they had wanted; just not in the way they had imagined it.

We don't always know what God's plans for us are. We know that his ways are not always our ways. But we should remember that his ways are always the best.

## **Fourth hymn – No 230: Praise God for the harvest ...**

### **The Olive tree**

*Illustrate with olives and olive oil*

The olive tree yields one of the most important crops of the ancient world and the modern.

The olives were eaten, fresh or pickled but also, were crushed to produce the valuable oil. Olive oil was used extensively for cooking, as it still is today, and also used as fuel in lamps. In hot dry climates, the oil, can be used as a soothing body ointment and in the biblical world was also used to anoint people who were marked out for special office.

## **Prayer**

“And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk with your God.”

*Micah 6: 8*

Let us pray for those suffering hunger and injustice as a result of natural disaster and the misuse of natural resources – such as the destruction of the rain forests.

Let us pray for those across the world whose hands grew this food and packed it and brought it to our land.

Let us pray for the gardeners and farmers and distributors in this country who worked with weather and soil, with road and with rail, to make the land productive and deliver its harvest so that we can also eat food produced at home.

Let us pray for the supermarket staff who stack the shelves and guide us round and take our money with cheerful smiles.

Let us pray for ourselves who belong to the earth and are caught up with each other in the web of life. May we learn to live together justly, to honour the earth, and to walk humbly with God.

Amen

## **The cedar tree**

The famous Cedar of Lebanon is a huge tree originating in the mountains of Lebanon. Few remain there today, but in biblical times, they were used as timbers for Solomon's temple. Cedar beams supported the roof and the interior was panelled with sweet-scented cedar wood, which was beautifully carved and overlaid with gold.

The following reading gives an interesting account of how Solomon obtained the timber for his temple

**Reading: 1 Kings, 5: 1-2 and 5-10**



**Final hymn – No 226: God, whose hand is all creation ...**

**Benediction**

God the father, Bless us  
God the son, defend us  
God the spirit, keep us  
Now and evermore

**Sung triple Amen**