



When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion,
we were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with rejoicing.

R. **The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**

Then they said among the nations,

“The LORD has done great things for them.”

The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad indeed.

R. **The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**

Restore our fortunes, O LORD,

like the torrents in the southern desert.

Those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing.

R. **The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**

Although they go forth weeping, carrying the seed to be sown,

They shall come back rejoicing, carrying their sheaves.

R. **The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.**

A celebrative memory of God’s transformative act for the sake of Jerusalem and a petition that God would now, again, perform such a transformative act.

The celebratory memory of verses 1-3 most likely refers to the return of the deported to Jerusalem in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. **This wondrous act of restoration evokes a threefold response of gladness.**

First, it seemed like a dream, so unreal, so impossible, so beyond explanation, even beyond anticipation. But of course, that is the nature of God’s rescue miracles.

Outside the purview of God, such wonders seem like a fantasy – except in this case it is a lived reality!

Second, the people of Israel were **filled with joy and offered glad songs of thanksgiving**. It is credible to think that the joyous lyrics of Isaiah 40-55 are an embodiment of the songs of joy that are here mentioned. Note especially the “new song” in Isa 42:10, a new song for a new historical beginning!

Third, the other nations watched this magnificent restoration of Jerusalem and were dazzled by it. They can recognize and give praise to God, the God known in the world as the worker of wonders. **Thus the restoration of Jerusalem evokes a glad response from the entire international community**. The response of the nations is spontaneous, so overwhelming is the act of restoration itself. (*Brueggeman, 539*)

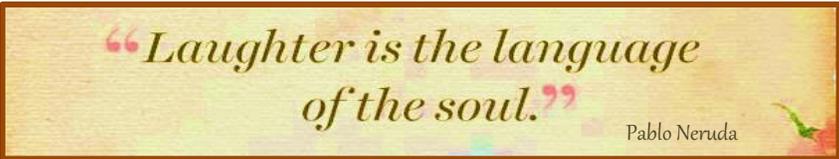
When the Lord brought back
the captivity of Zion,
We were like those who dream.

Psalm 126:1



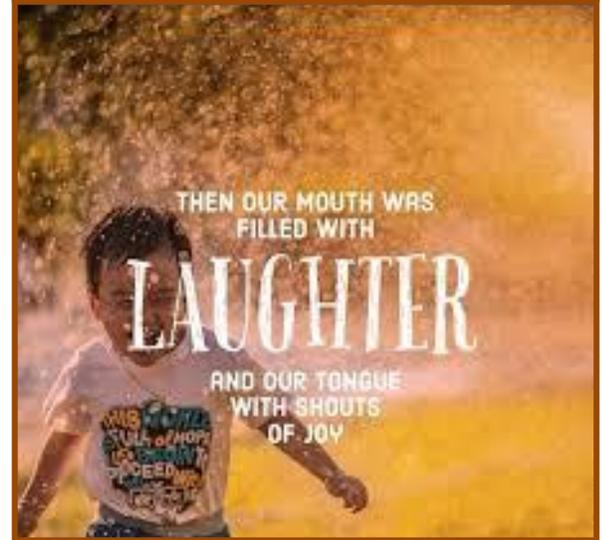
Relying on past favors granted by God, the people pray again for a **“reversal of fortune” (v. 4)**. However, here the people are not asking for deliverance, but for restoration in their homeland. **(Compare to today where we are trying to “make America great again”)**. The nature imagery is striking. The Negeb Desert is known for the sudden flooding of the riverbeds during the winter rains. It is for such remarkable reversals that the people pray. In this imagery, it is the gift of rain that constitutes a **“great thing,”** for it is God the rainmaker who gives or withholds rain. The second imagery uses agricultural references. It is clear that the first set (sow, weep, go out) is negative and the second set (reap, shouts of joy, come home) is positive. The hoped for move from the one to the other is by the anticipated action of God, who, by restorative activity, will accomplish one more **“great thing.”**

The imagery of sowing and sadness and reaping and joy calls to mind the imagery of Jesus’ teaching, **“except a grain of wheat fall into the ground...” (Jn12:24)**. In the teaching of Jesus, this agricultural imagery clearly refers to his own resurrection, the gift of new life out of death. In the Old Testament, moreover, the imagery of resurrection is utilized to refer to exile and homecoming (see Ezek 37:1-14). In every such reference, the gap between being dead in the ground and alive in the world is occupied only by the **doer of “great things.”** (Brueggeman, 541)



Psalm 126 talks to us about laughing, a too often over looked spiritual discipline. The important thing to remember about this psalm is that it takes place after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity. These people had suffered mightily. But in their freedom they did not become bitter. They learned to laugh – and so must we.

Humor gives spirit to a people when they have no other defense. Humor gives people dignity in situations that belittle them. Laughter gives us relief from the burden that can sometimes be daily life. **Humor helps us to not give in to what diminishes us, but with our laughter, we learn to reduce its power over us.** The function of humor is not to make light of serious things, but rather to enable us to see life differently, to know that we are not in control and to remember that God in his **“steadfast love and loving kindness” (hesed)** is the doer of **“great things”!**



Bibliography:

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Mays, James L. (1994) *“Psalm Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching.”* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press



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