

Lenten Devotional April 6, 2023 – Maundy Thursday

Scripture

Psalm 126

*1 When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
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.*

Devotional

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It is hard to read this Lenten psalm without hearing echoes of that oldest of Advent hymns, the Magnificat. The advocacy for the oppressed; the anticipated joy; the verse, “The Lord has done great things for [us], and [we] rejoiced.” And to go a step further and hear this song of ascent on the lips of a people oppressed—or a poor teenaged girl living on occupied land—deepens the impact of these words. It’s no wonder that Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the Magnificat “the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung.”

So what is a reference to Advent—when we anticipate the birth of the Messiah—doing on Maundy Thursday, as we enter into the Triduum and the memory of Jesus’ crucifixion?

From its beginning to its end, the arc of Jesus’ life was about the unexpected and the improbable. The God of the incarnation chose to enter fully this experience of being human in the most outrageous of ways—a baby born into inconsequential and impoverished circumstances. And his ministry? It was the realization of the psalmist’s vision and Mary’s hymn—radical attention paid to those who suffer, with the promise of abundance and joy. The God of the psalmist and of Mary, the God incarnated in Jesus, is one of delight and justice both who intends to do “great things” for those who need it most. Indeed, knowing something of the shape of the day that would follow, Jesus still chose to spend this one sharing a meal with his friends.

But power doesn't like to be challenged, and the rich do not appreciate being sent away empty. Yes, God's subversive promise of abundance intends the flourishing of all—but getting there is inevitably disruptive. And so we prepare for that costliest day, Good Friday.

Prayer

God of the unexpected, you see our suffering and join us in its midst, promising that it will not have the final say. You desire our flourishing; you want the captive to be free, the hungry to be fed, the sorrowful to rejoice. Remind us of this when we lose heart and forget, and strengthen us to work with you towards that day when all your people can proclaim with joy, "The Lord has done great things for us!"