

I love Psalm 126. It's short—in the Bible it's only 6 verses, the same length as the more famous 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. And like the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, Psalm 126 contains wonderful depths of spiritual treasure, despite its brevity.

Psalm 126 pops up in numerous different contexts in our readings. It's one of the options every day for Noonday Prayer. It's used on Thanksgiving Day and St. Thomas's Day. It also crops up in Sunday readings during October, during Lent, and yes, during Advent.

Psalm 126 deals with the wonderful Advent theme of already and not yet. I preached about the theme of already and not yet last week with Psalm 85. But in a year like 2020, that theme of already and not yet is important enough to meditate on again in a different way.

Advent is about the already, and not yet. We remember the past. We recollect the events leading up to Jesus' birth, in preparation for celebrating his birth at Christmas. But we also look to what has not yet happened. Jesus' return, the return of our risen Savior. And we look forward to our own resurrections as well, sharing forever in Jesus' eternal life in his eternal and glorious kingdom. Already, and not yet.

That's why I love Psalm 126. It begins by talking about what God has done in the past. The psalmist looks backward with a thankful heart at the way God has acted before. He's probably referring to Israel's return from exile. The attitude is overwhelmingly joyful.

*When the Lord delivered Zion from bondage,  
it seemed like a dream.  
Then was our mouth filled with laughter;  
on our lips were songs.*

What an amazing statement. When God acted in the past it was like a dream come true. Our mouths were filled to the brim with laughter. And the only thing our tongues could do was sing and shout for joy.

Even Gentile nations recognized it:  
*The heathens themselves said:  
"What marvels the Lord worked for them!"*  
And the psalmist agrees with what the other nations say:  
*What marvels the Lord worked for us!  
Indeed we were glad.*

The first half of Psalm 126 is a tremendous statement of praise for God's mighty acts in the past. It's giddy and bubbly and overflowing with joy. When God intervenes, nothing could possibly be better.

But then, there's the second half of the song. The first half says we celebrated our good fortune in the past. But now, in the second half, things are not so good.

Sometimes in scripture, people remember what God has done in the past, but then basically say, "God, what have you done for me lately?" The children of Israel in the Exodus come to mind. 'Sure, God you brought us out of slavery. Yes, you gave us water in the desert. You give us bread from heaven every morning. But it's pretty bland, it's monotonous. Couldn't we have some variety, God?'

Or I think of the crowd the day after the feeding of the 5,000 in John. It was a remarkable miracle. But the next day the people track Jesus down and basically say, 'What are you going to do for us today? We liked what you did yesterday. But how about today?'

But I believe the psalmist in Psalm 126 has a different attitude when he asks God to act again. He says:

*Deliver us, O Lord, from our bondage,  
as streams in dry land.*

He literally refers to the Negev Desert. The Negev is an arid region in southern Israel. Like west Texas, the Negev contains numerous stream and creek beds that are dry most of the year. Only in times of rain do they run with water.

That's what the psalmist is asking for. 'God, rain on us again. Restore us again. Let life flow through us again.' He's not really saying, "What have you done for me lately?"

Instead he's saying, 'God, you've acted powerfully in the past. Can't you act again? We're dry. We need your life. We need restoration.'

I don't know about you, but I've certainly felt that way in 2020. Lord, can't you act again. We need you, desperately.

And then come the final two verses. They are statements of faith in the midst of tough circumstances.

*Those who are sowing in tears  
will sing when they reap.  
They go out full of tears,  
carrying seed for the sowing;  
they come back full of song  
carrying their sheaves.*

In marginal agricultural societies, food was often scarce. To plant seeds was an act of tremendous trust. To put seeds into the ground was to literally take food from the mouths of your children and bury them in the dirt. That's why tears would often accompany sowing.

But you planted the seed in order to have more food in the future. It would have been very tempting in lean years to eat your seed. But if you did, you'd have nothing the following year.

Now, just step back and think about that for a second. What an amazing act of trust. You take seed that could be used to feed your hungry, crying children. And with tears you plant it in the ground, trusting that God will give it growth, and that there will be a future harvest to keep your family from starving. Then consider the emotions when the harvest does come.

*Those who are sowing in tears  
will sing when they reap.  
They go out full of tears,  
carrying seed for the sowing;  
they come back full of song  
carrying their sheaves.*

The joy of such a harvest would be tremendous indeed.

Psalm 126 in its six short verses provides a wonderful lesson about trusting in God, even in the midst difficult.

First, look back with thanksgiving for what God has done in the past:

*When the Lord delivered Zion from bondage,  
it seemed like a dream.*

Second, ask God to act in the present:

*Deliver us, O Lord, from our bondage,  
as streams in dry land.*

Third, move forward trusting that God will take the difficult things you do today and bring them to fruition:

*They go out full of tears,  
carrying seed for the sowing;  
they come back full of song  
carrying their sheaves.*

This pattern is an important reminder during tough times like 2020. This pattern is an important reminder as we encounter difficulties in our daily lives.

In our lives there are always going to be periods of suffering and struggle and even crucifixion. Such dark times can be spiritually fruitful or spiritually paralyzing. Psalm 126 suggests that we should move through such dark times looking both backward and forward.

Not backwards in a nostalgic way, thinking that things will never be as good as the "good old days." Rather, backwards in a mode of thanksgiving for what God has done in the past, with an anticipation that God will act in the future.

In the midst of the tears of 2020, we must trust in the joys of God's future.  
Tears are here now.  
But joy is coming.  
Joy is coming.