

Call to Worship

Sing songs of hope into the waiting air and begin the dance of joy, for the life of faith is before us.

Look into the distance and see the rising dawn with shining rays like acts of love and warming brightness from the heart of God.

Let us sing praises to God and watch for Christ, for in the longing of Easter, lies the promise of good that is to come.

We are ready Lord to continue the climb to Jerusalem together.

Prayer of Invocation

Spirit of God, abide with us today. We come to you prepared to receive your word, as it is spoken aloud and as you write it upon our hearts. May we, in the music that is played and sung, in the words that are spoken, and in the silences between, receive your grace. May we go forth with your strength to share the good news to the world. Accept our praise! Amen.

The Word Psalm 126

A pilgrimage song.

When the LORD changed Zion's circumstances for the better, it was like we had been dreaming.

Our mouths were suddenly filled with laughter; our tongues were filled with joyful shouts. It was even said, at that time, among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them!"

Yes, the LORD has done great things for us, and we are overjoyed.

LORD, change our circumstances for the better, like dry streams in the desert waste!

Let those who plant with tears reap the harvest with joyful shouts.

Let those who go out, crying and carrying their seed, come home with joyful shouts, carrying bales of grain!

Living the Word

Justifying Our Dreams

Time to get back up from the last rest, and continue the climb to reach the top of Mount Olivet so we can descend through the Kidron Valley to Mount Zion and Jerusalem. Passover is coming, the remembrance of Moses freeing Israel from Pharaoh's slavery.

Starting with his infant journey down the river in a basket, being raised in Pharaoh's Court, and then running away only to return years later to save his people – Moses' story seems to be something right out of the movies...Actually, we know it was the other way around as the movies were made out of his extraordinary life story.

Beginning in Exodus 1:22 "Then Pharaoh gave an order to all his people: "Throw every baby boy born to the Hebrews into the Nile River, but you can let all the girls live." Moses mother had dreams for him as she gave him up by putting him in a basket and sending him off, down the river, to keep him alive to live for another day. Parents and grandparents are like that, we dream dreams for our children.

As the Hebrew pilgrims again begin their ascent with their friends and their families, it is fortunate for them that the next two psalms of David, number 125 and 126, say what they do. It gives the travelers the opportunity to draw their families together and speak to one another about what God has done for them and about what they mean to each other. These two psalms present them (and us) the opportunity to be a little sentimental.

They speak to each other lovingly about their dreams, about laughter and singing, and about how glad they are to have each other. It is nice to have moments like that with your family. It is like going through a scrapbook that has been forgotten for a long time, and opening it together and being surprised all over again, at the things you used to do together.

Perhaps it meant more than that to David when he wrote these Psalms, as he said: *"When the LORD changed Zion's circumstances for the better, it was like we had been dreaming. Our mouths were suddenly filled with laughter; our tongues were filled with joyful shouts... Yes, the LORD has done great things for us, and we are overjoyed."*

When he wrote this psalm, David could have been thinking of many different instances when the Lord turned their captivity into laughter. He could have been thinking about the time when the Israelites walked around Jericho seven times the same day, and after their seventh trip around, the trumpeters were ordered to blow their trumpets and the people were to shout, and the walls of Jericho fell. Think of how their shouts turned to laughter! They couldn't speak, they were stunned. Words were only a mixture of laughter and unbelief. Their speech was garbled with laughter as they struggled to share their expressions to one another about what had just happened right before their eyes.

Greek historians tell how, when the Romans had conquered Greece, the Roman consul went to Greece to tell them that the Greeks were to be free. When this news was given to the citizens of Athens, they could not believe it. They were unable to receive it all at once, so the news had to be given to them a little bit at a time because it was too much to believe. It was too good for them to comprehend all at once.

That was the way the disciples had to be told about the resurrection of Jesus. The news had to be given to the disciples and the women at the tomb a little bit at a time. They could not absorb it all at once. It was too much for them. Even by evening of that resurrection day, they were still like those in a dream. The women had told them that he had risen, Mary had spoken to Him.

He had appeared to some of his disciples, but even then, when He met two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus and walked with them, they were still in confusion because they could not believe what had been told them. They were like men in a dream, and all they could do was laugh when they finally accepted the news. The Lord had turned the circumstances of Zion, and they were like those who dream.

I love picturing the disciples on their walk to Emmaus with Christ. It describes how I feel about the death and resurrection of Jesus, who is my Lord. I can't quite understand what it all means for me, but I really don't need to hear any more, because I want to hang on to it without someone trying to explain the unexplainable to me. I am afraid if someone tried to explain it to me, it would make it harder for me to believe, and instead of convincing me of its truth it might cause me to lose some of the faith that I have through my trust in the God's work in this whole event.

That is the way we can feel about the resurrection. We can believe that Christ died for us, and he arose from the dead so that we and our loved ones will also arise after death. But don't try to convince me about how God made it happen any further, or you may make me have doubts. It is such good news that I am like one in a dream about it. I also don't need anyone to convince me that it is true, only the Lord can do that and in my heart and mind that is already done. I just want to live with that dream so that my voice will be filled with laughter and my lips with singing.

But even more than that, it is not just for me that I am allowed to dream. I am allowed to dream even further because of what Psalm 127 describes. It speaks of our children and the blessing they are to us. Life would be a remarkable thing all by itself, even if there was no everlasting life and most of us could be satisfied without the hope of eternal life, but the fact is, we are offered more than just everlasting life, but also everlasting love.

I have loves in this life that just yearn for something more than this earthly life can offer. I not only want to live eternally; I want to love eternally. I want to love and see my ancestors forever. I want to see my parents again. I want to see my husband and my children and my grandchildren, and I want to be able to love them forever. That is why the next psalm. Psalm 127 is so precious.

"A pilgrimage song. Of Solomon."

"Unless it is the LORD who builds the house, the builders' work is pointless.

Unless it is the LORD who protects the city, the guard on duty is pointless.

*It is pointless that you get up early and stay up late, eating the bread of hard labor
because God gives sleep to those he loves.*

No doubt about it: children are a gift from the LORD; the fruit of the womb is a divine reward.

David now turns to his son Solomon, whom he loves so dearly and says something like this to him: Son, you know that the one great disappointment of my life has been that the Lord did not permit me to build a temple for Him. My hands have blood on them for I was a man of war, and I had your mother's first husband killed because I wanted her for myself, so the Lord has said that I am not to build his temple. But you will! So let me tell you this:

"Unless it is the LORD who builds the house, the builders' work is pointless.

Unless it is the LORD who protects the city, the guard on duty is pointless...

No doubt about it: children are a gift from the LORD; the fruit of the womb is a divine reward."

Our children mean so much to us! How much we want to tell them! How much advice we have for them! How much we love them! How much we want to tell them that unless they permit the Lord to build their life, they labor in vain, trying to make something of their life on their own. Unless they call on the Lord to watch over them, they will always be in danger.

It appears that Solomon took David's advice. David had two other sons, both very ambitious, both wanting to ascend to the throne of their father. Both fought for it and killed for it. One even attached his father to take the throne for himself before his father was dead. But Solomon just waited. The throne was his and he knew it; all he had to do was wait for it. He did not strain for it, He did not toil for it, he did not fret over it. He just waited and when his father David died, he ascended the throne and became an even greater king than his father before him!

And he did build the temple! Tradition has it that Solomon would not permit his workers to work too hard or too long each day on the temple. He took the advice of his father who said: *"It is pointless that you get up early and stay up late, eating the bread of hard labor because God gives sleep to those he loves."* He listened and learned from his father that the greatest work is done while one sleeps, for that is when the Lord works for us. Solomon did what he could, and then he let the Lord do the rest. David would have been proud of him had he seen the temple!

This is good advice for each of us, and especially a good piece to pass on to our children... We do what we can and let the Lord do the rest. We need to do what we can in this world, and then let God do what God can, through us. It is pointless to get up early and stay up late, eating the bread of hard labor. Let God do what God will do! That is good advice.

"And by the way, Solomon, I am so glad to have you. Children are a gift from God. There is no other gift like you." Isn't that true? We would do anything for the children of our lives. They are one of the reasons we want to accumulate some wealth in this life, so we can leave them something. Why build a house if you have no household to leave it to? Why own property if you cannot deed it to a loved one? Napoleon could never have built a dynasty because he had no son to will it to. Perhaps that is why he was so careless about his kingdom. Henry VIII went mad because he had no son. Neither of them could see beyond themselves and their desire for a blood-related child, to be able to love the other children and people in their lives. How much we love our children and the people of our lives! How much they mean to us!

That is all the more reason why the death of Christ and his resurrection can mean so much to us. We want to be with our loved ones forever and ever, for we love them more than ourselves. This Life is just not long enough to love them. Life without love is always long enough, but life with love is never long enough.

Jesus knew this. How well He knew this! That last night together with His disciples, He gathered them very close to Him just before He went out in the garden to pray for them, and He said:

"Little children, I'm with you for a little while longer. You will look for me—but, just as I told the Jewish leaders, I also tell you now—'Where I'm going, you can't come.'

"I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other.

Simon Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, where are you going?"

Jesus answered, "Where I am going, you can't follow me now, but you will follow later."

That is for us! We don't need to hear anymore whether that is true or not...We only need to look at that picture of our Lord call us 'Little Children' and saying 'don't be afraid to love, for you will follow me, and that love will go on into eternity.' As I dream it, I can just see a place... my loved ones gone before me, waiting with a greeting of love in their eyes...Christ in the lead; and then some day, my children, my grandchildren and all of those yet to come after me, together again as we make the journey singing the songs of Zion in a familiar land with familiar friends.