



Plum Blossom

by Alan Alesius

I barely felt the piercing lash of crisp mid-winter on the park trail. Tears welled not from the frosty air but from deep despair churning within. “Why God, why?” I muttered indignantly. My spirit ached with sorrow as I sought to understand. “Why did You call home both of my wife’s parents just one week apart? Was that not enough? You then pile on my job layoff upon our return from their funerals? Seriously?!” The anguish was too much to bear. I just had to get outdoors, to be alone with my thoughts that morning.

Walking briskly, I trekked along deep in thought. These painful wounds consumed me. I was oblivious to my surroundings. Until now. Coming upon a clearing, a most unusual sight suddenly captured my attention – a tree in full bloom! Flourishing beside a peaceful pond stood an exceptional, solitary tree. She had much room to thrive. Her much taller deciduous brothers, leaf-barren, crowded around at a distance like stiff sentinels on guard to protect her from winter’s freezing assault. She was a striking beauty. A magnificent branch canopy profusely covered with white petal blooms adorned her. New buds in unrolled purplish leaves mingled, eager to sprout. Her skin was a dark, deep gray bark with no horizontal lines. Her thin, twisty branches traversed in and out. Like a royal queen’s perfume, a fragrant smell wafted from her velvety soft, five-petal rounded-edge blooms. I was thunderstruck. All confirmed her distinctive identity. She was a plum blossom!

Beloved throughout China, the plum blossom tree is a national treasure. For centuries, her beloved, elegant beauty is a focal point on ubiquitous artwork. However, a plum blossom’s alluring attraction and rich symbolism is best appreciated while observed in its natural habitat and environment. How blessed I was to be led by God here to discover plum blossom in her natural surroundings. Little did I know, however, God planned to also use her to address my life’s burdens.

A gloomy sky, gray and overcast, left the drab brown ground bereft of shadow or silhouette. They mirrored my mood on this dreary early February day. In stark contrast, though, was plum blossom. She was vibrant – alive! One of only a few mid-winter bloomers, her brilliant white petals and red-tipped stamen burst brightly in fearless resistance to winter’s clutches. “Look at plum blossom’s

radiant countenance,” God exhorted me. “She shrugs off winter’s doldrums. Are you not rooted in My Son, Jesus? Abide in Him. Do so, and in a season of despair you will also thrive.”

A plum blossom tree possesses a remarkable ability to persevere too. Cold hardy, she can stave off a harsh winter’s punch by withstanding frost and temperatures far below freezing. The Lord nudged me again. “Persevere amid your travails, my son, for I will lead you through,” God encouraged. “You and your wife can weather her parents’ sudden passing. Your job loss is just a temporary setback too. See how the plum blossom vigorously battles winter’s nasty bite? Nothing can stop her from blooming. Have courage, friend. Endure these troubling times. I will give you strength.”

Furthermore, the plum blossom is a symbol of hope to the Chinese – hope of the coming spring, rebirth, and new life. Similarly, God reminded me. Jesus is my hope. Life might knock me down, and even kick me while down as did my sudden layoff. But God is with us. Trust Him, and He will provide. His promise in Proverbs 3:5-6 resonated once more. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. Acknowledge Him in all your ways, and He will direct your path.”

Bolstered now with newfound resilience, strength, courage, hope, and renewed trust in the Lord, I continued down the park trail. I looked back once more at plum blossom. She drew a smile to my face. New tears of joy melted away the tears of despair that had beset me. My wife and I were going to be okay. Thank you, plum blossom. Thank you, Lord!