

WEEKLY SERMON

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Standing in the gap for us

The nation was stunned to wake up to the news recently of the mindless felling of the 'Sycamore Gap' tree next to Hadrian's Wall. The Wall itself is much older than the tree of course, but nonetheless the tree has stood like a sentry, perfectly positioned in a dip in the landscape, for centuries.

It seemed immovable. Everlasting.

Until someone came along with a chainsaw and in a few moments of madness, robbed us of something very special indeed.

To see the tree on its side in the news reports was heartbreaking.

Then something remarkable happened.

In the news bulletins and on social media, people began to share stories of what the tree had meant to them. Some had scattered the ashes of a loved one nearby; others had proposed to their future husband or wife under its branches.

Of all the tales I heard in the days after the tree was felled the most affecting was a man who phoned LBC in tears to tell how the tree had meant everything to his father who had died in 2016 and grew up living near to where the tree had stood.

His father was the youngest prisoner of war liberated in 1945 by the allies from a German prison camp. He was 17 at the time.

His son told how the one thing that had kept his father going while in the camp was the thought of being able to walk up to Sycamore Gap and gaze upon the tree once again; to touch its trunk.

For centuries the tree had stood and meant so much to so many people. Could it rise again?

The answer, surprisingly, is potentially yes. Tree experts are saying what remains of the trunk could be protected and new branches and eventually the tree itself could rise again although it will take a century or more to reach anything like the size it was before.

Meanwhile seeds from the tree are being gathered and other trees may be planted from the original tree - multiplying it many times over. The story of the Sycamore standing in the Gap resonates on many levels and reminds us too of the sacrifice Jesus Christ made on our behalf.

Jesus came to be our sanctuary, as the tree was a sanctuary to so many from the wind and rain.

God loves people – He created them in His own image and wants to be in relationship with them; but sin gets in the way. Romans 3:23 says: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

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But God looked for an intercessor – someone to stand strong, like the tree, in the gap; someone who could bridge the gap between God and man and so He sent His Son, Jesus, to stand in the gap for you and me!

Let's also pray that the many seeds from the tree lead to so many saplings we won't be able to count them all; in much the same way as Jesus' sacrifice all those years ago has let to countless millions finding eternal everlasting life in Him.

Ronnie Semley, Communications Manager