

Thought for the Day 14th September - John Reed

Read Isaiah 55

Did you hear about the woman who married a tree?

Kate Cunningham from Sefton, Merseyside in the UK apparently changed her name to Elder after she and the elder tree tied the knot at Rimrose Valley Country Park last year. Despite the embarrassment of her 15-year-old son, Elder went through with the “marriage” as an awareness-raising exercise in a campaign to save Rimrose Valley Country Park from being transformed into a bypass.

Thinking of trees and people relating to each other, in this passage Isaiah prophesies that one day the trees will clap with joy as the people of God proceed in triumph.

We looked yesterday at Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, during which one of the tests he faced was the test of hunger – as Israel had also been tested by hunger during the Exodus. Jesus quoted a verse from Deuteronomy 8:3 (which God told Israel was supposed to be the lesson they learned from their testing): that “man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

Hunger and thirst are themes that flow throughout the Bible. And often – as in this passage in Isaiah – they speak of our hunger and thirst that only God can satisfy. These opening lines of Isaiah, for example, are lines that Jesus echoed in John 7:37, as he proclaimed what he had to offer:

*Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price ...*

As this chapter of Isaiah goes on, it continues to speak of the compassion and grace of the Lord, and invites the hearer (verse 6), to:

*Seek the Lord while he may be found;
call upon him while he is near ...*

The primary audience for these words were the exiled people of Jerusalem. Defeated and carried away into captivity – a fate allowed and even engineered by God because of her repeated unfaithfulness to him – nonetheless God is faithful to his covenant (verse 3), and will restore his people, and bring them back to Jerusalem.

And when that happens, not only will they rejoice, but all of nature will rejoice with them. In imagery reminiscent of the ticker-tape parades we sometimes see for triumphant soldiers of athletes returning home, their path will be lined with not people but mountains, hills and trees singing and clapping their hands (verse 12).