

Salt – Light – Hope

reflections and care for those who serve in pandemic
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Beside the streams of Babylon, we sat and wept at the memory of Zion, leaving our harps hanging on the poplars there.

--Psalm 137:1-2

The pathos of exile is the loss of contact with solidity and the satisfaction of the earth.

–Edward Said

Yesterday, in conversation about pandemic with a dear friend who serves as an ELCA pastor, our discussion touched on the odd experience of pandemic during Lent, leading us to the idea of seeing the current days less as a fast and more as an exile. As we consider accounts of exile in scripture, we come away with a picture of exile as terminal loss, extreme separation, wilderness confusion, and unhealable, unbearable rift. Hardly an appropriate preparatory experience for Palm Sunday or Easter perhaps.

Yet, what if we think of exile less as an experience and more as a place? Exile is the place where we are compelled to live life outside of the habitual order. And in exile, life outside of the habitual order becomes a place of remembrance, perhaps of grief, for what has been lost or left behind.

But also, life outside of the habitual order may be a place of reflection and renewal within a period of waiting. It is a place where we can remember the words to our heart songs. Thinking about this idea further, my friend referenced the first lines of Psalm 137 to pose this question: *What harps do we need to hang up for a time while we learn to sing God's song in a strange land?* Such an essential question for an exiled Easter people.

Please pray with me, using the words from Psalm 90:

Turn, O Lord! How long?

Have compassion on your servants!

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us,
and as many years as we have seen evil.

Let your work be manifest to your servants,
and your glorious power to their children.

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and prosper for us the work of our hands—
O prosper the work of our hands!

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. Amen.