

**Wall Street United Church Like the Ones who Dreamed Rev. Wendy Maclean
August 18, 2024**

Psalm 126 – GNT

*When the Lord brought us back to Jerusalem, it was like a dream!
How we laughed, how we sang for joy!
Then the other nations said about us, "The Lord did great things for them."
Indeed he did great things for us; how happy we were!*

*Lord, make us prosperous again, just as the rain brings water back to dry riverbeds.
Let those who wept as they planted their crops, gather the harvest with joy!*

*Those who wept as they went out carrying the seed will come back singing for joy, as
they bring in the harvest.*

Celtic Encompassing Prayer: Christ of the Seven Directions

Christ above: to uplift us
Beneath our feet: to ground and support us
Christ behind us: to protect us

Christ on our left: to keep us company
Christ On our right: to challenge us
Christ within us: to strengthen us and hold us in love.
(Adapted from David Adams in The Open Gate)

*Great Spirit, Holy One, Child of Life,
Bless us as we travel into your word,
one step at a time,
following Christ, who calls us to join him.
We are in good company, with pilgrims
and seekers throughout time.
Speak gently into our hearts, Holy One.
May my words be true and faithful to the gospel.
And may our understandings be a blessing to you. AMEN*

Today we are in the in the company of people who have prayed this psalm on their journey. This is a living prayer. With this psalm, we are walking on an ancient path of heart and soul, "carrying our seed for sowing"--carrying our very human worries, and blessings, with tears, and with trust.

I like to imagine the bands of pilgrims, after a long trek from their villages, coming into Jerusalem singing. These psalms would have been the songs Jesus learned as a boy

from his parents. He would have sung them with his family as they went up to the temple. This psalm is full of promise. *Remember, the people say to each other-- remember --God has saved us before, and God will save us again. Remember how it felt?* It was like a dream.

When we worship, there are always silent witnesses, who hover just on the edge of our gathering. Some of these silent witnesses are here via the internet. We can't see you, but you are an important part of this service. God bless you.

There are others who are touched by our prayers, in ways we will never know. We can't take responsibility or credit for this. It is a gift of Spirit, but I trust that our praying and singing radiate out, bringing God's healing love to our world. At the same time, WE are being blessed and saved by the prayers of people we will never see. Trust the prayers of the ancestors, and the prayers of people we will never know.

In Judaism, scripture is sometimes described as black fire on white fire. Black fire is the words on paper, written in ink. White fire is the space between the words, spaces between the shapes of the letters. We enter these gaps when we open ourselves to the words under the words. We find ourselves in the company of people who are praying. In the white fire, we join our own needs, fears, longings to the prayers of centuries of pilgrims.

Now more than ever, we pray for the Lord to restore the fortunes of Zion. Free the captives. Restore the hostages being held by Hamas. Restore thousands of Palestinians languishing in Israeli prisons. Heal the land. Not with the power of domination and oppression. The fortune of Zion is shalom: peace with justice. Not in wealth, but in the faithful treatment of widows and orphans, strangers and even enemies. In the rubble of bombed schools, in the torn-up roads, in the desert, in the hospitals that have no electricity, in Palestine, in Israel: the people go out weeping. With them we pray for their return to shalom, to safety.

And with the people, we will rejoice. Then our mouths will be filled with laughter. Great belly laughs, head thrown back, shouting praise!

There are many reasons I love this psalm, but one that keeps it fresh for me is hearing the people's response to joy: "We were like those who dream." I remember one wise friend telling me: "*Don't be afraid to let your dreams come true.*" When we dream, we are very vulnerable. We have to open ourselves to risk seeing new possibilities. When we dream, we are imagining something that doesn't exist yet for us, something we long for or hope for.

What are you dreaming about? What might be just at the edge of your awareness, a dream you are afraid to dream? Something too good to hope for? Don't be afraid to dream. This may be God praying in you, God's longing for you to trust and to listen.

I have recently returned from a wonderful time of retreat and pilgrimage to Lindisfarne, Holy Island. Lindisfarne is a tidal island at the borderlands of England and Scotland. When the tide is out, the island is accessible. But when the tide is in, the island is cut off because the causeway is flooded. Holy Island is a very peaceful place, saturated in spirit and history. Pilgrims keep a rhythm of prayer, with morning and evening prayers at the church. The walls of the church have been soaked in the prayers of pilgrims for over a thousand years.

In the seventh century, a shepherd named Cuthbert responded to a dream by becoming a monk at a monastery in Lindisfarne-Holy Island. People came from all around to be healed by him. For centuries, pilgrims have walked the path of Saint Cuthbert from Melrose in Northumberland, to Lindisfarne. Just beyond the churchyard, the ruins of the ancient monastery walls hover like a prayer. The sounds of gulls and seals are carried on the wind, and the sound of the waves is always present.

Celtic monks, on pilgrimage, wandered without maps, without any clear directions, except their love of God. They were "seeking the place of their resurrection." One of the small chapels in the church at Lindisfarne honours the journeys the monks took in small boats called coracles. There was no rudder, so monks were at the mercy of the waves and tides. This is the spirit of pilgrimage: to trust the way will open, and God's love will be our guide. "Go seeking the place of your resurrection."

I did not experience the rough seas or hard journey of the ancient monks on my pilgrimage. I did not go with any special call, except to "come away and rest". I stayed at Marygate House, a very old house, lovingly run as an ecumenical ministry, supported by a charitable trust including churches. Like the monks of old in their coracles, I let my prayers drift and float and carry me wherever God wanted me to be.

When we pray, we never know who will turn up in spirit. I found myself reflecting a lot about my call to ministry, and the miracles and wonderful interventions I have experienced over my life. Like any pilgrim, I also had my burdens and questions. *"What next, God? What is your dream for me?"*

At Wall Street UC, we have spent the past year asking this question together. What is your vision for the church, God? *What is your dream for us?* This is a question for changing times ... when we are moving from a place we know well, into unknown territory. Changes in health. Retirement. New Relationship. Widowhood. Changed expectations.

Psalm 126 is a strong affirmation of God's promises fulfilled. God has brought the captives home from exile in Babylon. God has restored their shalom. God has done great things for the people. Miracle after miracle! We were like people who dream. Yes, God, you did great things, now we need you again. Come, Lord Jesus.

"What next, God? What is your dream for me/ for your church/for your people?"

On Saint Cuthbert's beach, overlooking the tiny island where he had his hermitage, many pieces of glass and broken bricks have been washed up by the tide. No longer needed for walls and windows, no longer needed to house the monks or families who have moved on, these broken bits of brick and glass have been washed smooth over the years. They have their own beauty, transformed by the waves and salt of the North Sea. Like the way the monks and pilgrims of Lindisfarne found the sharp edges of their souls worn away by the world's tears. Like the way our souls are smoothed and transformed by prayer.

As I contemplated these broken bits of glass and brick, I wondered: What will you do with the broken bits of our lives, God? With the lost dreams, the closed churches, the dreams that did not come true?

In spirit, I found myself with the women who visited the tomb of Jesus on Easter morning. Their arms were full of spices, and cloths for anointing his crucified body, according to the rituals of their religion. But when they got to the tomb, the body of their beloved teacher was not there. The women had been worried about how to roll away the stone. They never dreamed that the myrrh and aloes and soft muslin cloth -- their most precious gifts -- would not be needed. Was it grief or joy that rose from their bellies in a great howl? *What next, God?*

We are Easter people: We proclaim Christ crucified and risen. In the first light of that morning, the scent of spices filled the air. *What shall we do with these spices? the women ask.* In our worship, today, two thousand years later, we answer them with our trust and love:

Your spices were not needed for the body, dear sisters, but the world will need them forever to spice our words with the truth of that first day that ordains and anoints us in the prayer we need to wrap our children: murdered, missing, abducted, ignored, incarcerated. Abused.

Alone.

Dear Sisters, your prayers wrap God's children and anoint them with the love of Christ. Even from a distance, we tell God's children: You are not alone In the strong name and spirit of the risen Christ.

We pray with our brothers and sisters across time: Restore your people, O God.

The monks went seeking the place of their resurrection. Here, today, we meet in the light and love of the Resurrection. We sing your praise. Our weeping turns to laughter. Rejoice! AMEN