

Psalm 137, 1-6

1. *By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion.*
2. *As for our lyres. we hung them up on the willows that grow in that
land.*
3. *For there our captors asked for a song,
our tormentors called for mirth: 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.'*
4. *How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?*
5. *If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill.*
6. *Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you,
if I set not Jerusalem above my highest joy.*

How shall we sing the Lord's song
in a strange land?

Psalm 137 is a community lament.

The exiles in Babylon gather by the canals, which bring the waters of the Euphrates to the fields of the city. Here there is a ceremony of mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem, and they pray for the restoration of that city. The lyres hang silently on the trees, because the songs of Zion, seen in Psalms 95 to 99, which emphasise the majesty and power of God, would only arouse the contempt and amusement of the conquerors. The Lord's song belongs to the ritual of a temple, which no longer exists.

One of the members of the group says that, although he cannot sing the sacred songs, he will never forget Jerusalem, and will regard the chance to return there as life's greatest joy.

Some people, when they go away abroad or far from home, become homesick and miss what is familiar. For some of us, the place where we were born is very special and living somewhere else, perhaps owing to work commitments, isn't the same.

We may find changes in our own country hard to accept, look back into the past and imagine that things were better then. People sometimes say, "I don't recognise this country anymore." We may think of somewhere, for example, a church, where we were happy and don't want to go back, as things have changed. We used to have a nun at Brighthouse Parish Church, who had been released from her convent to look after her sister, who was unwell. When her sister died, she was supposed to go back to the convent, but, as things had changed there, she couldn't face it. Her own death seemed to release her from it.

We might despair at the world, which on the one hand has beautiful scenery, but in which also there is bad behaviour, cruelty and increasing crime, and we wonder where we can find hope of a better future.

We may begin to feel that we don't belong anymore, so how can we sing "the Lord's song"?

But we have to remind ourselves that we have to sing the Lord's song wherever we are, that God is present in our everyday lives, and, even in our darkest moments, he is there alongside us. So, if we feel that we are in a strange land, we have to try to rediscover a sense of hope and belonging. If we can do that, then we shall be able to sing that song wherever we are.

Prayer

God of our pilgrimage,
you have willed that the gate of mercy
should stand open for those who trust in you:
look upon us with your favour
that we who follow the path of your will
may never wander from the way of life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

(Post Communion Collect, Trinity 10)