

The Weeping Cherry Tree

Every spring, people journey to The Saikouji Temple. At this temple, they can view the beautiful, ancient Weeping Cherry Tree blossom.

However a long time ago, maybe 100 years or so, one beautiful tree refused to bloom. That year, the priest had been looking forward to seeing the blossoms on that tree. He was so disappointed when day after day no buds appeared, he began to wonder if maybe the tree was just too old to bloom anymore, but he could not bring himself to cut it down.

One day, while looking after the ancient Weeping Cherry Tree, he said aloud, “I feel so sorry for you. You must be tired. Tomorrow, I will bring someone to chop you down and put you to rest.

That night, in the priest’s dream, the Weeping Cherry Tree’s spirit came to him. “I promise I will begin blooming in spring,” the spirit whispered, “please don’t cut me down.” The spirit’s face was so heartbreaking as she pleaded with the priest throughout the night. The spirit promised to bloom over and over.

The priest was felt moved by the dream, and he thought to himself, “I don't have to cut down the tree this year. I can always do it next year.”

The priest talked to the Weeping Cherry Tree every day. “Won’t you bloom for me in spring ?” One day, when he gazed at the tree, many buds were appearing on the willowing branches. True to her words, the Weeping Cherry Tree bloomed beautifully in spring.

The priest would often think to himself that with the spring breeze swaying through the branches, it looked as if the tree was happily dancing. “Thank you for not cutting me down,” the tree’s spirit seemed to say.

One day, a poet met with the priest and the priest told the poet of his dream. The poet took a brush to paper and created a poem.

*Roh-oh moto yori kore in-nen nari
Hyaku-nen manugare-etari sho-oh no ono
Shun-pu senshi ranman no toki
Yukoh hitoe ni Butsu-zen ni mukatte haku
Tada osoru shokei no koe ai furui
Shoh-joh kyori kashin oh odorokasu koto o*

The poem’s meaning is “At the Saikouji Temple, there is a Weeping Cherry Tree more than a hundred years old. It narrowly escaped the ax of death, believed to be saved by the grace of fate. Invited by the spring breeze, the cherry blossoms are in full bloom. A faint fragrance flows up to Buddha. Sounds of the gong and *kei* awake the Cherry Tree’s spirit from a dream. She knows the time to blossom has arrived.”

Even though the Weeping Cherry Tree is over 250 years old, people still journey to the Saikouji Temple, basking in the sight of the beautifully blooming blossoms.

