

Tale from the Garden!

A welcome sight in spring is the flowering currant, which is now coming into its own as its branches drip with what, to me, looks like blobs of raspberry jam! I've spotted a few of these hardy shrubs in the gardens round Stokesley soon to be smothered with their rich pink flowers. There's a lovely one in a garden on West Green. Every bit as scrumptious is the aroma of the leaves, giving away its relationship to the blackcurrant. Crush a leaf between your fingers & inhale deeply & you'll reel at that floral, fruity & spicy aroma, which is almost as good at clearing the tubes as oil of eucalyptus!

The most common varieties of 'Ribes sanguineum' (to give currant its proper name) are 'Pulborough Scarlet' & 'King Edward VII'. Both are a striking shade of rose pink. 'Poky's Pink' is paler, while 'White Icicle' & 'Tydeman's White' both live up to their descriptions. They are such a delightful sight when spring arrives, as their buds begin to burst in February before finally opening in late March & decorating the stems with their dangling flowers.



As the gardens become more colourful with blooms and blossoms, so the air becomes filled with the busy buzzing of bees. The star attraction for the bumblebees at the moment is the flowering currant with its showy crimson pendulous highly scented clusters.

Its discovery by David Douglas in 1825 in what is now the US state of Oregon is part of an epic and grisly botanical tale.

If anyone is the model for Indiana Jones, it is Douglas. The Scottish botanist crossed snowy mountains, rivers and heat-baked prairies in the process of discovering over 200 species, including the Douglas fir and holly-leaved Berberry. He had been dispatched by the newly founded Royal Horticultural Society to collect plants for their gardens in Chiswick. After a number of trips, each involving clashes with Native Americans, Douglas came to a ghastly end. He fell into a pit set to trap wild cattle and was gored to death by an animal already captured. So behind the humble flowering currant is a story of bravery and dreadful death.

'Sanguineum' means "blood-red" & how poignant is that in light of this weekend when we begin the journey to the cross from Palm Sunday to Good Friday – a story of bravery & dreadful death.

Today we celebrate Jesus' joyous entrance into Jerusalem on that long-ago Palm Sunday. In the days that follow we reflect on the events preceding Christ's death on the cross and subsequent resurrection on Easter Sunday. It's amazing how the events of one week have had a colossal impact on history and on our lives.

The week of Easter is a time for earnest reflection about the ultimate sacrifice that was made by Christ to save us from our sins. The magnitude of that sacrifice is enormous - the life of Jesus traded for our own. But it needn't be a one-way sacrifice.

As Christians, we're commanded to imitate that glorious gift on behalf of others, as written in Ephesians 5 v1-2: "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Again in Hebrews 13 v16 we read about sacrifice: "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

The week of Easter is a fitting time to think about what we can do in our own lives to act as Jesus did: sacrificing something for the sake of others. Whatever the sacrifice, large or small, what truly matters is

the spirit in which it is made. As the words of 2 Corinthians 9 v7 say, the Lord wants us to give with a joyful spirit: "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Our hearts should be filled with the loving spirit of Christ so that we may love one another as he loved us.

As you reflect on the meaning of this week and take in the power of the resurrection, remember that we as Christians are called by Christ to sacrifice ourselves for the good of our neighbours, especially the poor. As Jesus gave himself up for you, let us give of ourselves on behalf of others.

The Red Flowering Currant easily lifts seasonal blues and, after the last 12 months living under the shadow of the Covid crisis, will help to release fears that prevent us from taking joy in life. For those of us who have lost heart over the past months, the pink blossom will give us the energy and courage to keep on going.

In Psalm 118, the author is writing about incredible adversity. It's not written when times are good, but when times are really hard. Situations were changing. The Psalmist cried out to God in anguish, he was surrounded on all sides by the enemy. He felt pushed back, and about to fall. Yet right in the midst of huge struggles shared, this chapter both starts and ends with the same verse, of giving thanks and praise unto God.

"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love endures forever." Vs 1 & 29

Such a powerful reminder to us: True joy is never dependent on our circumstances. And though we may know this in our head, it might be hard to walk out every day. Learning to choose joy in hard times takes effort and action on our part; it requires our hearts to be set on Him. God is faithful to help us, so that we can choose well. And we can be assured that in His grace, He has made every day, and for that gift itself we can **"rejoice and be glad in it."** No matter what we face, we can still believe in God's goodness and love, for that's what carries us through the most difficult of seasons.

Jesus is so crucial for our lives today. Without Him we would surely fall, He is the only One who can put back together all the broken pieces of our lives. He is the One who is the capstone of the church, the body of Christ, both now and forever. His gift of salvation was offered to us all through His sacrifice on the cross. Jesus was victorious over death and sin, and He rose again, reminding us that the door is open for us all through faith in Him.

We might be facing the toughest of times right now, but the truth is this, He's still given us breath for today. Jesus came to give us hope and freedom, He's the very reason we can live with joy despite the battles, and have peace that is unexplainable to the world. He's with us and will never leave or fail us. His love covers us, He gives us the strength to face every trial and obstacle with courage and grace. We can rest in the security that Truth brings.

No matter what you're up against, be confident in God's unchanging love for you, always. And it is written, **"This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it."**

Each morning, when we wake up, we have a choice about how we want to greet the day. We can be miserable or we can think about all that God has made, all the beautiful things in our world, and feel joy. You get to decide. What is your morning song?

Remember – **"The Lord is my strength and song"** (Psalm 118 v14).