

Jordan Station United Church

November 14, 2021

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Sermon based on Psalm 126

Psalm 126 is a prayer of thanksgiving that is situated between remembrance and anticipation, between memory and hope. It is fitting that it has been selected for the week after Remembrance Day and two weeks before Advent begins. So today as the liturgical calendar comes close to an end, we find ourselves between remembrance and anticipation. It is where all the yesterdays of the past year meet all the days that tomorrow will bring. **For me, it is about 'joy remembered, and joy anticipated'**. From a historical perspective this psalm tells the story of the captives have just gained release from Babylon and have returned to their homeland. They remember the past when they were captives but are like "those who dream" as they look to the future that lays before them. Seventy long years it has been for them. So long that many were born into captivity but they know the stories of exile that have been told to them by the elders. In this context the psalmist exults: "those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, they shall also sow in tears"- and anticipate that the God of the harvest will bring forth an abundance that answers the spiritual and physical needs of all.

Remembering past restorations gives hope for a restoration in the present day. This is very upbeat and a helpful reminder in the midst of difficulties.

*When was your last, "really good day?" What made that day so memorable?
When was your last, "not so great day?" What made it so painful, sad or disappointing?*

Some days are better than others. Sometimes we wake up and our bodies ache or our spirit seems low. But, there are other days when the sun warms us and our hearts are filled with joy. These are the days when we raise our hearts and hands to God, and say, "Thank you!"

Psalm 126 is one of those "good day" psalms. It praises God for leading the faithful through tough and lean times. Two themes of thanks are interwoven in the psalm:

1) the restoration of the nation (126:1b) and

2) the celebration that looks forward to rain and a bountiful harvest (126:4, 6).

Sometimes, as we grow older, our bad days might outnumber our good days, but there is hope for the good days that are ahead. In the spirit of Psalm 126, we can thank God for the good days and look forward to better days. This is the essence of the second theological virtue of hope.

How do you maintain your hope, even in tough times?

Tell the story of Katie dancing in the graveyard.

....she felt free enough to do the thing she loved to bring her strength and to live into a hopeful future.

She gave me hope.... learning from the innocence of our children...their unfiltered joy and authenticity.

How do we live in the tension between the memories of the past and the hope of the future?

How do we not only carry the seeds but sow them so they produce something abundant in the future?

Sowing is an act of hope and expectation. The sower carries their future in their own hands. But the seed must be planted and tended if anything is to come of it. Once the seed is planted, the sower's hope is taken out of their hands and their future is dependent on the one who grants rain and warmth with which the seed might grow. Left in the hands of God there is the hope of a good day.

But in this psalm the sower sows in weeping. We do not know what the weeping is for here. It could be that the act of sowing offers little prospect for the sower. The ground seems dry and unreceptive perhaps. In any case, the psalmist suggests that the act of hope is not always one of high or joyous expectation. Nevertheless, it also suggests that present distress or seeming hopelessness is not an argument for the denial of God's power to effect change.

The task of sowing in tears is ours today, for we stand between the great acts of salvation *in the past* and the desired act of deliverance *in the future*. **Thus, we sow in tears. Why? Because it takes so much work to sow, and we don't see the fruit of our work right away.** We labor in relationships; to establish a career; to gain knowledge; to learn skills; to raise children; to rebuild after the loss of any of these. It is so difficult and takes so long but we must persevere.

Whatever the point of the weeping we soon see that deep despair is nevertheless turned into great celebration. 'Reap with shouts of joy' in v. 5 becomes 'shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves' in v. 6. 'Going out' has become 'coming home', 'weeping' has turned into 'shouts of joy' and the seed that was just recently carried out is now replaced by sheaves of wheat or barley. In these last verses thoughts of 'coming home', of sheer joy, and of abundance fill the mind. They create in us a sense that what is a seemingly hopeless task is indeed a possibility.

Finally, the seemingly hopeless task of sowing becomes one of overwhelming fruitfulness. The great things of the Lord, for which the people hope, are not the miraculous events that transport us out of our daily existence into another world. The miraculous we look for is in the transformation of the world we daily inhabit into that which God would have it be, a joyous and abundant place.

Today's psalm juxtaposes past deliverance and joy with present distress in the hope that there will be future joy. It is **'joy remembered, and joy anticipated'**. It is my greatest wish that as you begin a conversation about the future of this church that you will sow seeds and have faith that God will provide for those seeds and ensure a fruitful harvest. Thanks be to God. Amen.