

## THE ROOD TREE

**Reading** Galatians 3.6-14

Just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’, so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.’ For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.’ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’ But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, ‘Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’—in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

### Talk

What would the Cross itself say to us, if it could speak? That is what lies behind one of the most beautiful of Old English poems, the Dream of the Rood. Although it sounds splendid as the author wrote it, I guess you wouldn’t understand very much. So here is part of it in the translation by Richard Hamer. The author says he is watching by the Saviour’s tree, grieving, until he hears the cross speak to him in these words.

"It was long past - I still remember it -  
That I was cut down at the copse's end,  
Moved from my root. Strong enemies there took me,  
Told me to hold aloft their criminals,  
Made me a spectacle. Men carried me  
Upon their shoulders, set me on a hill,  
A host of enemies there fastened me.  
And then I saw the Lord of all mankind  
Hasten with eager zeal that He might mount  
Upon me. I durst not against God's word  
Bend down or break, when I saw tremble all  
The surface of the earth. Although I might  
Have struck down all the foes, yet stood I fast.  
Then the young hero (who was God almighty)  
Got ready, resolute and strong in heart.

He climbed onto the lofty gallows-tree,  
Bold in the sight of many watching men,  
When He intended to redeem mankind.  
I trembled as the warrior embraced me.  
But still I dared not bend down to the earth,  
Fall to the ground. Upright I had to stand.  
A rood I was raised up; and I held high  
The noble King, the Lord of heaven above.  
I dared not stoop. They pierced me with dark nails;  
The scars can still be clearly seen on me,  
The open wounds of malice. yet might I  
Not harm them. They reviled us both together.  
I was made wet all over with the blood  
Which poured out from his side, after  
He had Sent forth His spirit. And I underwent  
Full many a dire experience on that hill.  
I saw the God of hosts stretched grimly out.  
Darkness covered the Ruler's corpse with clouds  
His shining beauty; shadows passed across,  
Black in the darkness. All creation wept,  
Bewailed the King's death; Christ was on the cross.  
And yet I saw men coming from afar,  
Hastening to the Prince. I watched it all.  
With sorrows I was grievously oppressed,  
Yet willingly I bent to those men's hands,  
Humbly. They took up there Almighty God,  
And from the heavy torment lifted Him.  
The soldiers left me standing drenched with moisture,  
Wounded all over with the metal points.  
They laid Him down limb-weary; then they stood  
Beside the corpse's head, there they beheld  
The Lord of heaven, and He rested there  
A while, tired after the great agony.  
The men then made a sepulchre for Him  
In sight of me. They carved it of bright stone,

And set therein the Lord of victories.  
Next, wretched in the eveningtide, they sang  
A dirge for Him; and when they went away,  
Weary from that great Prince, He stayed alone.  
Yet we remained there weeping in our places  
A good long time after the warriors' voices  
Had passed away from us. The corpse grew cold,  
The fair abode of life. Then men began  
To cut us down. That was a dreadful fate.  
In a deep pit they buried us. But friends  
And servants of the Lord learnt where I was,  
And decorated me with gold and silver.  
Now you may understand, dear warrior,  
That I have suffered deeds of wicked men  
And grievous sorrows. Now the time has come  
That far and wide on earth men honour me,  
And all this great and glorious creation,  
And to this beacon offers prayers. On me  
The Son of God once suffered; therefore now  
I tower mighty underneath the heavens,  
And I may heal all those in awe of me.  
Once I became the cruellest of tortures,  
Most hateful to all nations, till the time  
I opened the right way of life for men.  
So then the prince of glory honoured me,  
And heaven's King exalted me above  
All other trees, just as Almighty God  
Raised up His mother Mary for all men  
Above all other women in the world.  
Now, my dear warrior, I order you  
That you reveal this vision to mankind,  
Declare in words this is the tree of glory  
On which Almighty God once suffered torments  
For mankind's many sins, and for the deeds  
Of Adam long ago. He tasted death

Thereon; and yet the Lord arose again  
By his great might to come to human aid.  
He rose to heaven. And the Lord Himself,  
Almighty God and all His angels with Him,  
Will come onto this earth again to see  
Mankind on Doomsday, when the final Judge  
Will give His verdict upon every man,  
What in this fleeting life he shall have earned.  
Nor then may any man be without fear  
About the words the Lord shall say to him.  
Before all He shall ask where that man is  
Who for God's name would suffer bitter death  
As formerly He did upon the cross.  
Then they will be afraid, and few will know  
What they may say to Christ. But there need none  
Be fearful if he bears upon his breast  
The best of tokens. Through the cross each soul  
Nay journey to the heavens from this earth,  
Who with the Ruler thinks to go and dwell."