

Wisdom in the Round

Based on Psalm 126

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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Do you know what it's like to discover that your greatest dream isn't all it's cracked up to be? Have you ever attained vision for your life, then, the crushing realization that it might have been the wrong dream to begin with, or that the realization of the dream came with some harsh new realities that you weren't expecting?

If you know what that's like, then you know what Psalm 126 is about.

It's likely that Psalm 126 was first sung after the Israelites had been forced into exile, but had just returned home. Imagine that, coming home after 70 years in Babylon. A lifetime in exile.

The psalmist said it was like a dream. There was laughter, joy, testimony. Even "the nations," the people who worshipped other Gods and often threatened Israel admitted that "The Lord has done great things for them." (Psalm 126: 2) ***Even they*** saw the hand of God in the homecoming.

Between the last word of the verse 3, "rejoiced," and first word of verse 4, "Restore," ...it seems that there is a pause. I get the sense that a lot of water has passed under the bridge of that dream. There is a new reality.

You can read other Bible writings about the experience coming home after painful exiles – in Haggai, Zechariah, in the last part of the writings of the prophet Isaiah. The economic hardship and disunity is palpable. There is a realization that there is rebuilding to be done. Planting. Organizing. Hard work ahead.

So the psalmist gets to work...praying. What comes to this psalm writer's heart are the watercourses of the Negeb desert. You know, seasonal drought always dries up the streams but when the rains pour, the Negeb teams with water.

Our Spirit is that dry, O God. Do that to us. Literally, the Psalm prays, "sow in tears, reap with shouts of joy" (Psalm 126: 5).

You can almost see the psalmist on their knees now. "Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy" (Psalm 126: 6).

Let them shout with joy "carrying their sheaves" (Psalm 126: 6) Not a few grains; Sheaves! Who of us hasn't yearned that deeply for restoration? For the mercy of God? Who of us hasn't cried out to God in hope like this Psalm, or like blind Bartimaeus in today's Gospel?

Bartimaeus, who gets wind of Jesus passing by on the road, he shouts "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mk 10: 47) so loudly, so embarrassingly, that the people around him try to get him to hush up. And the more they try to get him to quiet down, the louder he yells "Have mercy on me!"

And there is indeed mercy. Healing mercy. Peace. New dreams. The possibility that the hope of restoration will lead full circle, back to rejoicing.

Back to laughter, joy, testimony. Back to “God has done great things!” Here is the good news: We are not stuck here.

We are not immobilized in the dry Negebs of our lives. We are not mired in the old dreams that didn’t turn out the way we expected. We are not confined to the sidelines, yelling in despair.

Our faith, our Bible, this tradition we inherit from Jesus, assures us:

that God has got this;
that water can come from rock;
that new life wins over death;
that God’s wisdom is beyond anything we can come up with;
that new dreams are possible;
that God’s grace is ours;

Ours is a story of good news, and the good news is ours to share. In fact, we can’t *not* share it! Once we have come full circle and know that God turns us back to new dreams, it is impossible to pass by anyone else lingering down there where the land is dry and the eyes are wet with tears and where people are calling for mercy.

By God’s Grace, we offer our prayer, our action, advocacy. That’s what you and I do here at St Andrew’s, we offer hope. Not just us, though. We are part of a powerful community called The United Church. Offering hope is the mission that we are a part of as God’s church.

You and I are a part of the circle of God’s grace. Both as giver and receiver. In his poem “Widening Circles,” Austrian poet and novelist Rainer Maria Rilke writes of God at the centre of the circle of life:

I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.
I may not complete this last one
but I give myself to it.
I circle around God, around the primordial tower.
I’ve been circling for thousands of years
and I still don’t know: am I a falcon,
a storm, or a great song?¹

We may be a falcon, a storm or a great song. It’s true; we fly, we rage, we sing. At any given point, we might be uncertain of who we are on the circle. And yet, in all the uncertainty, wherever we go, there is God at the centre of it all, at the heart of our mission, the hub of beauty, wholeness, compassion, and justice. Turning us to new dreams. Inviting us into the centre to turn the wheel for others. May we give ourselves over. Amen.

¹ From *Book of Hours, Love Poems to God*, by Rainer Maria Rilke. English translation published by The Berkley Publishing Group, © 1996 Anita Barrows/Joanna Macy