

AUGUST 5 - 9
DAILY READINGS



mid winter series

Day 1 – A Green Country

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Job 12:7-10

We are, relatively speaking, a young country. A significant portion of our native forests still remain, and even allowing for the deliberate deforestation we have inflicted upon them, there is much of this land's natural flora and fauna that we are still able to experience. We like to see ourselves as a country of pristine natural beauty, and while our environmental missteps and carelessness are plainly evident to see, one of the things we are most well-known for globally is the beauty of our countryside. Trees are a natural part of the lives of most New Zealanders; we are a people that is used to seeing green around us, wherever we are.

Before its removal from the summit in 2000, the tree standing atop One Tree Hill in Auckland was one of New Zealand's most iconic natural features, its silhouette against the sky a famous image here and also abroad. Also very well-known is Tane Mahuta, a 45 metre tall kauri tree in the Waipoua Forest in Northland. Estimates of Tane Mahuta's age range from 1,250 years (significantly predating European settlement in New Zealand, and landing at the latter end of projected Maori arrival) to 2,500 years (half a millennia before the birth of Jesus). And while these solitary trees might be well-known in the public imagination, as we are slowly discovering, trees are not solely "individuals"; they have a social life just as we do and are able to connect and interact with each other to create ecological communities. As we will discover in the readings this week, there is far more going on below the surface that connects trees together than we might realise.

Questions to Consider

What part do trees play in your life? What and when do you think of trees?

Prayer

Lord God, reveal to me the ways we are bound together that I fail to see. Show me how I am connected to those I fail to see. Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 2 – The Social Life of Trees

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Ezekiel 17:5-6

As much as we have recently begun to understand the ecological connections between various plants in their habitats, the true extent of these connections is only now beginning to be realised – never mind yet understood. We are only just starting to discover how extensive the connections between plants near and far actually are. For example, fungi wrap themselves around the roots of plants, and through increasing the mass of the roots, help the plant soak up water and nutrients at a greater rate. Not only that, but food and nutrients can actually be passed along the system from tree to tree and from plant to plant.

Until recently, scientists thought this type of thing was a one-off, each plant having its own individual fungus. But now we know that what is really going on is so much more complicated and interconnected than this. Studies have shown that these fungal networks connect hundreds of trees. One Douglas fir tree was found to be connected to 47 others, thanks to eight individuals from one fungus species and three from another. Discoveries such as this are changing the way we look at plant communities. So much happens unseen by us, below the surface, beneath the ground. Plants are more entwined, and over much greater areas, than we thought. Our (slow, but growing) realisation of the interconnectedness of all things, and the fact that we are all part of larger systems and ecologies, continues to grow as we discover new ways in which these interconnections occur.

Questions to Consider

Why is it important for trees that they connect and intertwine with each other? What can we learn from the way they do this?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, continue to reveal the nature of nature to us. Give us a greater appreciation for the world you have created. Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 3 – The Friendly Forest

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Isaiah 60:13

One of the things that we have discovered that trees and other plants can do is warn their neighbours of threats and diseases that are assailing them, thus spurring these nearby trees and plants to increase their own defences against attack. Plants being ravaged by disease or by animals browsing on their leaves and flowers can send out chemical “distress signals” through the air as an early warning system to other plants in the area, thus giving these other plants an early warning system that warns them of possible imminent threats, giving them time to take action to protect themselves from attack. And as we have already seen, plants can also communicate through intricate underground networks of fungi, connecting various trees and plants together in a vast web, largely unseen by above ground dwellers such as ourselves.

These communication networks aren’t only between members of a single species of plant. Scientists have conducted experiments that show plants communicate through such fungal networks even if they are not of the same species. In one study seedlings of Douglas fir and ponderosa pine were planted close together, separated by mesh barriers small enough to prohibit root contact between the seedlings but large enough for fungal penetration to occur. When researchers pulled all the needles off the Douglas fir seedlings, the damaged trees used their root fungi to alert the ponderosa pines to the attack, and this prompted the pines to produce protective enzymes. Furthermore, the dying Douglas firs even passed on their reserves of food to the unrelated, still healthy pine seedlings.

Questions to Consider

What do trees give to each other? What do we give to each other?

Prayer

Almighty Father, show me how I can better look out and care for those around me. Show me how to open up my network to more people. Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 4 – May Our Failure Spur Us To Do Better

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Romans 8:19-23

The variety and beauty of this world show us how amazing God is. God designed the world to be a home for all creatures, humanity included. What an awesome and spectacularly beautiful world we belong to. We are so privileged to be able to enjoy it. We need to remember that the environment we live in is not to be taken for granted. God has given us the responsibility of caring for this creation. Sadly, we haven't done this nearly as well as we should have, or nearly as well as we need to in order for this wonderful gift of a world that God has given us to survive – and us with it. Our role is to care for the earth, not exploit it or waste its resources. God expects his children to care for his creation in the same way he does. The animals, plants and ecosystems we share this planet with are God's handiwork just as much as we are. We need to care for it better.

For example, in the last four decades alone the jungles that orangutans live in have declined in size by 75% due to human activity, most of which is due to deforestation in order to plant palm oil trees, which many companies still use in their production of cocoa. We are losing tropical forest at the rate of 15 million hectares every year, as farmers clear land in order to have somewhere to grow the crops that (predominantly) Western companies deem lucrative – for the companies. We cannot afford for this to continue. Jungles store and capture more carbon than any other habitat on the planet. They cool the planet, and are a rich source for us, providing food and medicines. We – all of us – need to start living in a way that protects God's creation, not destroys it.

Question to Consider

How can you contribute to the global effort to care for the earth?

Prayer

Creator God, forgive us for our failure to love and care for your creation as well as you do. Guide us, your people, as we seek to do better. Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Day 5 – Becoming Cognizant of Our Connections

Silence, Stillness and Centering before God (2 minutes)

Scripture Reading – Psalm 8

Chocolate. Coffee. Trees. Three simple, commonplace objects capable of giving us much insight into – and food for thought about – our place in the world; the place of our fellow human beings, both near and far, in our lives; the ways, both seen and unseen, acknowledged and denied, that we are connected together; and the effect that we have on each other and on our world. Community is about interconnectedness and acknowledging that we are connected to, influenced by, and responsible for, each other. We are connected to others through what we grow and consume, and the ways in which we do this. We are connected through how we behave and act locally and globally. We are connected through the environments we inhabit and the ecology we share.

Perhaps the next step in our growing awareness of community is to become cognizant of the unseen ways in which we are connected with others, the unintentional ways in which we affect the lives of those far from us, and to acknowledge the truly global reach that community has. Being a part of the same human family is not just a matter of semantics any more. In this day and age community has a globe-spanning reach – and world encompassing consequences for the ways in which communities and their members behave and act towards each other and towards other communities. As God's people, charged with bringing hope and restoration to his creation, as a people called to model a different way of living and being, we of all people need to be living lives that show the love and grace that God has poured out upon his earthly community.

Questions to Consider

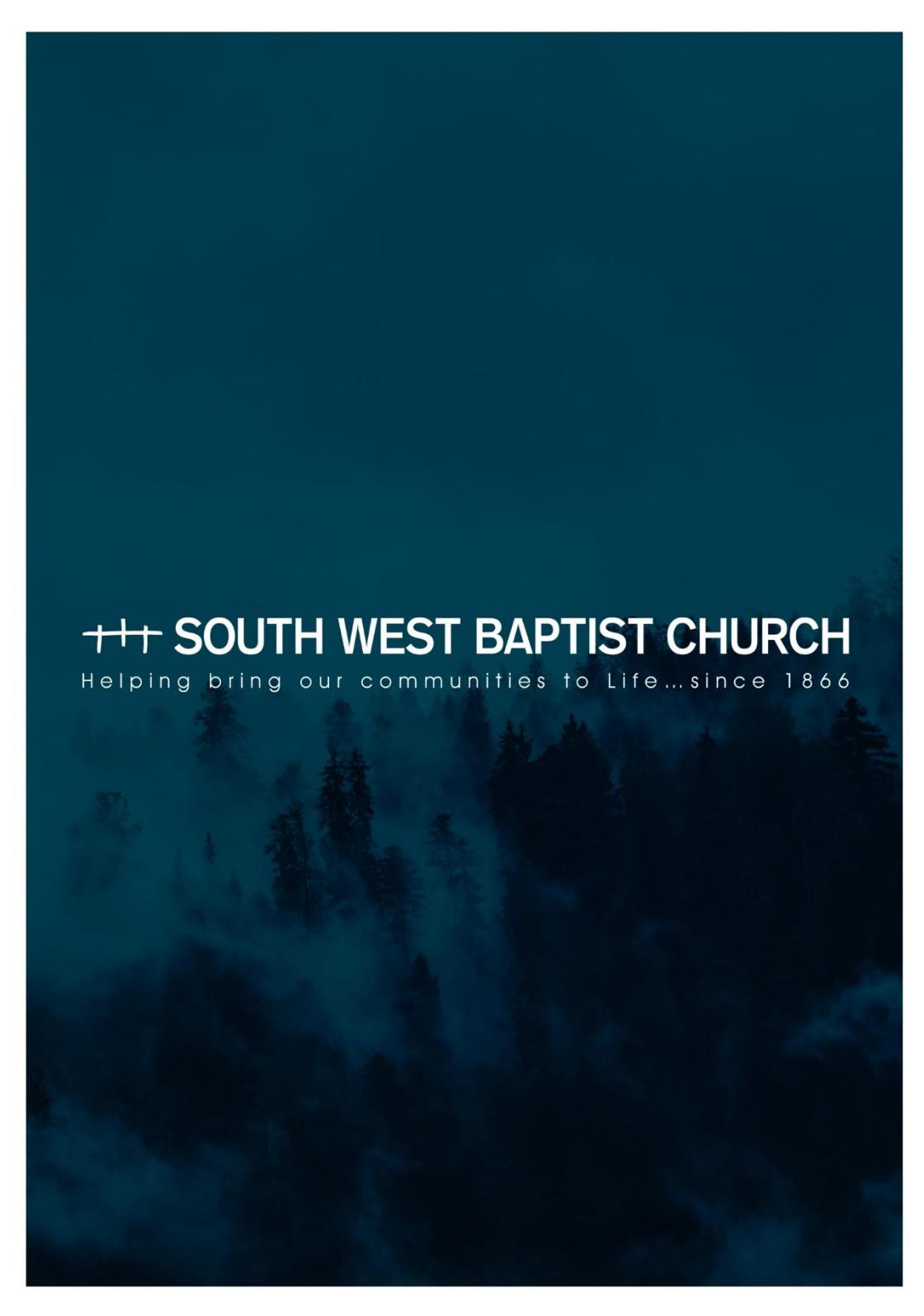
What have you learned from our Mid-winter series? What will you change?

Prayer

Sovereign Lord, show me what you want me to do. Mould me in the direction of positive change for my community and my world. Amen.

Conclude with Silence (2 minutes)

Saturday/Sunday Notes



++ **SOUTH WEST BAPTIST CHURCH**

Helping bring our communities to Life...since 1866