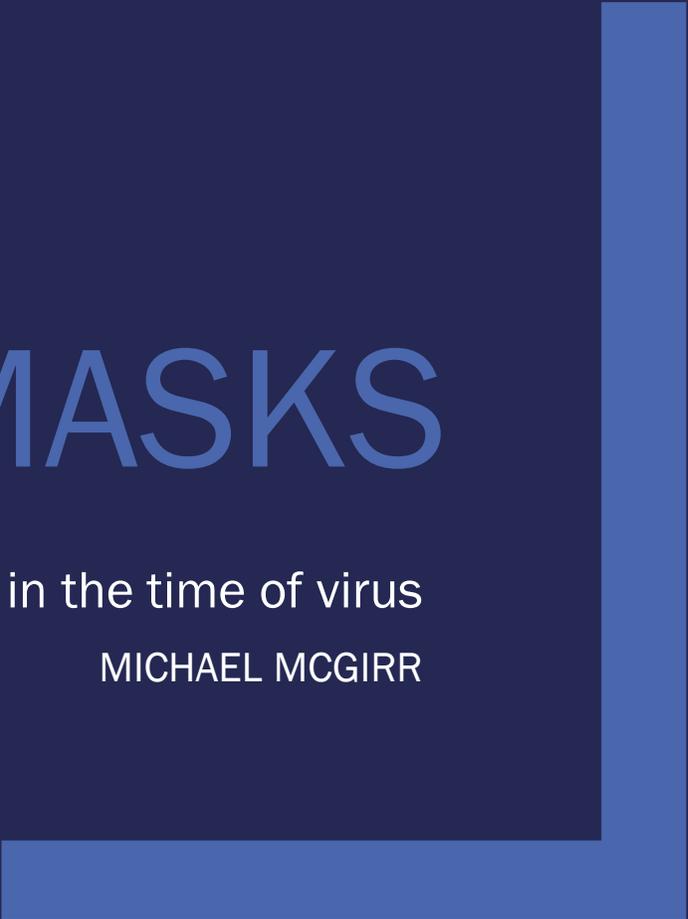


# TREES WITHOUT MASKS

Simple prayers in the time of virus

MICHAEL MCGIRR





## 1. TREES THAT WAIT FOR BIRDS

God of patience, we thank you for birds that sit quietly in branches

And wonder what we humans are doing down below.

May they keep their business to themselves.

May we learn their lesson of stillness,

Of oneness with trees and the earth.

May we hold others as branches hold birds.

Just like the story of St Kevin and the blackbird.

May we reach out

Until the people we hold are ready to fly off on their own

And leave us to wait for the next person you send.

Teach us how to love as your son taught us

From a tree.

Amen.



## 2. THE FIG TREE IN WINTER

God of days when nothing goes right,  
Help us to know that we are not cursed.

Scripture tells us that Jesus was impatient with  
the fig tree

That did not bear fruit.

But he gave it another chance, another year to  
come good.

May we be patient with ourselves  
And with you.

May we accept that all things have their season  
and learn with St Peter that sometimes

You will put a belt around us

And take us where we would rather not go.

We wait in joyful hope

For the unfolding of your plan.

Amen.



### 3. THE SAPLING

Loving God, we thank you for the gift of new growth.

For the people who never give up.

For the ones who look after the sick.

For those who insist that black lives matter.

For those who bring food to those who can't leave home.

They are all like saplings, small plants that point to a bigger future.

We thank you for the call to new growth in our own lives,

To new commitment, to fresh honesty, to deeper love.

Be with us as we begin to branch out.

Make us stronger.

Amen.



#### **4. THE TREE WITH A SPIDER'S WEB**

God of gentle strength,

A spider's web is a thing of great beauty but also fragile. Just like our lives.

A spider's web is the result of a lot of hard work. Just like our lives.

A spider's web can get damaged. But the spider is never discouraged. The spider just gets back to work and tries again. Just like us. A spider's web is easy to overlook. Sometimes that is just like us.

Let us pray that we can appreciate the beauty of the world around us.

Let us pray that we can appreciate the beauty and wonder of our own lives and the lives of those we love.

Let us give thanks for small moments of grace.

Amen.



## 5. THE QUIET TREE WITH A NOISY MINER

God of beauty,

We thank you for our world, especially for birds.

They go about their business and don't seem to realise

How beautiful they are.

Jesus asked us to consider the birds of the air.

He said that they don't sow or reap,

But that not even a king looked as majestic.

Jesus' message was not to worry too much.

To accept each day.

To deal with its challenges honestly.

To give thanks for the gift of life in all its forms.

To get on with life whatever this day presents.

May we all take his advice!

Amen.



## 6. THE TREE IN THE FAST-FOOD DRIVE THROUGH

Loving God, we know that some trees look awkward.

They are planted for decoration and seem to be made of plastic.

They don't get much attention.

But if we look closely, we will see new leaves  
A sign of real life.

We pray, O Lord, that we don't live for appearances.

May we see beyond makeup and outfits

To find what is genuine

Because nothing is holy without being real  
And reality doesn't have to match our ideas of what matters.

Reality is where we find you every day, even during a rushed lunch.

Help us grow in dry places when that is where you need us.

Amen.



## 7. THE SHEOAK

God of bad hair days,  
We thank you for the sheoak  
Perhaps the most untidy of all your trees.  
It looks like it just got out of bed, it's branches  
and leaves all over the place.  
Yet its texture of greys and greens are the  
most subtle shades in the bush.  
Its thousands of tiny branches dance in hot  
winds and cold gales  
When the rest of us have sought shelter.  
Help us to be true to ourselves,  
To appreciate our unkempt beauty,  
To stand our ground in all seasons,  
Not to disguise our mess, our confusion, our  
search for love  
Which is wonderful in your eyes even when it  
is frustrating in our own.  
Amen.



## 8. THE JADE TREE

God of good days and bad,  
We offer you a modest pot of jade.  
It often appears near doors  
Because it is said to bring good luck.  
If someone put a jade tree under a ladder,  
We don't know whose superstition would prevail!  
We thank you for the legends of different  
cultures  
And the longing they preserve.  
Not all our fortune is of our own making.  
Sometimes it walks through the door  
In the form of a person who offers kindness or  
advice,  
A gentle challenge or challenging gentleness.  
Bring us not luck, but grace.  
Keep us open to your daily coming.  
Amen.



## 9. THE TREE STUMP

God of our grieving,  
Help us to find inspiration in nature.  
In the weeds that spring up from cracks in  
concrete,  
from grass that sprouts in the highest gutters,  
from vegetables that grow from compost.  
Remind us that the end is never the end for you,  
Meaning that there is always another chapter  
With a twist we may not have expected.  
Loving God, we can count the rings in a stump  
And realise how long a tree has stood before it  
was felled.  
May we value the rings in our own timber,  
The experiences you have led us through,  
The losses that have helped us grow, however  
painful  
Thank you for second chances, third chances  
And peace at the last.  
Amen.



## 10. THE MAGNOLIA

God of gracious gestures,

We thank you for the magnolia.

It holds out its flowers like a prayer

Offering colour and beauty in ordinary places.

The magnolia is said to be the most ancient  
flower

Existing even before there were bees to help with  
pollination.

It has the dignity of the ages.

It has seen everything before.

Help our souls to find the right balance

When there is so much to unsettle us.

May we lift up our hearts in gratitude

Even when we are tempted to bow down in  
resentment,

Or pointless anger.

Make our spirits light.

Amen.



## 11. THE ORANGE TREE

God of good neighbours,  
We thank you for the gardener down the street  
Who is so proud of his oranges.  
Mary Magdalene is famous for mistaking Jesus  
for a gardener.  
In a way, it was a compliment. Gardeners love  
creation!  
They respect even the smallest seedling.  
St Teresa of Avila said that God was like a  
gardener  
And our lives are God's garden.  
God plants all sorts of things in them.  
May we also be gardeners of our own lives  
Caring for ourselves and caring for others  
In wonder and gratitude.  
Amen.

## 12. THE WATTLE

God of every breath,  
We love to see the wattle in bloom,  
The harbinger of spring.  
Its arrival brightens up our winter gloom.  
It can be uncomfortable too  
Often indicating that hayfever is in the air.  
Nothing reminds us of the gift of breath so  
much as when breathing is difficult.  
Wearing masks during the pandemic  
reminded many of us  
Of the beauty of air, the grace of every easy  
breath.  
Jesus breathed on his friends to receive the  
Holy Spirit.  
May our every breath draw the Spirit deeper  
into our being  
And free us from all fear.  
Amen.





### **13. THE TREE THAT APPEARS IN FOG**

God of misty mornings,

We thank you for moments of clarity.

There are times when life feels like winter,

Cold and foggy.

We want to stay under the blankets.

But then we catch a glimpse of you,

A bit like something taking shape in the mist,

And slowly we discern your presence,

Not always clear but unmistakable.

Lead us this day to know you a little more  
deeply

And to surrender to you, as St Ignatius prayed,

Our liberty, memory, understanding, our entire  
will.

Give us only your love and your grace.

That is enough.

Amen.



#### **14. TREES AT FIRST LIGHT WHEN IT IS WELL BELOW ZERO**

God of first light,  
We thank you for the trees that have stood  
patiently all night  
Ready for when the birds begin to call at their  
unseemly hour.  
We offer you this day.  
All its prayers, works, joys and sufferings.  
Guide us to where you need us.  
We thank you for the gift of our lives and the  
world within which we lead them.  
We thank you for the small moments of  
beauty and wonder in every day.  
May we listen to the words of Jesus  
Do not let your hearts be troubled, trust in  
God and trust in me.  
Amen.



## 15. THE POTTED LEMON TREE

God of potted trees, help us to accept our limitations

To grow even when we feel confined.

There is a saying that if life gives us lemons, we should make lemonade.

Others say we should make gin and tonic.

May we think of the widow for whom two small coins  
Expressed great love

And the boy who gave some fish and a few loaves.

We often feel inadequate to the challenges of a world in pain.

Help us to know that our littleness  
Is enough to add zest to the world  
Because of your great love.

Heal our self-doubt.

May we remember the words of St Mary MacKillop.  
There where you are, you will find God.

Amen.



## 16. WILD APPLE TREES

God of abundance, we thank you for wild  
apple trees,

Bursting with so much fruit that the branches  
can hardly cope.

We know that a bit of pruning might have  
helped the tree

And led to fewer but larger apples.

Yet it is great to see what can happen when  
we don't get in the way.

Loving God, thank you for the abundance of  
our own lives.

Sometimes we can hardly cope either

We wish you might prune our lives,

And make them simpler.

But the complexity is your gift.

It stops us settling for simple answers.

Faith doesn't have one liners.

It is a relationship ripening in your love.

Amen.



## 17. THE CONIFER IN THE MORNING RAIN

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,  
Be with us at every hour of this day.

Help us to hold on to you,

When it is easy to let go into cynicism,  
negativity, and endless criticism.

Every drop of water is teeming with life and so  
is every moment.

May we remember the words of Psalm 63:

God, you are my God, I am seeking you,

My soul is thirsting for you,

My flesh is longing for you,

A land parched weary and waterless.

Let us pray

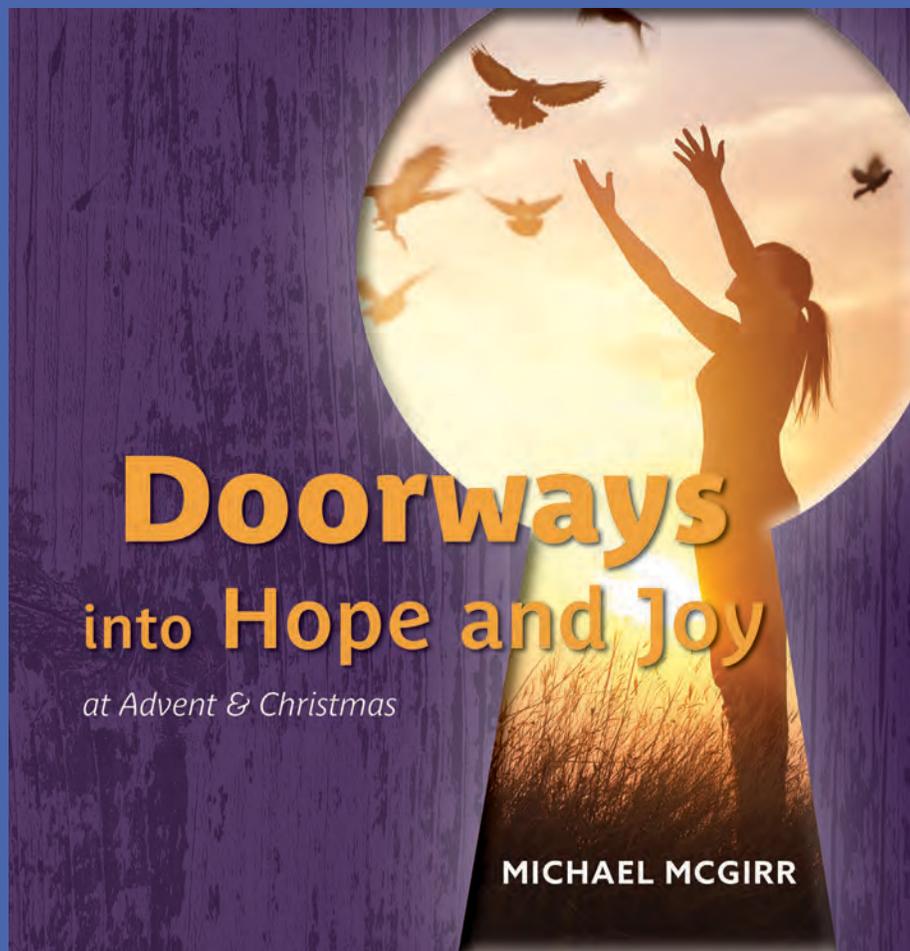
Your love is better than life itself.

Amen.



## 18. THE TREE THAT SHOULDN'T BE THERE

God of the unexpected,  
we thank you for trees that grow where they  
are not supposed to.  
Sometimes they frustrate us, putting their  
roots in our pipes  
And blocking our drains.  
But they remind us that our ways are not your  
ways.  
They say that if you want to hear God laugh,  
Just say what your plans are.  
Help us, Lord, to surrender to your mystery.  
To do what we can  
And leave the rest to your grace.  
You will make things grow in our lives  
Where we least expect.  
Amen.



If you have enjoyed Michael McGirr's *TREES* series, his new book – *Doorways into Hope and Joy at Advent & Christmas*, is now in stock!

In *Doorways into Hope and Joy*, Michael has taken the idea of the perennial favourite – the Advent calendar – and created a book where each day of Advent reveals a different doorway into the world around us. Accompanying each beautiful image is a scripture prompt and reflection that inspires readers to consider the many different doorways through which God can come into their lives.

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