

Sermon Title: Singing While Weeping

Preacher: Rev. Devon Crawford

Date: February 18, 2024

Scripture: Psalm 137:1-6 NRSV (updated)

¹ *By the rivers of Babylon—*

*there we sat down, and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.*

² *On the willows^[a] there
we hung up our harps.*

³ *For there our captors
asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”*

⁴ *How could we sing the Lord’s song
in a foreign land?*

⁵ *If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!*

⁶ *Let my tongue cling to the roof of my
mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy.*

Sermon Notes:

Rev. Crawford describes the Israelites whose voices are rendered in this Psalm. Their homes had been plundered and they were exiles in Babylon – a land where the culture and traditions are unfamiliar and strange. Their exile and displacement have led to depression; we find them by the rivers of Babylon disoriented and debilitated. Their situation, Rev. Crawford shared with us, is neither new nor exclusive. History and current events reveal the same experiences: exile, displacement, disorientation and ultimately depression.

It is in that reality that the exiles were commanded to sing the songs of Zion, not to God’s glory, but for the entertainment of their oppressors. The question that confronts every exile is this: “How can we sing the Lord’s song in this strange (and) foreign land?”

The Negro/Black National Anthem – Lift Every Voice and Sing – was composed at such a time. Rev. Crawford shared that historian Rayford Logan described it as “the nadir” or lowest point in race relations in the United States of America following the emancipation of enslaved people. Black people found themselves in a “strange land” as did the people in Psalm 137. Yet the era in which the Negro/Black National Anthem was born produced a flourishing of excellence in culture, politics, art and history within the African American community. Therefore, the question must be raised, “How do you sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” when you are living contemporaneously in a “nadir.”

After reminding us of some of what makes America “sick” today, Rev. Crawford declared that if the voice of the church remains muted in this moment, then the judgment of God is upon us. Again, the question arises, “How do you muster the strength to sing while you are weeping?”

Sermon Points:

1. SINGING IS A MODE OF REMEMBRANCE. Singing our songs reminds us that our current condition is not our final destination.
2. SINGING IS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE. Singing the songs of Zion to the glory of God affirms our “somebody-ness” in the face of oppression.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you do if/when you get depressed about current events, situations and circumstances?
2. What song(s) remind you that the current situation is not the final destination?
3. In what ways are you or others being denied their “somebody-ness”?
4. Do you think that singing the songs of Zion, to the glory of God, will change our world? Why or why not?
5. Does our church do enough “singing?”
6. What was your reaction to this sermon?