

Views from the Pews - Weddings

In Hebrew society, a wedding was a big event, and a fertile source of imagery for theological ideas. A woman was required to leave her home and everything she knew in order to join the family of her husband. Her taking of his name marked the start of this new life, and a significant change in status. Here Isaiah 62:2 takes that process as a metaphor illustrating the restoration of Zion: ‘The nations shall see your vindication....and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give’.

The primary function of a married woman was to provide sons and grandsons for her husband, and a woman surrounded by many healthy children enjoyed high social esteem. But an unmarried woman, or worse, a married but childless woman, was an object of social scorn. Think of the desperate humiliation of Hannah, sorely provoked by her rivals for refusing to accept that ‘the Lord had closed her womb’, or to be comforted by Elkanah’s reassurance that he should be ‘more to you than ten sons’ (1 Sam 1:5-8). Remembering the strength of that public disgrace – far more powerful in those days than now – underlines the extraordinary vision of the prophet that ‘You [Zion] shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate’ [both standard terms of abuse suffered by spinsters and barren wives]. On the contrary, the new name promised in v. 2 is revealed in vv 3-4: ‘but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her....and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you (v 5)’. Amid all this glorious rejoicing we should not be distracted by the apparently mixed metaphor in v5, where ‘your sons marry you’ [ESV/NKJV] still refers to Zion. A search for ‘bridegroom’ comes up with many other Biblical images in both Testaments.

The wedding theme continues in the Gospel reading for today. The reception must have been quite a large family gathering, since Mary, Jesus and his disciples were invited to be there. When Mary told him that the wine had run out, Jesus responded ‘My hour has not yet come’, but his compassion for the potential embarrassment of the hosts overcame his reluctance. His compassion also prompted many future healings, and is still available to us. *Kim King*