

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Thursday, January 28, 2021

May We Never Adapt

*How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you,
if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. —Psalm 137:4-6*

A few months ago, I was praising God for the gifts of adaptability which have been granted us through this year of isolation and COVID restrictions. Some of you folks were rejoicing and telling me of God's power among us, and I was glad to delight with you. We have been given special strengths for the strains of the journey, peace in the stress of uncertainty and wisdom to meet the many decisions which have been presented us in these days. Let us continue to rejoice in the resourcefulness and insights which we have found in this season, and pray that God keep on giving us a spirit of adaptability. And now that the end of this virus is appearing on our horizon, I am adding to that another prayer—that the Lord teach us to never adapt.

The two prayers would appear to be completely at odds with each other, but they do belong together, and the 137th Psalm explains the compatibility of these prayers. This celebrated song is a cry of homesickness from the time of the Babylonian exile, and at the heart of the hymn is a question: *How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?* As Israel was separated from their homeland, they felt that they were unable to truly worship, and loudly lamented this separation. For most of the exiles their separation from their land and their Temple were perceived as a death sentence, and that they were no longer truly alive. But they learned much about their God in those days. Their previous way of life and worship had been taken from them, but they learned that all the same, God was watching over them, was moving among them in power and was prospering them. They left their land convinced that they were exiled from God. In time they learned that God is Lord over *all* of heaven and earth. In those years, though separated from their beloved homeland, they were finding the power to adapt, and to find God among them.

Yet the thrust of Psalm 137 is a passionate prayer that they never truly adapt to Babylon. *If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.* The singer prayed that their loyalty to the Lord's Temple never flag and feared the day when he or his descendants would lose their zeal for Jerusalem and Jerusalem's God. In time the exile would draw to a close and many would return to the Promised Land. Many, however, stayed in Babylon, for by then that was the only

land they knew. They had prospered there by the Lord's gracious hand and would rather stay in that prosperous land than risk the long and perilous journey to their ancestral home. They had adapted.

The end of this virus is still a way off, though it is in sight! Let us pray now that we become God's un-adaptive people. Having made the best of our isolation—and faith does benefit from such periods—let us reclaim the craft of fellowship. *Forsake not the assembly* (Hebrews 10:25) say the familiar King James translation. May we return quickly to the joys of encouraging one another, and finding the special presence and power of God in the gathering of God's people. This has generally been a more sedentary year. May we quickly reclaim the vigor of a moving and doing faith. This has been a year for the virtual with all sorts of worship services being offered on line, in group chats, Zoom, etc. These virtual events had, and may still have their value, but let us reclaim our passion for the real thing! From a more general perspective one could say that this was a year when we simply got out of many of the habits of faith. May we receive divine power and joy as we re-establish those habits. Let us all be sure to consider Jerusalem our highest joy.

Praise God for the graces of adaptability. Now, as the time of restoration approaches, let us pray for the power to un-adapt.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

Psalm 137:1-6

*By the rivers of Babylon—
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there we hung up our harps.
For there our captors asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!'*

*How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.*