

"Sowing Tears, Harvesting Joy"

A Reflection for our annual Memorial Service

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Psalm 126

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This psalm is for pilgrims. They would sing it as they came to Jerusalem, Mount Zion, the holy City. They prayed for themselves, and for this place of their God-shaped dreams. It is also a prayer that makes place for tears.

Listen and pray . . .

*When GOD brought back goodness to Zion,
we became like people dreaming.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with songs of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
'GOD has done great things for them.'
GOD has done great things for us,
and we became people celebrating.*

*Bring back our goodness, GOD,
like water-filled canyons in the Negev desert.
May those who sow in tears
harvest with songs of joy.
Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with songs of joy,
carrying their sheaves.*

(Adapted from the New Revised Standard Version)

I

Go into a memory along with me? Remember yours as I remember mine.

Remember when you were brought into a place and moment, and you truly belonged. You were carried there with someone . . . them . . . them when they were fully alive and perfectly with you. You belonged together. Remember that?

It might have been holding and beholding for the very first. Maybe a simple swaying sublime. Maybe running, yelling, racing, collapsing at a finish line where everyone wins.

Maybe a slow walk in step, silent while saying everything needed. Maybe a boisterous letting-loose, hoping midnight never comes to close it down?

It was thick with your presence together, dense with everything that makes life. Thick and dense, and also feather-light, airy, free within a forever flow of space.

Your moment, your memory, it has got to be different from mine. It was perfectly personal. It was yours — yours with them, yours with her, yours with him. You were in that one place, selected from the magnitude of points in the cosmos, and in that one moment with them, it was all there was, your everywhere.

*"When GOD brought back goodness to the City. . . ."*¹ That's the particular moment and place the Psalm is remembering. It does not spell out the details. It doesn't even pinpoint the event. It doesn't have to. Everyone knows what it was.

You do. You know your moment, which God brought you into, when everything was right, and you were together, and truly belonged.

It was like dreaming. Too good to be true. Better, because it was true. In your soundest dreaming, sleep well, and alive, in God's goodness overflowing.

Remember that?

II

You were pushed from bed to the floor! Clock struck twelve, the coach turned back to a pumpkin, and the faerie tale ended.

And now, there stretches a canyon between now and back then, between you and them.

Maybe that's what you're lugging with you into this hour of prayer, a whole Grand Canyon stretched across your shoulders. The empty weight of your sorrow.

Each year we do this, a memorial Sunday set-aside for remembering well. Today we name these dear ones: Coralie, Dorothy, Henry, Lois, Debbie, Garry. We do this today, but every day you love and miss them.

¹ Psalm 126:1 poses a translation challenge. At its heart, it is about God restoring things to the way they were. See Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: Volume 3, Writings (Ketuvim): A Translation with Commentary*. (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 298.

Who else are you bringing today? No matter how far back it happened. Our grieving does not stop, because our love never ends.

And, of course, we're all bringing what we've lost and keep losing, these long days in our worn-down-and-out world.

That dreamlike moment and place you were just remembering? It's still there, but like it's got paved over. Pushed deeper into a memory. Memories seem to un-draw, un-colour-in, disassemble into cut-up pieces that float away from each other.

The canyon between then and now, between you and them, widens. Infinitely uncrossable.

III

"Bring us back, GOD. Bring back our goodness!" the Psalm prays.

You pray that. You've got to ask. Beg. Plead. And hope.

You know like when you've just woken from the best dream. And consciousness is breaking in and stealing from you the illusion that it was actually true. Is that what it feels like all the time? Like the illusion is way better than the reality, the dream better than being awake? Except, your dream was true, right? You had that with them. Now you don't.

GOD, close the gap. Flood that desert canyon with torrents of water, from bottom to top. Drown my grief. Submerge my sorrow. Fill it up, so we can walk across to each other, and goodness again.

IV

The Psalm works on us with word-pictures: being in a dream, water-flooded canyons in the desert. And farming: sowing and harvesting.

Sow first, then harvest. Seed in the ground, wait through the growing, then do the gathering.

Sow your tears. Broadcast them widely. Cover the ground. Let them fall, and the soil takes them in, tiny treasures.

Keep sowing them. Someone wonders why you're not doing better yet. Truth: you're doing perfectly well, for such a time as this. Someone wonders when you're going to

move on. Well, have the seeds sprouted yet? Nope. Then more tears are needed. Sow away.

Sow tears. They are your investment in the harvest

That's what a farmer does. Invests. I mean, right now a bag of seed can feed your family, for a bit. But instead, you nest the seeds into the earth. You count on hopes and prayers that they will become an abundance, to fill all of you forever more. It's a risk.

But the harvest!

V

Bring us back, GOD. Bring us back into that goodness.

I want to make that my prayer, and then fling myself into the future with GOD.

Sure, it feels tenuous. You know, the laws of physics, the rules of life. And death. Those so perfectly-good moments we were remembering, they are past. Life's calendar does not flip backwards. Believe me, I get that.

But if God is (and I am quite sure) . . . then God is God. Then our pasts and God's futures are not as divorced as we would otherwise think.

There was a prophet in Israel, Amos. Most of the time, he was letting the people have it, in God's name. But occasionally, he offered slim slivers of hope. Like when he talks about God's coming harvest, when abundance will pour out.

*The days are surely coming, says the Lord . . .
when the one who crushes grapes
will overtake the one who sows the seed.
The mountains will drip wine,
and all the hills will flow with it.²*

The grape-pressing will happen before the vines are even planted. The harvester will catch up to and pass the sower. The timing is messed up. It's a joke! The sort God delights in.³

² Amos 9:13.

³ Jason Byassee, [Psalms 100-150](#), Brazos Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2018), 147.

So maybe in God's good time, the past is not lost to the present, and what we remember so dearly might seed a promise into our future.

VI

God's future. The harvest! Joy in abundance.

Papias was a second-generation follower of Jesus. Here's how he described the joy:

*The days will come in which vines shall grow, having each 10,000 branches and in each branch 10,000 twigs, and in each twig 10,000 shoots, and in each one of the shoots 10,000 clusters, and on every one of the clusters 10,000 grapes, and every grape when pressed will give 25 metretes of wine.*⁴

A metretes is 9 gallons. I did the math. It's outrageous.⁵ Enough wine to fill 25 million of our Grand Canyons to the top.⁶

It's funny. A joke! The best kind. God's harvest! From your tears! If you don't burst out laughing — or at least smile under your mask . . . well, have another glass.

When you are sowing oceans of tears, and you can't even glimpse the other side of that canyon, you can count on an outrageous harvest like you've never, ever seen. No one has. . . . Well, except once.

Jesus once said, *"I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit."*⁷

He did. Died. Buried.

Then he who turns water into wine arose. Such an abundance flows.

And with him, we will walk across it to the other side.

⁴ Byassee, 149.

⁵ Papias's description works out to $1.02287025 \times 10^{23}$ litres of wine. That's about 136 sextillion bottles, enough for each person who has ever lived (about 107 billion) to have more than 1 trillion bottles each! Whew!

⁶ The volume of the Grand Canyon is about 4.1 quadrillion litres.

⁷ John 12:24.