

This Fresh Morning

Text: Psalm 126

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The poetry of Mary Oliver gets me going with the sweep of a single verse.

*It is a serious thing
just to be alive
on this fresh morning
in this broken world.*

So imagine with me a fresh morning in late August. It's one that happened decades ago now though it remains in my memory as eternally present – one of those indelible moments that will be within me always.

I was at our family cottage on the New Jersey Shore at the time. The summer was taking a last turn toward Labor Day. A gentle breeze awakened me early and beckoned me through the screen to come down to the bay at the end of the street.

I was an easy target for that kind of calling! Before long, my Sunfish slid into Barnegat Bay. I pushed her deeper with one leg in the water and the other knee on the deck. I fiddled with a few adjustments, hopped aboard and pulled tight on the line to the sail. In the next instant the wind caught hold and off I went.

I let out a loud YES! There was just something so right about that fresh morning: the salt air, the ripple of the bow slicing the water, the song of the gulls. The breeze was unabashedly flirting with me and I was falling fast in love with her. I put the centerboard down and, heading southwest, I was already halfway to heaven.

Though I did not have the language for it then I was being restored in real-time. It was as just St. Irenaeus said in the second century: "The glory of God is a human being fully alive." And that's exactly what I was experiencing. And honestly, there is something of God's glory when any of us find the pace and place and grace to be so refreshed as that morning was for me.

In fact, such moments of restoration are among the deepest longings in human life. We all want to feel and be fully alive. Profound is that hunger. And the reason that they are so delicious when they occur, and why they bear such power, is that they don't happen all the time. The odd calculus of life delivers them only now and again.

Or larger and deeper and far from the Jersey Shore. Turn to the ancient lyrics of a Psalm. Our scripture passage today is what scholars call a Psalm of restoration. It's grounded in the deep human yearning to feel fully alive, to return to the center, to be restored with a fresh start.

As always, the Psalms speak in terms both singular and plural; that is for individuals and for an entire people. To hear them any other way misses their full power. And what a good thing. Because though it is true that we are whole within ourselves, we are not really ever complete without the fabric and network of others. So it's really both/and.

In this instance, the Psalm is speaking about coming home again after a long time of exile. Just like ours is now, their world was broken then, too. And the Psalm is about the felt-sense of waking up fresh and starting over in the largest of ways. Just listen to sweep of the phrases:

*When God restored us we were like those who dream!
Our mouths were filled with laughter,
our tongues with shouts of joy!
The Lord had done great things for us and we rejoiced!*

Or, expressed in more contemporary language, a pastoral translation at the hand of Gene Peterson in *The Message*:

*We couldn't believe our good fortune!
Rains came to our drought-stricken lives
and heavy hearts came home with armloads of blessing!
God was wonderful to us and we were one happy people!
Do it again, Lord! Do it again!*

My goodness could we use a boost like that in our lives, in our land and in our world! I need not recount the many reasons. But imagine the breadth and depth, the length and width of being restored like that from the inside our and the outside in!

So here we are today. Be it ever so simple as this. It's early September once again, barely a day old, and a fresh season is just about to unfold before our very eyes.

That's what the lyrical verses of the Psalm are all about, new moments of coming alive, of being home again after a long and lonely time away, of finding a way to look forward to the goodness and the grace awaiting.

It is also what the mystical elements of the Table invite us to this morning: whoever we are, whatever our journey, coming to the wellsprings of God to be filled again.

May your hunger for renewal and mine; my yearning for restoration and yours; your need for fresh steps and mine; and scripture's promise of dreams and laughter and rejoicing . . . guide us to the bread that never grows stale, and the cup that is always brand new. My friends and my family: come now, the Table waits. Amen.

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