



Garstang United
Reformed Church

Plants for Reflection: Fig Tree and Apple Tree

Figs are the edible fruit of the Fig Tree. It is a deciduous tree growing up to twenty-five feet tall, native to Western Asia and the Mediterranean.

Apples have been grown in Europe and Asia for thousands of years. There are over 750 different cultivars (varieties) of Apple, often grown for specific uses, e.g., eating, for drinks, and cooking.

Bible Passage: Joel 1:12 (NRSV*)

The vine withers, the fig tree droops. Pomegranate, palm, and apple - all the trees of the field are dried up; surely, joy withers away among the people.

The first part of this book contains a prophecy which foretells the impact of a natural disaster on God's people. The book starts with images of the destruction of the harvest of the fields, wheat, wine, and trees. The prophecy ends with God having taken pity on his people and a plentiful harvest from the fields.

As in other stories in the Bible, the cause of the disaster is the appearance of a swarm of locusts. It is likely that this type of disaster was not unknown to the people in Palestine that Joel was writing for. This will have made the images of the penalties for falling away from God more real to the intended reader and therefore also the gratitude when the swarm has passed, and food supplies are restored in plenty.

Reflection: Food and Clothing

Desert locusts remain common across large areas of the Middle East and East Africa. They are largely solitary insects, but they can multiply very rapidly and when numbers increase, they swarm and form huge clouds of several million insects in search of food. Each locust consumes two grams of food every day. Each day a swarm of about ten million locusts, enough to cover the area of about two football pitches, would eat food equivalent to the daily needs of the population of Garstang. In these countries, this is one of many causes of hunger and malnutrition amongst their population, particularly for children, because this can leave them more at risk from the harm caused by other diseases.

* New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition, © 1989, 1995, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Although we are fortunate in this country not to suffer from swarms of locusts, there are still people who are unable to access sufficient food and clothing for themselves and their families. In 2021, the Trussell Trust estimated that their food banks across the UK provided over 5,000 food parcels each day, of which about 40% were to families with children. The number of people living in food poverty and needing to make regular use of food banks is growing rapidly. The Trussell Trust asks us to think about whether this is acceptable in a society like ours, or whether we should be working to create a more dignified and just society where everyone has enough money for the essentials. As Christians we are taught that all people are God's children. Would we want to see our family members not having enough food to eat?

Prayer

We who are fed give thanks for the food we can enjoy.

We offer a prayer for those who hunger in our land and across the world, remembering those whose diet depends on what they can find, not what they want to eat.

We remember those in our country who rely on food banks and soup kitchens or are dependent on food that others have thrown away.

You called us to feed your people, to use our skills and our conscience to ensure that no-one goes hungry in a land of plenty.

We pray for those who go hungry in other lands, people whose land is farmed to meet our needs not to provide enough for them; people living in places prone to natural disasters, drought, flooding, swarms of locusts, adding more burden to a precarious existence.

Lord, you call us to feed your people, neighbours near and far.

We give you thanks for those who work to ensure that this is the case,

- in the food banks and food clubs in the communities of our land
- across the world in building resilience in communities so that they are able to feed their people

We pray for the hungry and the fed.

Loving God have mercy

Amen.