

Facing Cut Backs?

Ever since we had moved into our home 20 years previously, we had enjoyed a large established *Eleagnus pungens* 'Maculata' shrub in our garden. Its green and gold leaves provided all-year colour and looked beautiful in vases of cut flowers and around the house at Christmas. Over the years it had grown enormous. Nearly half of it had lost its variegation and produced dull green leaves. Although nominally a shrub, it was 5 metres tall with its central trunk as thick as my thigh. It was like a tree.

It was time for the chop!

Then the very morning I planned to take the axe and saw to it, it produced for the first time exquisite-looking fruit—red berries encrusted with silver tracery like tiny Fabergé eggs. They hung down as decoratively as any Christmas tree lantern. I wavered. What a waste to destroy all this growth, all this beauty.

Nevertheless, I started some fairly tentative cutting at the back of the shrub and my decision to proceed was soon endorsed by what I found:

1. The healthy branches at the front hid dead ones at the back that only provided support for the brambles that were so tall that they came out of the top of the *Eleagnus*.
2. I could reach thick brambles that had caused a nuisance for years and I then had space to dig out their roots instead of constantly just cutting them back several times a year.
3. Light started to flood into our garden from the south-west into areas that had always been in deep shade.
4. As I continued, I regained 3 metres of ground back to our neighbours' boundary and, once the roots were removed, I could create a new flowerbed.

The process was painful at times because the brambles were lethal. The *Eleagnus* wood was very close-grained and hard. It took a lot of time and effort to complete the job but the gains were worth it. Where the *Eleagnus* stood, we now have a beautiful young Copper Beech with a climbing rose reaching up through its branches. We have a mahonia and a hebe with primroses and geums underneath.

This is such a picture of what God loves to do in us. We can be deceived by superficially attractive things in our lives, we can be led to think that established parts of us are too big, too difficult to remove; interference and the fear of being wounded can get in the way, but when light comes into our darkness we reclaim the ground. Then God can do his new thing in us, with us and for us. God says,

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? Isaiah 43:18-19a