

**Sermon October 7, 2018 Thanksgiving**  
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**St. Helen's Anglican Church West Point Grey**  
**Vancouver BC [www.pointgreyanglican.com](http://www.pointgreyanglican.com)**

[Joel 2:21-27](#), [Psalm 126](#), [1 Timothy 2:1-7](#), [Matthew 6:25-33](#)

***Psalm 126 Page 782, BCP***

***In convertendo***

1

*When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, \**  
*then were we like those who dream.*

2

*Then was our mouth filled with laughter, \**  
*and our tongue with shouts of joy.*

3

*Then they said among the nations, \**  
*"The LORD has done great things for them."*

4

*The LORD has done great things for us, \**  
*and we are glad indeed.*

5

*Restore our fortunes, O LORD, \**  
*like the watercourses of the Negev.*

6

*Those who sowed with tears \**  
*will reap with songs of joy.*

7

*Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, \**  
*will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.*

In the early sixth century BCE, the kingdom of Judah was torn apart by a conflict between two rival factions. One group was loyal to the ruling Babylonian empire, the other

favoured their Egyptian arch-rivals. In the year 599 BCE, the pro-Egyptian party was in power and Judah rebelled against Babylon, thereby inviting invasion by the infamous Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II. In 597 the city of Jerusalem fell, the Temple was pillaged and on March 16<sup>th</sup> the whole Judean court, including the king, the and other prominent citizens, was deported to Babylon. They were to stay in exile there for almost sixty years. Known as the Babylonian Captivity, this catastrophic period became a defining experience in the history of the Jewish people.

A second invasion and deportation in 587 BCE further destroyed the city, smashing the Jewish state. Many of those not deported to Babylon fled to other places including Egypt. This was the beginning of the diaspora, the dispersion of Jews from Judah to long term, eventually permanent, habitation elsewhere.

In exile, the Jewish people were tempted to adopt the religion of their captors and many did so. In these challenging circumstances one of the greatest prophets of Judaism flourished. Ezekiel, prophet of the Exile, spent his life in Babylon. He is buried between the Chebar and Euphrates Rivers in modern day Iraq, but his prophetic

visions are unforgettable. More than 2500 years later, even we remember the valley of dry bones. Ezekiel's endlessly provocative visions relentlessly called the Jewish people to repent of idolatry, to put aside little gods of carved wood and cast metal and remember the One great God of their ancestors.

But after a few decades in Babylon whole generations of exiled Jews had grown to adulthood never seeing Jerusalem. Sixty years is a very long time. When Ezekiel was in his fifties, his prophecies changed. Instead of seeing the destruction of Judah, he began to have visions of a new temple in Jerusalem. But to many Jews the Captivity probably seemed like the end of Israel. It must have seemed to them that God had completely abandoned the Jewish people. What was the point of believing in a God who could let such a thing happen.

In the year 538, the thing which may have become unthinkable for many, happened. Babylon fell. The Persians became the ruling power. The Persian Emperor Cyrus took a benevolent view of the enemies of Babylon and he issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem. It was a profound vindication of Ezekiel's vision, of prophecy itself,

and of those who had remained faithful to God through generations of exile

It is perhaps difficult for us to imagine the kind of re-awakening this was for the Jewish people. But this is the moment expressed so beautifully in Psalm 126 that we read this morning:

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, \*  
then were we like those who dream.

2

Then was our mouth filled with laughter, \*  
and our tongue with shouts of joy.

3

Then they said among the nations, \*  
"The LORD has done great things for them."

4

The LORD has done great things for us, \*  
and we are glad indeed.

They were stunned by it, like those who dream. They experienced a joy that profoundly nourished them, filled them up, in a way that food could never do. The nations who had witnessed their humiliation, exile, and the apparent

crushing of the nationhood witnessed now the vindication of their faith and a restoration to their homeland which only The LORD could have accomplished. The LORD had done great things for them and they were glad indeed.

It is interesting to read of such gratitude on Thanksgiving, because of course, we are like those who dream. We have our challenges and wants. We have our downturns and our corrections. But for the most part we have a kind of prosperity, security, comfort, and convenience few human beings can ever have experienced. Most can only dream of what we have.

Many of us can remember more difficult times of course, times of genuine poverty, widespread unemployment, even hunger. If we ourselves cannot, our parents, or grandparents could. Some of them could understand quite literally the last two verses of the psalm:

6

Those who sowed with tears \*  
will reap with songs of joy.

7

Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, \*  
will come again with joy, shouldering their sheaves.

They sowed with tears because the only food they had left was their seed corn. They had no choice but to plant their last morsels and trust in the promise of tomorrow and the Lord of the harvest. They sowed with tears, reaped with songs of joy, and in the meantime fed their hunger with faith.

It is on that basis that our gratitude must rest. We must remember today, that Thanksgiving is not just about food for the body. The table may hold turkey or ham or both. But to truly fill us, the feast must be of gratitude, of thanksgiving, of faith. *Then* will our mouths be filled with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy. The LORD has done great things for us and we are glad indeed.