

SERMON THOUGHTS ABRIDGED

## PSALM 126

**“Nach dem Weinen, Kommt das Lachen”  
AFTER THE CRYING, COMES THE LAUGHING**

*When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream.  
Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing.  
Then they said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.”  
The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad.  
Bring back our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the South.  
Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.  
He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing,  
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*

“Nach dem Lachen kommt das Weinen.” It’s German. Judy relates that her father used to say that, when she and her sister got to having a little too good of time—laughing, giggling, chasing, teasing—then suddenly tears would come, because somebody got bumped, or hurt, or had feelings hurt. “Nach dem Lachen kommt das Weinen.” “After the laughing comes the crying.”

If you are really astute this morning, and if you have a few German skills spooking around in you, you will note that those same words aren’t quite the words I printed as the sermon title today. Actually the sermon title and the thought for today, Christmas day—because of the text for today—are just the other way around. “Nach dem Weinen, kommt das Lachen!” “After the crying comes the laughing!”

The Psalm writer is looking back perhaps a few years, or perhaps just months. He is reflecting on the feeling his fellow Jews--God’s Old Testament people—had in their hearts when their captivity and exile in Babylon ended. It was like a dream. It was too good to be true! It was like expecting to eat a Christmas dinner of cereal and crackers because that’s all there was, but by the kindness and concern of a relative or neighbor, sitting down to a fabulous Christmas Day feast of turkey with all the trimmings!

The Jewish people did not relish their captivity away from Zion or Jerusalem. Actually “Zion” was the central part, the old city, where King David had first established his residence and headquarters. It was a safe place, located on the elevated area of what was called “mount” Moriah. It was his fortress. Zion also became the place of worship of the LORD when David had the worship tabernacle moved there. His son Solomon would build the great temple there. “Zion” the fortress and “Zion” the worship center for the LORD was the heart of the nation. But it was gone. The people had been forcibly taken from it, and their temple and city burned and destroyed, with no hope of returning. Alas. However, 70 years later their captors the Babylonians were defeated by the Persians. Perhaps the people thought, “Ouch, a new round of oppressors.” But, as if out of nowhere, Cyrus king of the Persians, announced that they could go home! *When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream.* It was too good to be true! It seemed like a dream. Where did that come from?

When was the last time you had one of those experiences. “Where did that come from?” “It’s like a dream!” Maybe it was the bountiful rains we had in October. Maybe it was (this is imaginary) when oil was discovered on your ranch or farm. Maybe it was the blanket of white snow on this Christmas morning!

*Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing.* What a gift bringing pure joy! Laughing and dancing in the sorely needed rain! The words say, *Then our mouth was filled with laughter.* Literally the Hebrew says, Then our FACE was filled with laughter. Not just a little chuckle or a restrained laugh. The entire face lit up with laughter. And our mouths were filled were singing. “O what a beautiful morning, O what a beautiful day!” Try NOT\_singing when things are going well!

Even other people recognized the unbelievable nature of the turn of events, *Then they said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.”* Indeed! It was not just by accident, or by chance, or by Luck! as one of my extended family members was known to say, “As Luck would have it.” This was clearly the LORD in action., the LORD had seen to it that His people were privileged to return home to Zion! A little more modern-day example: 60 years ago, even leaders in the WELS recognized that the infant CLC’s acquisition of the Ingram Estate in Eau Claire, at a bargain price, was a generous and tremendous turn of events for us. It is the ILC campus today.

We say, *The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad!* Do you see where this is going on Christmas Day? Is your life on a downhill spiral of late—due to health, disaster, family tension and breakdown? Or due to mistakes you’ve made, foolish choices, sins against God and against others? The lives of all of us are on a downward spiral. Like the Jewish people back then, we’re in captivity because of our own missteps and because of life in this sinful life and world. The future looks bleak--and casting all dishonesty aside--you know God is not happy with you. If you face Him right now at death, He rightly should send you “south” where it’s too hot to enjoy anything--Hell. Oh, the sad and bitter tears of life.

But then comes Christmas! Jesus, God’s eternal Son, in love and generosity toward you, came to this earth setting aside the full use of His honor and glory, born as a man although God, to live as man, although God, the God-man, to live in lowliness and commonness. Born in a barn, raised by sinful parents. As an adult no house, no horse, no donkey. Opponents and enemies by the fistful. Dying on a cross, facing the anger of God the Father for our sins. Rising from the grave in victory as only God can do! Delivering that victory to us. Christmas! Christ the Savior is born! “I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people—all people! you too! For unto you is born this day in the city of David—the city of Bethlehem—a Savior which is Christ the Lord!” (Luke 2:10-11). In Christ you have the help you so desperately need against every earthly obstacle, against death and eternal death in hell itself, against the lies and wiles of Satan, against sin. In Jesus you are safe! Like a baseball player, at a close play at the bag, or at home plate, though you are far short, yet through Jesus, the umpire rightfully sees and declares, SAFE! and you win! “Where did that come from? It’s too good to be true! It’s like a dream.” That’s your joy at Christmas! And not just today, but every day of your life. Trust Jesus, In Jesus, you are Safe! You are Saved. Forgiveness, resurrection from the grave, and the perfect life of heaven forever, await you!

The psalmist says, *The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad.* Isn’t that Christmas?! *The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad.* Great things! Think of Christmas hymns with the word “great” in them.

Hymn 70 “A GREAT and mighty wonder, a full and holy cure.” A cure for sin and death. A great wonder!  
Hymn 674 “O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. v. 4 O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today. Oh hear the Christmas angels, the GREAT glad tidings tell. Oh come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel.” Great news—God is with us!  
Hymn 105 “Praise God the Lord, ye sons of men before His highest throne. Today He opens heaven again and gives us His own Son. v. 4 He serves that I a lord may be, a GREAT exchange indeed! Could Jesus’ love do more for me to help me in my need!” He became poor, that I might become rich! How great for me!

(And there are more.) In Jesus, God has brought back your captivity. You will now inherit of heaven. Amazing!

*Bring back our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the South.* The psalm writer compares this great change of events and great change of status--from exiles to those returned home—as if they were one of the dry stream beds in the desert area south of Jerusalem. The Arabs call them *wadi-s*, perhaps you have heard the term. Those stream beds for most of the year are dry useless channels, but when rains do come, they become streams of fresh water, full of life for those around. What a sudden turn of events, what a joy!

He looks at another example. *Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.* The psalmist describes the annual turn of events in the life of a farmer. The farmer had to take precious seed that his family could eat, that his livestock could eat, that could be sold for needed money. He had to take it and throw it in the ground, bury it in the soil. Seed gone. Sad. But then by the LORD’s doing, the seeds grow and mature and come to harvest. That same farmer who sowed in tears, reaps in joy, carrying valuable sheaves of ripened grain with him, blessed with a crop and grain for another year, so much more bountiful than the amount he cast into the ground. What a turn of events! Too good to be true. Like a dream!

At Christmas, in Christ your Savior your sad world and life, your sad record and status, are changed. You the captive and exile, the confined prisoner, are free! Do you see that it is no longer “Nach dem Lachen kommt das Weinen,” “After the laughing comes the crying”? But that now and forever it is, “Nach dem Weinen, kommt das Lachen.” “After the crying comes the laughing!” May today, Christmas Day, be a day of laughter and singing for you! And tomorrow, and the next, because of the great things God has done for you in sending His Son to earth, to bring about forgiveness and life—eternal life—for you! A blessed Christmas Day in Jesus!

So be it! Amen.

Pastor Kanzenbach---