

# Straight to the heart

Gillian Cooper *reflects on* Isaiah 55:10-13

Sometimes reason will not do. Sometimes logic fails us. Sometimes we look around us and hope and faith desert us. Sometimes only imagination can help us. Then what we need is Isaiah.

The poet responsible for the central section of the book of Isaiah was addressing a defeated people. They had lost their land, their king, and their faith in their God. They lived in exile in a foreign land. Many of them could not even remember Jerusalem. Hope for a return had long gone, and they were making the best of life in Babylon, as reason and logic told them to do.

But along comes the poet. "My word", says the Lord, "... shall not return to me empty... you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace." The mountains will sing, the trees will applaud. The whole world will rejoice as God's people go home.

There is no logic in the words of the prophet. Trees do not clap their hands. Jerusalem is in ruins. Return will be hard and painful. But still the poet sings of salvation, because only imagination will give the people back their faith and hope. The poetry is designed to bypass their brains and get into their hearts – and into ours too, when we need it. ☺

**God of hope and love, speak to our hearts and fire our imagination, that we may hear the singing of the mountains and the applause of the trees, and ever trust in your power to save. Amen.**



## Writing the journeys we never wanted to make

### Part 4 – journalling our consolations

by Julia McGuinness

Though we all have events or experiences in our lives we wish had been different, as we start to accept things and live through them, we can discover that these losses are softened by unexpected gains.

For example: If only... [my daughter had not married an Australian and gone to live in Sydney]. And yet... [I now have an international family and have been to a part of the world I would not otherwise have visited.]

Set up columns for two lists. Head the first "If only," and the

second, "And yet." Under the first, write things you wish could have been different. Be as specific as you can. Now move to the second column. Can you add an "And yet" that counter-balances each "If only"? It might not compensate for what has been lost, but it can be a consolation. Writing these things down can help us appreciate how they are also part of our journey.

*Julia is a lay reader licensed to Chester Cathedral, where she was formerly poet-in-residence. Her book – Writing the Journeys We Never Wanted to Make: a guide to journalling for resilience – is published by Wellness Books. ☺*

## Summer reading

*The Cost of Discipleship,*  
by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

*Recommended by* Caroline Hodgson

Published in 1937, *The Cost of Discipleship* is a powerful call to authentic Christian living. In it, Bonhoeffer denounces what he famously calls "cheap grace" – grace without discipleship. Rather, he advocates for grace which is "costly," demanding obedience, sacrifice and complete commitment to Christ. Drawing on the Sermon on the Mount, Bonhoeffer explores themes such as self-denial, suffering and the radical nature of following Jesus.

Written in the shadow of Nazi Germany, *The Cost of Discipleship*

is a testimony to Bonhoeffer's moral courage and theological conviction, which ultimately led to his imprisonment and execution in 1945. His work and example live on, however, and *The Cost of Discipleship* remains one of the most influential twentieth-century Christian books, both as a theological classic and a deeply personal witness to the price of true faith.

Bonhoeffer lived and died true to his own words: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." ☺

“If we answer the call to discipleship, where will it lead us?... Only Jesus, who bids us to follow him, knows the journey's end. But we do know that it will be a road of boundless mercy.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), German pastor, theologian and anti-Nazi activist