

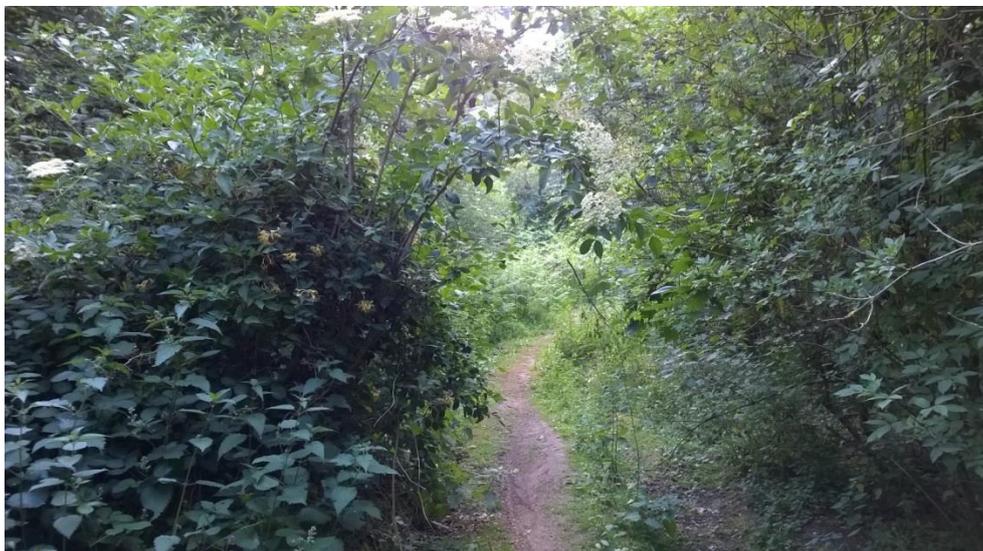
Sunday 7th June 2020

The Art of Waiting

The aroma in my dining room confirms that early summer has arrived. The first batch of Elderflower cordial is bottled and the second is infusing very nicely! There is something very satisfying in gathering the first hedgerow freebies of the season and turning them into a drink to be enjoyed throughout the year. Whenever I open a bottle, the heady aroma will transport me back to the early summer countryside.



The countryside is a wonder of glorious abundance at present. During these last few weeks I have often walked the same paths but they are barely recognisable as the ones I trod ten weeks ago. Some have become green tunnels with leaf-laden branches meeting to form natural canopies. Tall ferns confidently sway in the breeze, masking the places where primroses and bluebells gently emerged to raise spring spirits. The sunlight is dappled in the woodland now as the sun's rays are broken by leafy boughs.



Amidst all this beauty I have been watching the elder, eagerly anticipating the right moment to pick the flowers for my favourite cordial! Part of the joy is engaging a range of senses in this process. My eyes are attuned to observing the clusters of tight buds as they gradually begin to open to reveal the delicate white flowers. But visual observation isn't the most reliable guide. The true indicator of readiness is the fragrance. Only when an elder bush greets you with a heady aroma, will the flowers produce a drink that tastes of summer! This is patient work but the patience is richly rewarded. It's tempting to start gathering the flowers as soon as they open but experience has taught me to wait. If elderflowers are gathered before the fragrance has depth, the resulting drink will be disappointing.



Waiting generally requires patience. Many areas of our lives are on hold at present. We are being asked to wait. And even as we begin to emerge from lockdown, we must move slowly and carefully to protect each other from the virus.

I have a lot of sympathy for those who are impatient! I long to worship God in our churches and to gather family and friends in my home. Waiting to do these things seems very frustrating at times. But waiting is also a sign of our love and respect for each other. The scientists are telling us that a sprint back to normality could have disastrous consequences. A gentle and patient walk, watching carefully as we move forwards, is a safer path to follow.

Some of you have mentioned that previous reflections have drawn you to become more attentive as you've walked in the countryside. Such attentiveness allows us to receive the gifts of nature that are freely offered to nurture us and raise our spirits. Some of us sense God's love profoundly in such moments. As we begin to emerge from this period of enforced slow-down, perhaps a gradual, patient and discerning increase in activity is also the more spiritual way. It might enable us to retain those things that will strengthen us and enrich our society to positively move forwards into the future. Recently I have been moved by the awesome sight of birds of prey gliding over the countryside. I thought of their attentive birds-eye view of the world as I prayerfully reflected on these words from the prophet Isaiah,

*Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.* Isaiah 40. 31.