

Forests

When through the woods and forest glades I wander,

And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;

When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,

And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze:

Carl Gustaf Boberg (1859-1940) Hymn 236 CPWI

A walk through a wooded area or even relaxing in the shade of a tree can produce the most calming feeling of being at one with nature as Boberg captures in his well-known hymn. Trees are quite unassuming. Unlike most living things, they do not move from place to place, so we often are oblivious to the functions they actively perform and the vital role they play within the environment. However, if we really consider how essential they are for the survival of the planet, we will take greater care in their preservation. Trees are fascinating. Trees account for about 20% of the oxygen produced in the world (most of the oxygen produced comes from marine organisms). They are also vital in recycling water back into the atmosphere. A mature tree can release between 100 and 400 liters of water into the atmosphere per day. Then there is perhaps the most amazing fact about trees; they are natural air-conditioning units. A mature tree can provide the cooling effect of 5-8 air-conditioning units running continuously for about 20 hours!

Imagine then what happens when many trees are working together as they do in a forest.

The Amazing Amazon

The trees in the Amazon Rainforest act as a natural water pump. The roots reach deep into the soil and absorb water and nutrients. A small amount of the water (~5%) is used to make food for the plant and the rest is released by the process of evapotranspiration into the atmosphere. The Amazon rainforest releases approximately 200 billion cubic meters or 200 trillion liters of water per day. Just to put that into perspective, Barbados consumes about 81 million cubic meters of water per year. That would be about 0.4% of the amount of water that the Amazon Rainforest produces in one day! To put it another way, the Amazon Rainforest releases enough water in a single day to supply the island of Barbados for about 250 years!

The water vapor that is released from the trees is then carried by wind currents producing natural phenomena known as aerial rivers or 'flying rivers' (*rios valadores*). Flying rivers appear as continuous streams of clouds which move westward over the Amazon Rainforest until they encounter the natural barrier of the high Andes Mountains which forces them to turn south. The flying rivers created by the Amazon Rainforest provide as much as 70% of the water for some regions of South America.



An aerial or 'flying river' over the Amazon Rainforest

Reflection:

One of the images presented in the passage from Ezekiel 47 on which the theme for the season is based, is that of the evergreen trees which grow on the banks of the river bearing an abundance of different fruits nourished by the living water which flows from the temple. Apart from the physical imagery we are called to reflect on what this means spiritually. Perhaps if we pair this passage with that of another post-exilic writer's hope for the restoration of Judah, it becomes more apparent. In Trito-Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1-3) the prophet sees his mission as being sent to those who had returned from exile to inspire hope for the restoration of the temple and Judah in general. His intent was for the

people to become strong so that “They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord to display his glory” (Is. 61:3b). The prophet envisaged the people becoming like strong trees! To take it further, it is more than mere coincidence that this is the very passage with which Jesus began his earthly ministry in the Gospel according to St. Luke (Luke 4:18). Though Jesus did not quote the passage in its entirety, having read the first portion of the text, the latter portion is implied. Jesus’ ministry therefore was to proclaim liberty as was that of the prophet in Isaiah 61, to strengthen the hearts of the people that they may become like strong trees.

In essence, the Christian is called to be deeply rooted, stable like the trees of the Amazon, that we may draw on the living water and become agents of its distribution to those who are thirsting. Likewise, the Christian is also called to bear fruit. Here the fruit we are called to bear is the fruit of the Spirit which St. Paul described as “Love, Peace, Joy, Goodness, Kindness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Patience and Self-Control” (Gal. 5:22-23a).