



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK

The Archbishop writes in today's [Yorkshire Post](#) about the value and his love of trees. The article follows in full...

The American poet Wendell Berry once described the canopy that trees formed above him as 'a timbered choir':

Great trees, outspreading and upright

Apostles of the living light.

Patient as stars, they build in air

Tier after tier a timbered choir

Stout beams upholding weightless grace

Of song, a blessing on this place.^{[1](#)}

It will be a good while before the twelve small trees that were recently planted by myself and members of the local community in the gardens of Bishopthorpe Palace will resemble an avenue of giants, but left alone and allowed to thrive, they will become just that – each tree an ecosystem in itself, sustaining a wondrous diversity of life,

Receiving sun and giving shade

Their life's a benefaction made

And is a benediction said

Over the living and the dead.

The annals of Bishopthorpe Palace will explain that the trees planted in November 2021 mark the Platinum Jubilee of the accession to the throne of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. It is a small contribution to the national initiative led by [Cool Earth](#), in partnership with the UK Government and the [Woodland Trust](#), to plant millions of trees in celebration of the Jubilee. A living legacy - the [Queen's Green Canopy](#).

There is something deeply humbling about planting trees. The old forester's proverb claims that 'Great oaks take 300 years to grow, 300 years to stay, and 300 years to die'. These fragile saplings are patient creatures that will long outlive me and even my great-grandchildren.

Those of us who have seen Sir David Attenborough's latest documentary series on the BBC will have nurtured a new respect for the intricate wonders of plant-life on our Green Planet. Did you know that oak trees alone provide a habitat for 2,300 other species – 326 of which are entirely dependent on oak for their survival?

Apart from their obvious benefit for biodiversity, trees also improve air quality, fight flooding, promote mental and physical health and wellbeing, improve the aesthetic value of the world around us, and as such even attract business and elevate house prices.

And I haven't even mentioned the role trees can play in our response to the Climate Crisis. It is estimated that each hectare of young woodland can capture over 400+ tonnes of carbon. Even a single mature tree will absorb between 10 and 40kg of carbon per year on average, adding up to at least a tonne over its lifetime. To put this into a more sombre perspective – the average carbon footprint of a UK citizen is about 10 tonnes of CO2 per person per year.

I know full well that my 12 trees aren't going to solve our climate crisis! However, no less than 3 million “Plant a Tree for the Jubilee” saplings and trees are available for free to UK community groups, schools, parish councils and corporates through the Woodland Trust and its partners. They can begin to make a difference. If we act together – much like trees do in the forest – we will start to notice the impact. Not just for ourselves, but also for those who will come after us.

This is the time for hopeful action. Jesus inspired us with stories of small beginnings and seemingly insignificant actions that transform the world beyond all recognition. From a single mustard seed grows a large plant that supports the nesting birds. A single grain of wheat, when buried, sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. As my friend Justin Welby expressed it in his New Year Message: “When we plant a seed, we don't see the fruit immediately. But under the surface, God is working with what we have planted.” If we act in hope, we no longer feel the need to calculate the exact impact of our actions, but instead have faith in the life-giving and transforming power of the God of life to bring about things beyond our wildest imagination.

So I invite you to consider planting a tree this year. As you do this, you invest in joy and hope, and in someone else's future. You change the trajectory of our planet. The planting season ends in March and will start again in October. If you need help on what to plant and how to do it, the Woodland Trust [website](#) is the place to look.

Planting a tree is a joyfully defiant statement of hope: for you and your community; for generations to come; and for the earth itself.

- [1A](#) Timbered Choir written by Wendell Berry. Taken from This Day: Collected & New Sabbath Poems published by Counterpoint in 2013



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