

SHELTERING TREES

By Rev. Susan Gregg-Schroeder

Shortly before his death, Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote *Youth and Age*, in which he reflected over his past and what had given him strength in his earlier years. One of the most profound lines of his work is the statement, "Friendship is a sheltering tree..." How true this statement is for all of us today. When we face life's challenges and disappointments, there is nothing like a sheltering tree - a true friend - to give us relief in the cool shade. Beneath the branches of such sheltering trees have rested many a discouraged soul.

There are numerous examples of sheltering trees in the Bible. But of all the trees that God provided, the special relationship between David and Jonathan stands out. No matter how hard he tried, Saul could not chop down that tree named Jonathan. There were no limits, no conditions, no bargains and no reservations in this special friendship. When things were at their worst, the book of 1 Samuel reports that Jonathan "Went to David...and encouraged him in God." (1 Sam.23:16) Jonathan was committed to the basic principles of friendship and "he loved him as he loved himself." (1 Sam.18:1) Love was the reason for this special friendship.

Beneath whose branches are you refreshed? And who rests beneath your branches? We can probably name persons who rest beneath our branches, for most of us are more comfortable reaching out to others. But sometimes we too need to rest awhile beneath the shade of another's branches. Too often, I suspect, we give the impression that we have it all together, and we are afraid of admitting our own vulnerability.

Sheltering trees are a gift from God. I believe God works in and through the relationships we share with others. I wrote this poem for one of my sheltering trees.

I had a glimpse of your love today, O God.
It was in the eyes of my friend
 as she shared my tears.
It was in the arms of my friend
 as she held me when I cried.
It was in my friend's being there
 in her acceptance of my pain
 in her allowing me to let out those feelings.
It was in her loving me.
Surely that was you, Creator God.
Surely it was your eyes,
 your arms, your presence, your love.
Just as you revealed your nature
 to us all,
So my friend became an expression
 of your love to me.