**#44 3 April 2022 Lent 5**

**Psalm 126**

**1**When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+126&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-16117a)]
    we were like those who dream.
**2**Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
    and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
    “The Lord has done great things for them.”
**3**The Lord has done great things for us,
    and we rejoiced.

**4**Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
    like the watercourses in the Negeb.
**5**May those who sow in tears
    reap with shouts of joy.
**6**Those who go out weeping,
    bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
    carrying their sheaves.

**We will eat…**

How often do you dream?

I seem to have periods of intense dreams, and periods where I don’t – or can’t remember – dreaming at all. But when I do, I think it means that I’ve had a decent night’s sleep, that I’ve been able to put aside the worries of the past day and to sidestep the adrenaline of the coming days, to get to a place where my mind isn’t replaying what has gone and isn’t rehearsing what’s to come. A place where my mind is let loose, without me getting in its way. Usually within seconds of waking I most often just have a sliver of what I’ve dreamt about – just a snapshot, or just a feeling, a mood, an impression, of where my mind has been taking itself while I’ve not been watching.

Sometimes I feel like I want to go back there, to wherever my mind has been, because it’s felt like home, safety, fun, happiness. Perhaps someone was there who I miss, or I was in a loved place that I’ve not been to for a long time.

This feels like the sort of dream that the Psalmist is occupied with in our reading today. The Israelites, exiled by one of other of the invading forces that litter their past, have been allowed home. They never quite lost the hope that the restoration of fortunes would come again; many Psalms of Lament revolve around the thought we’ve been home before, Lord, when can we go back, what have we done for you to allow us to fall?

This twin appeal splits the Psalm into two neat halves – looking back to a dream time in Zion and acknowledging a present when they can, now, return. Jerusalem is restored to the writer’s community; God has allowed a second homecoming, a second restoration - or a resurrection - of the life of the people.

It's a psalm of a displaced people, a cry from the heart of an entire community who had lost something – home, identity, security, and probably at times, their immediate hope.

But this is a community for whom the biggest loss is an uncluttered trust in God; instead of feeling like the chosen people, they have had to question their God, because this is a God who, it has felt like, hasn’t been present anymore. Dreams have become nightmares; perhaps they have forgotten how to dream. This God, for whom they sacrificed and to whom they worshipped in songs on unending praise, just wasn’t there anymore when they really needed him to be.

At one time, the other nations, looking on, saw that God had been good to them; there is a sense of awe in the onlookers, watching, as they did, and seeing the great things being done for the writer’s community, seeing them filled with laughter and singing songs of joy. This was public rejoicing and has, it seems, been accompanied by a very public fall from grace. At that time, they asked, where has God gone? Why has he gone? Didn’t we do all that he asked?

This is a psalm that recognises that disorientation, and that prays thanks for reorientation. It speaks of a wandering people who at some point have been thrown out of their land, and who have been hovering nervously on the sidelines, in a place permitted by whoever has had fortune recently in Zion. Not only had they lost something, but they could see someone else making whoopee where they used to, so much so that their loss is double, with the opponents gain and their loss on display, side by side, in Zion.

Some psalms, like Psalm 13, have a defined turning point in them; in Psalm 13, the writer asks three times, ‘How long, Lord….Will you forsake me forever…will my enemy be exalted over me forever’? After the lament, though, the writer of psalm 13 seems to get a second wind. ‘But I trusted in your steadfast love…my heart shall rejoice…I will sing to the Lord….’ I guess we are at a nightmare place that the writer has sunk so low that there’s just nowhere else to go than up.

Our Psalm 126 *is* called a ‘Psalm of Ascent’ – one sung when *going up, returning,* to Jerusalem. Psalm 126 uses poetic devices; parallel phrases, written side-by-side, to rejoice in the light; ‘you sow with tears…but reap with joy.’ They ‘go out weeping, but…come back with joy.’ This is a typical device in Hebrew poetry, used here in a description of an upward trajectory, an ascent back to the promised land, where their dreams will become, or perhaps have already become, once again, a reality.

Psalm 126 ultimately tells of an opposing force that has forced people out; anyone who sung it would know the history, it was written on the psyche of generations of the displaced. I suspect that there are many people in Ukraine for whom these two stories, Psalsm13 and Psalm 126, might mean much. To Ukrainians, and to other displaced people, a cry against displacement and for homecoming will resonate deeply; and in eastern Europe, that cry is becoming part of the character a people that will last for, I suspect, at least two generations. For them, homecoming is a dream whose reality is out of reach. Let us pray that the displaced people of our world will one day see their homes and families in reality – not like a dream of mine that’s forgotten almost as soon as I wake up, but an actual tangible, homecoming; a rebirth, a resurrection, and a chance for the luxury of dreaming and forgetting again.

Three days ago we commemorated John Donne, the priest and poet. He said, with male-centred pronouns of his time;

‘Any man’s death diminishes me,

Because I am involved in mankind,

And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls:

It tolls for thee’.

Friends, all wars destroy dreams, and all wars diminish who we all are as Christians. All wars are an abdication of the promises humanity has made to the prince of Peace.

Let’s all pray for dreams of homecoming, for shouts of joy, filled with laughter, and for the living water to return to the people, and the animals, and culture of Ukraine.

Amen