

“Dreams, Laughter and Rejoicing!”

Text: Psalm 126

Dr. Geordie Campbell

August 9, 2009

**“Very few things in the world are more profound or powerful
than a rested soul and a restored mind.”**

A very wise pastoral mentor once said that to a room filled with weary-worn preachers. Every single one of us understood exactly what he was saying. I can still hear the cadence of his phrases. “Very few things - more powerful - a rested soul - a restored mind.”

It’s actually a timely and fitting thought for these summer days and for this time in our culture at large. Timely and fitting because there are, in and about us, more than a few tired souls around. I know in the summer-time we all try to catch up on that tiredness thing, but it’s still true. And there are more than a few people who feel like it’s a long walk back to feeling restored again. Sometimes I know that feeling in my own life, my own story; and sometimes I know it’s true for you, as well.

If we take a giant step back to Biblical days we find that it was true then, too. It seems that the longing for rest and restoration is as old as the hills. It’s been around as long as people have. Then, as now, people hungered to feel fresh again, to feel newly alive, to feel replenished. They wanted to have that felt-sense of goodness and favor returning – this after a long season of feeling just the very opposite.

This is what our Psalm is about this morning. In fact, biblical scholars call it a Psalm of restoration – one among a half-dozen different genres found in the Psalms. In this case it’s a kind of poetic prayer, one remembering the times when benevolence was plentiful with the deep gladness of life all around. And then it connects that memory with the hope and promise that these gifts would be given again.

I want us to simply trace the lines of the Psalm today, and let the wisdom of the ages take hold of our day.

When the Lord restored us we were like those who dream . . .

Early in July Pam and I spent some time in Vermont. I love it there – the green hills and the babbling brooks and the cloud-racing-skies of summer go a long way in restoring me. Among the stops we made was to the church that my father served in Springfield, which is also the church where I was ordained. The economic base of that town evaporated about 20 years ago when the machine-tool industry went off-shore. As a consequence, slowly but steadily, the community around it has been severely diminished. It’s now a virtual ghost town of what it once was. The church has suffered terrible decline, too. It reflects the town. I was saddened to see how much had ebbed in the tide.

But that night I had a dream. I was in the church walking the old hallways but they were all different now. There was a spiral staircase ascending with light and music. In the dream I met the new pastor whose name was Christine. She was filled with enthusiasm about how the church was responding to its new reality. I tried to tell her about how lively and large this church had been. She persisted in telling me of their new efforts, and of the new possibilities and she asked me to pray for them. Still in my dream, I thought, “This is nothing at all like this church used to be. But it’s so full of life and goodness and faith.”

When the Lord restored us . . . we were like those who dream! We were as those who were grateful for the things yet possible. That’s what our Psalm says, and as with all of the Psalms, this is not just a personal prayer, it’s also expressive of a communal longing – not only one soul but a whole people, an entire community hungering for the blessing of renewal.¹

When the Lord restored us our mouths were filled with laughter . . .

Quite fitting to our Psalm Robert Frost once said, “Laughter and poetry go well together. They give us a momentary stay against confusion.” That’s so very true. Deeper yet, theologian Karl Rahner said, “Real laughter, resounding laughter, the kind that makes a person double over and brings tears to the eyes puts us closely in touch with the spark of the Divine that lives in us.”

Another stop in Vermont was to take in a show at the Weston Playhouse. We saw *The Twenty-fifth Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, a wonderful play and funny to the core. The story-line was clever, filled with moments of hilarity, and I quickly fell under the spell of laughter. All manner of tension left me. Deep, authentic, surrendered humor won me over. It felt so good! I was not aware how much I needed that release. But the best part of it is that I was not alone. Everyone else in this small living-room-theater of people, our family for the night, was under the influence of laughter with me. It was not just an individual experience but a communal one.

We all know how good it is to laugh like that! Not in the polite fiction of social banter, but in the sort of laughter that sneaks up and erupts in glad and unexpected moments; the kind that catches us in the deep belly, and the good feelings that follow.

Again, remember, the Psalms are not only personal prayers. They are expressive of a communal longing – not just one soul but a whole people. Then . . . our mouths were filled with laughter!

When the Lord restored us our tongues shouted with joy . . .

I think it instructive to note that joy, rejoicing or gladness appear no less than five times in the brief words of our Psalm² – which underscores how essential these emotions are in restoring our souls.

Let me tell you about Elaina. We met her two weeks ago on the New Jersey Shore. I would guess that she is about 6 or 7 years old. She is energetic and curious, unafraid of strangers, wonderfully expressive, and also this: Elaina is a Downs child, a little girl with some large and special challenges.

Pam and I were with two of our closest friends on the beach. We were having a picnic lunch, which meant that a lot of seagulls, scavengers that they are, found us pretty interesting. Elaina was mesmerized by the gulls and made her way over toward us. She was fascinated and enchanted that the birds would come so close to us. Seeing her delight we threw a few pieces of crust and the birds came swooping after the treasure. Elaina squealed with joy. She turned and asked us to do it again. And so we did, just as before, and the seagulls did, and so did Elaina, too. Then we asked if she wanted to throw the bread and she did. She was so full of rejoicing as to be over-flowing. And we felt it too, just watching this child play with the birds in the sun.

Her parents were surveying all of this with great care but keeping just far enough away so as to let Elaina have her delight fulfilled. I suspect that Elaina's rejoicing was followed very closely by the joy of her folks. Her mother beamed as she wiped her eyes. Elaina had reminded all of us of the power of rejoicing.

So let me pull it all together - this Psalm of restoration. It truly is a prayer of the soul's renewal for each of us today – and for the world in which we live. **“When the Lord restored us we were like those who dream! Then our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy! For the Lord has done great things for us and we are glad.”**

May it be so. Amen.

© 2009 Charles Geordie Campbell, all rights reserved.

¹ James L. Mays. Interpretation: The Psalms. John Knox Press, 1994, p. 399.

² Ibid. p. 400.