

## PSALM 126 RESTORE US

This seventh song is a psalm full of tension. It is tension between what the past seemed to hold out for the future and the reality of the future that has arrived, their present reality. This is a common experience of individuals, of churches and of nations. Something seems so full of promise at the beginning but the present reality is hard to live with. So, one scholar characterises this psalm as “joy remembered and joy anticipated.”

### ***A dream come true 1-3***

Given what I have explained of the exile and its terrible questions and heart rending experiences the return would have been like a dream come true. Home at last, free at last.

But more, Isaiah 40-55 had promised that this would be a new day, a second exodus, and God’s new thing. So laughter, true laughter, not at the expense of others but in praise of God’s marvellous ways filled their days. Joy was their song. How often we are the dour and sour and yet we know what great things God has done for us. We know how God has restored our fortunes. We know we are home at last, free at last.

This was not time for long faces for them nor ought it to be for us.

More than that the nations were sitting up and taking notice. They had become in Isaiah’s terms a light to the nations (Isa 42.6). In other words there was a time when the nations looked and wondered at what God was doing. The missionary impulse of the OT was finding fulfilment and they were overjoyed

### ***The longing for joy 4-6***

But...

We do not know what has happened but it has all come to grinding halt as the poet writes. The best description of the present is tears and weeping the very opposite of laughter and songs of joy.

They have become dry like the wadi in the Negev, the desert to the south. No one looks to them to find spiritual refreshment now or see in them the amazing work of God.

However, the key to this psalm is the hope deeply embedded in it. Hope lies embedded in the past. We know what God can do. God can redeem, God can set free, god can bring us home, and God can set our laughter flowing again. The past is critical to the present. It can and does in this song subvert the present and its dreariness. It offers hope. Hope is not nostalgia. Hope is the promise of what God has done in the past he will continue to do now and more, and that means that the present is not the future.

The watercourses or wadis do fill up and when they do they blossom and everyone comes to this place of renewal and life.

Sowing is an act of anticipation and hope. Tears and weeping for people who live on subsistence are the tears of hunger and hope together. If the season is poor hunger will stalk them. They must trust in hope.

And that trust will never be unrewarded. Trust feeds hope, hope feed joy, joy feeds the shout of praise and thanksgiving.

### ***Further Reflections***

The reflection on the past should be a source of joy and laughter. It is that because it is subversive of the present. The present can overwhelm us with its problems. We live the present in hope. God has done great things for us and we ought to live in that. But daily we

need God's help and renewal. We live in the anticipation of what God will do.

In liturgical tradition this Psalm is used in Advent and Lent. We remind ourselves that the people of God live by memory and hope. During Advent and Lent we remember the humble and humbling circumstances of Jesus' life and death. Yet we do this in the joyful anticipation of his resurrection and the promise of the renewal of all things.

Dreaming in verse 1 is not then just a state of incredulity in the face of a divine intervention but is a state of living a joyfully visionary life. This is a life not of having visions all the time but a life that can see the infinite possibilities that trust in God can put before us. It is the opening of the imagination to God's possibilities.

We started these studies with a plea for graciousness, a plea to escape the effects of contempt and derision, a celebration of rescue, an affirmation of security found only in God and finally laughter and joy. All of these are great themes for the pilgrim life and pilgrim worship.

## **Questions**

How can we better express our joy, our laughter, because God has brought us home? Have we become dry like a billabong in drought? What restorative work do we pray for and look forward to God doing among us? How might come to be that the nations might say of us "The Lord has done great things for them."?