**December 17, 2023 Psalm 126:1-6**

***Joy***

**Scripture:** *Psalms 126:1-6 NRSV*

*(1)When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. (2)Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." (3)The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. (4)Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb. (5)May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. (6)Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.*

**Notes:**

1. Psalms of ascent were intended to provoke ***collective*** ***memory***.
   1. Psalms of ascent are ***associated*** with specific times of year.
   2. Psalms of ascent reminded the people of God’s ***faithfulness***.
2. Music and ***memory*** are strongly connected.
   1. Memories can be evoked by ***music***.
   2. There is a connection between music and ***healthier*** ***aging***.
   3. Music can often cause people with memory-related diseases to “rediscover their ***identity***.”
3. Music is part of church ***liturgy***.
   1. There are songs you ***gravitate*** toward more than others.
   2. We ***remember*** through music.
4. Remembering the past is meant to help us remember ***forward***.
   1. Psalm 126 should help the people look ***forward***.
   2. Advent is a season of remembering forward, ***anticipate*** God’s return.
5. There is ***joy*** in remembering forward.
   1. ***Recall*** the greatness and faithfulness of God.
   2. ***Trust*** that God will continue to be faithful in the future.
6. The music of the season conjures up ***memories*** for each of us.
   1. We may only have seeds in our hands now, but trust that there will be a ***harvest***.
   2. Remember a God who is always ***faithful***.

**Scripture:**

When did you do it? When did you change the music you listen to, to Christmas music? For me it was the day after thanksgiving; I was running an errand in my truck and turned the radio on. I quickly discovered the channel I normally listen to switched to all Christmas music. So when I switched to my car, I naturally tuned to a channel with all Christmas music. Christmas music has a nostalgic effect on many people, myself included. When I hear certain songs, I think back to Christmas’s past. I remember certain people that I would spend my holidays with. and I would remember certain places that I would go. I remember certain events and significant times in my life that have had a lasting impact on me. Some of these people, places or events make me smile, some make me sad, and others bring joy to my heart.

Which songs do this for you, Are you an “O Come All Ye Faithful” type? Or, is your song Joy to the World? Perhaps it is more contemporary, “Jingle Bells” or “Santa Claus is Coming to Town”. Maybe you’re a fan of the #1 Christmas song “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree”?

Songs are used to mark specific times or cause us to remember past times. When we hear Pachelbel’s “Canon in D,” many of us think of weddings. When we hear “Pomp and Circumstance,” we instantly think of graduations. Maybe the most obvious is “Happy Birthday,” which reminds us of numerous birthday celebrations throughout our lives. For some, such musical memories might be difficult, bringing to mind challenging times but hopefully they are mostly reminders of joyous occasions.

Christmas is one of those times. A time when music can bring to mind our memories of the past, whether good or bad. So it is fitting that during the Advent week of joy, we look at Psalm 126, which is a psalm of remembrance for the people to remember the source of their joy—Yahweh. Stand with me and share in the reading of our passage found in Psalm 126

*Psalms 126:1-6 NRSV A Song of Ascents. (1)When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. (2)Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." (3)The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. (4)Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb. (5)May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. (6)Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.*

Psalm 126, is a psalm of Ascent. It is a psalm of remembrance, a psalm for people to remember the source of their joy, Yahweh.

*Psalms of ascent were intended to provoke collective memory.* One popular belief is that psalms of ascent were sung by pilgrims traveling up to Jerusalem for annual feasts, which would mean these psalms were associated with specific times of year. Psalms of ascent reminded the people of God’s faithfulness in both the distant and the more recent past.

*Music and memory are strongly connected.* Our knowledge of the connection between music and memory is why we use songs to teach children things we want them to remember. Good *and* bad memories can be evoked by music, memories as well as different eras of our lives. Some studies are even showing a connection between music and healthier aging.

There is a documentary on Amazon Prime called *Alive Inside.* The documentaryexplores the connections between music and memory in Alzheimer’s and dementia patients. The results have been a realization that music can often cause people with memory-related diseases to “come alive” or “rediscover their identity,” as the documentarian put it after watching people’s demeanor physically change when they listened to familiar music from their past.

Music is part of church liturgy for many of these same reasons. We learn a lot of theology (for good or ill!) through music. What are the first songs you remember from church services? Are there songs you gravitate toward more than others? Do you sing particular songs during times of personal hardship? We remember through music. The songs of Christmas remind us of Christ’s coming. The songs of Easter remind us of Christ’s resurrection. We remember loved ones with funeral music.

Psalm 126 and the other psalms of ascent are connected to a communal memory. Every time they hear a certain song, they remember what God did in the past. *Remembering the past is meant to help us remember forward.* While Psalm 126 is a song of remembrance, it isn’t supposed to be static. It should help the people look forward to it. The idea is that looking back at where God has *been* faithful kindles the hope that God will *be* faithful again in the future.

Advent is a season of remembering forward. We look back at God’s coming in order to anticipate God’s return. We look at the faithfulness of God in the past, trusting that God will be faithful again. We look to the past with an eye on the promises of God for the future. There is joy in remembering forward because of the great things God has done for us before, the great things we know God is doing now, and the great things we know God is going to do in the future. This entire psalm is about recalling the greatness and faithfulness of God and the trust that God will continue to be faithful in the future.

The music of the season conjures up memories for each of us. Each of these memories are significant in our lives, who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going. Some might not be good memories, and others might be hard, but hopefully we also have some great memories of Christmases past.

But even if our memories are difficult this time of year, even if we are in the stage of weeping, we can look back and remember the faithfulness of God in the past and trust that God is faithful now and will be faithful again. Just like the children of God, we may only have seeds in our hands now, but we trust that there will be a harvest.

We remember forward, trusting that God will continue to be faithful, just as God was so many years ago when taking on humanity for us. We sing the songs; songs of lament and joy, Songs of hope and promise, so that we might collectively remember a God who is always faithful.