

30th September 2025

Pruning

“The work which I propound,’ as lord Bacon says, ‘tendeth to pruning’.”

Robert Peel, *Speech in the House of Commons, 1826*

We have a Rowan Tree in our back yard, which we planted when we moved into our home. There’s a tradition in Scotland that a Rowan Tree is planted close to every dwelling, to ward off evil spirits and bring good fortune. Be that as it may, *we* planted a Rowan Tree because we like Rowan Trees, and, in the autumn, when it’s heaving with bunches of red berries, it’s a delight.

However, there’s a problem. Above the Rowan Tree there’s a telephone cable, from the telegraph pole in our back lane, across the garden to our house. If the Rowan Tree gets too high, it catches on the cable when the wind is strong. So, it has to be pruned from time to time, to alleviate the risk of disaster – and that’s what I was doing yesterday.

Pruning matters – for the development of a plant, or shrub, or tree. Pruning matters – to stop any potential problems. Pruning matters – in the right way and at the right time. In so many ways, pruning matters!

In the Gospel of John, Jesus uses the pruning metaphor this way:

He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

The purpose of our pruning, it seems, is to increase our fruitfulness, the implication being that God prunes us to make us more productive in our faith. Now, far be it from me to take issue with the Good Lord, but I have a problem with that. I *don’t* believe that God prunes me. Under the challenges of God – to keep me fruitful and deal with potential problems, in the right way and at the right time – I see to my *own* pruning. God’s Word and Truth will be my guide. But should I abrogate the responsibility for my own life and faith onto the Divine? I don’t think so.

If my approach should be one that “tendeth to pruning”, today, I’ll need to get on with my snipping and clipping. If there’s something that’s not bearing fruit, I’ll have to see to that. If there’s something that may be causing a problem, I’ll have to see to that. If there’s something that needs to be tidied or nurtured, I’ll have to see to that. Encountering God will be my prompt and my challenge. But God will *not* do it for me.

Now I’ve to clear up the prunings – but that’s a whole other story.

A prayer for today

However I do it, I’m trying to be more fruitful. Good gardening, I hope ...