

View From Grabbist, February 2025

Whenever I walk in the countryside, I love to look out for mushrooms and toadstools. There are many common varieties, and more lesser-known ones. I am no expert, but I have enjoyed using the Obs Identify app on my phone which helps me make identifications. Here are some that I have spotted over the last few months: *Sterum Subtomentosum*, *Sterum Hirsutum*, the aptly named *Common Earthball*, *Turkeytail* and *Jelly Ear Fungus*, *Golden Waxcap*, *Scarlet Waxcap*, *Glutinous Waxcap*...I love their names, variety and intriguing other-worldliness.

What is even more astonishing is that the fungi we see out and about are only fleeting fruits of much vaster networks of mycelium which exist in the dark under our feet in the rich humus. It has been estimated that if all the mycelium in the world were strung together in a line, they would stretch halfway across the Milky Way, around 50,000 light years (or 4.25×10^{12} km!). Scientists think we only know a tiny amount about this. Penicillin is a fungi, and more recently fungi have been discovered that can break down plastic and others that can be formed into organic biodegradable replacement materials for plastic. More commonly, mycelium break down dead matter and keep the cycle of life going across our forests with brain-like intelligence. Through the mycelial networks, trees of differing varieties communicate with one another. This world is a world of wonder that we're only just beginning to understand...¹

That we are beginning to understand this now is poignant. It seems to me that the mycelial networks which keep us alive are also a great metaphor for the interconnectedness that we share as human beings with one another and all of nature. We live in critical times, when there is much breakdown, isolation and misunderstanding across our world and communities and we have set ourselves over and against the very nature which is our life. The mycelium tells a deeper story. It is, if you like, a sacrament - an outward sign of an inward grace, signalling the Divine Life which infuses and upholds all things. Connection, interconnection and relationship are primal and we are part of a Holy Communion. Whenever we reject that which causes us to divide and truly and authentically re-forge relationship with one another and all of nature, we rediscover the Divine.

This is no easy path. Christ embodies this Divine life (an embodiment at the heart of the season of incarnation, which is just closing), and it led him into great suffering (the season that leads to his passion, which we are approaching). The life and work of Christ is about reconnection, re-forging relation. We can be a part of this reconciling work. It is the organic Body of Christ - or perhaps the mycelial sacrament!

It is nothing less than the healing of everything.

Revd Kenneth Cross

¹ See BBC iPlayer, 'Fungi: The Web Of Life for a fascinating exploration of this, or Martin Sheldrake's book 'Entangled Life' which I am looking forward to reading soon!