

Words for an Emerging Church

Wednesday, June 16, 2021

Remembering the Songs of Zion— Which May Require Some Rehearsing!

*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*

The 137th Psalm has been an inspiration for many over the years and I have quoted it numerous times throughout our recent troubles. This song of exile speaks to our hearts in powerful ways during our own times of exile, when we feel as though we have been taken away from our familiar and loved settings and places, and this year past has been a truly 137 kind of year! Most loved about this song is its strong and candid expression of grief and longing for the old days and the old ways, but beyond this primary emotion is an amazing study of the dynamics of exile and loss.

After lamenting their exile and resenting the requests of the Babylonians to hear their songs of Zion, there comes a bold promise. We will always remember Zion and we will always sing those glorious hymns! Bold promises like these come naturally in such times. We keenly feel our loss and defiantly promise that we will always be dedicated to the old ways. How could it be otherwise? Yet we must be careful of the loud promises which we make.

“Of course, we would never forget the songs of Zion!” affirmed the disgruntled exiles, yet fifty or so years later most of these exiles and their children did! Most of the exiles did not return to the Promised Land. Presumably the distance was just too much, the trip was too dangerous, and they were already comfortable in Babylon. Those who did return may have been glad to be back in the homeland, but a sense of lethargy and depression afflicted these returnees. The Temple and the city walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, but only after the strong leadership and push of a few key leaders and prophets. Post-exilic Israel was marked by a sense of sadness and uncertainty of God’s real love and caring. All told, the homecoming was not a completely happy one. After a long year and a half of COVID our re-start time is upon us. Not long ago we imagined ourselves like racehorses, ready to bolt at the opening of the gate. We could not wait to get back to our discontinued practices. Now that the time has come, some of that energy has dissipated.

No matter how difficult a particular time of life might be, there are always parts of that phase in the journey which we liked and may resist letting go of. We once may have anguished over missing Sunday morning worship, but in time may come to enjoy sleeping in and catching the message on YouTube. Our choirs rallied over the past months to put together a wonderful Pentecost presentation, but I am sure that some of them came to rehearsal with the thought in the back of their mind, "I kind of liked having my weekday evenings free and now I'm tied down with choir." Last summer many anguished over our failure to offer a full Vacation Bible School program to the neighborhood. Now we feel a bit overwhelmed by all the work involved in putting together such a program.

It takes a push, from within and from above, to get back into a life of Christian service. We may say of certain services and disciplines which we once honored that "I just got out of the habit." Habits, once broken, can be a real challenge to restart, but now is the time to do just that. Granted, we may not want to jump back into every pre-COVID activity. Some have wisely pointed out that this may be a good time to re-evaluate life and to drop certain tasks which were not worth our time and energy, or to be starting new endeavors to which we may be called, but may this reorganizing never be a mask for mere laziness.

The exile is ending and *now* is the time to again be singing the songs of Zion in the Promised Land. Like the exiles we are learning that this is easier said than done, but still very much worth doing! Let us again, back in the land of Zion, celebrate the songs of Zion, even if it may require a little rehearsing.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

O God, who never forsakes those that hope in thee: grant that we may ever keep that hope which thou hast given us by thy Word as an anchor of our souls, to preserve us sure and steadfast, unshaken and secure in all the storms of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. —Source unknown