

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Apr 7, 2019 – Lent 5

Do You Fear the Shadow of Death?

(Psalm 126 with Refrain #3)



**May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.
Those who go out in weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,
Shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.
(Psalm 126:5-6)**

A lesson from Psalm 126

I've been pondering this wonderful image by indigenous artist Daphne Odjig all week – it portrays that common indigenous affirmation “All My Relations” so powerfully for me – and that's the vision of God's reconciliation of the world to the triune God that is becoming more and more definitive of my faith these days – to connect it with our psalm this morning, it's the cause of “shouts of joy” – things may well appear to be in grips of death, but there is potential there that we cannot imagine without faith in God's reconciling love – the outrageous claim of the Christian faith, what makes it foolishness and a scandal to many, is this claim that, in Jesus Christ, God defeated death once and for all – our lives may well take a different form, the energy that is shaped into our current human being may get configured differently, but our lives will go on, in closer and more compassionate connections with all our relations – that is the promise of the Gospel and our core cause for joy

Provocative points to ponder – as always, too many to cram into one sermon

- The origins of this psalm probably lie in the long period of exile that the people of Israel experienced in Babylon from the 590s to the 530s BCE – a time of deep disruption, wrenching death, and discouraging despair among God's people – but there were always voices of hope – voices that saw through the tears and weeping to the possibility of new life flourishing from the seeds sown in the midst of the suffering – those voices witnessed to a resilient determination to remain faithful while the growth of those seeds took place – all of this was grounded in

gratitude for faithfulness of God in the past – the past was prologue to a promising future, regardless of the shadows of death that darkened their present situations – so, this is a song of hope in the midst of despair

- The most joyful insight Odjig's fascinating image of all our relations reminded me of this week was this – life goes on generation after generation in joy – there is suffering and death – we turn our fears into monsters and become trapped in their jaws for a time – perhaps a long time – but the reconciling work of Jesus Christ carries us through those times into the home of reconciled relationships God offers through a power that is God's alone – we may well lose touch with that power – we often act as if it is not real – but that love is always there – with us and for us – birthing new things – propagating new life from the seeds of the old – inviting us to reap in humble, yet confident, joy

How does this all relate to our witness as a fellowship of the friends of Jesus?

There is something deeply personal about this psalm's testimony to the power of God over death – the power of God to accompany us through the valleys darkened by the shadows of death – we all face the end of life in our current bodies – it's a fact of life in this realm – but what's the vision of the greater reality within which this happens? – is it one of "That's it! Nothing more than what I see and feel in this body" – or is it nourished by the kind of vision portrayed by Odjig's mural? – a vision of generation after generation sowing seeds and reaping under the compassion care of God's reconciling love – a love that carries us through this life into the next – a love that promises shouts of joy as we come home to the full glory of the banquet table we gather at here, in anticipation of something far greater – I pray you will find that promised fulfilled in these communion elements at this feast of reconciliation

My Notes

My Prayers

