

# It's a Gardener's World!

Has Summer come & gone? I've seen conkers on the Horse-Chestnut trees along the riverside & in the garden of Tanton Grove Farm, brambles ripening in the hedgerows & potatoes ready to harvest in the field opposite Mill Riggs – all things we associate with late summer & Autumn!

A definite Autumn eye-catcher is the Rowan Tree with its bright red berry clusters, dazzling displays of which are now in plenty around Stokesley.



The Rowan tree has a long, sacred history. Since ancient times, people have been planting a Rowan beside their home as in Celtic mythology it's known as the Tree of Life and symbolises courage, wisdom and protection.

Look at the delicate leaves, perfectly symmetrical on either side of their stem. They freshly unfurl every Spring in bright green and resemble feathers: it's not surprising that before the written word, the ancient world believed that these beautiful feather-leaves were created from a bird of prey.

The myth tells that the goddess Hebe lost her chalice of youth and an eagle fought to recover the cup and return it to her. Wherever the bird shed a drop of blood or feather, up sprang a Rowan tree.

The Rowan tree's bright berries were symbolically associated with these drops of blood.

The power of the sacred Rowan tree is further enhanced by the pentagram (a tiny five-pointed star), an ancient protective symbol, embedded in the bottom of every Rowan berry.

Another legend tells us how the Rowan tree bent over a fast-flowing river and rescued Thor from being swept away into the Underworld. The wood is strong and resilient, and has, since ancient times, been used to make protective crosses tied with red thread.

Rowan was once widely planted by houses as a protection against witches. The colour red was considered to be the best colour for fighting evil, and so the rowan's bright red berries have been associated with magic and witches. Its old Celtic name, 'fid na ndruid', means wizards' tree. Hence it is also revered as the "Tree of Good Luck."

In Ireland, it was planted near houses to protect them against spirits, and in Wales rowan trees were planted in churchyards. Cutting down a rowan was considered taboo in Scotland.

The Rowan tree's timber has also been used for carving rune staves, walking sticks, and was especially treasured for its divining properties. The wood was used for stirring milk to prevent the milk curdling, and as a pocket charm against rheumatism.

The delicate, creamy-white flowers are five petalled, blossoming every spring and loved by our honey and bumble bees. Garden birds feast on the ripe berries in autumn, and so can we – we can use them to make jams, jellies, preserves, marmalades, vinegar, wines, spirits, confectionery, ketchup, pies and soups. Rowan jelly is particularly delicious with venison and other game. But despite all these applications, perhaps the rowan tree's greatest virtue may simply be its benevolent gift of beauty through the seasons.

In our Gospel reading for this week, we read how, having acknowledged the truth of Peter's declaration, Jesus tells his friends what kind of king he will be: one that suffers. And he tells them that they too will suffer if they come after him; it is the only way to find the life they seek. We too are being invited to share in Jesus' story, which is as tough as it is good.

We see suffering in the world every day, on the news & in the papers – the world is stricken with disasters of every kind - not just the Coronavirus. On 4th August a large amount of ammonium nitrate stored at the port of the city of Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, accidentally exploded, causing at least 180 deaths, 6,000 injuries, US\$10–15 billion in property damage, and leaving an estimated 300,000

people homeless. We may think life is tough for us at the moment, but the Beirut tragedy is 'suffering' on another dimension. Life is very, very tough for millions!

The Bible informs us about the protection of God. As humans, we want to see God's protection as a magic force field that keeps us from all harm. Yes, just like the magical power of the Rowan Tree! But many times, God works in ways that we do not understand. Sometimes God's protection comes in the form of peace and strength in the middle of despair. Other times God's protection comes as an ending because he sees something more on the horizon that we cannot see.

Jeremiah 15 describes the prophet's anguished prayer on behalf of Judah, the people's plight & his own 'unending pain'. God responds with the words 'I will make you a wall to this people, a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue & save you ...'

As a believer in Jesus, we are promised a new life covered under the protection of God in which NOTHING can separate us from His love. Rest knowing that no matter what hardship we face, God is our provider and protector!

He will help us fight evil & overcome our toughest challenges. Remember these wise words from Romans 12 v21, 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.' Doing good is the 'magic'!