

"We are Freed to Dream!"

Psalm 126

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Easter Sunday

When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion,
we were like men who dreamed.

Our mouths were filled with laughter,
our tongues with songs of joy.
Then it was said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."

The LORD has done great things for us,
and we are filled with joy.

Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like streams in the Negev.

Those who sow in tears
will reap with songs of joy.

He who goes out weeping,
carrying seed to sow,
will return with songs of joy,
carrying sheaves with him.

When was the last time you allowed yourself a really big dream? A mind-boggling, far-out, fantastic dream? When was the last time you drowned in a dream so sweet, so powerful you couldn't tell whether this was you or something bigger than you?

"I am going graduate from medical school."

"I am going to run a marathon."

"I am going to start a whole new life in a new country."

"I am going to break the cycle of prejudice in my family."

"We are going to plant a church."

. . .start a business."

. . .build a water purification system."

"I am going to overcome an addiction."

"We are going to save lives."

"We are going to free people from what imprisons them."

"We are going to bring someone back from the dead."

Such big dreams, you may say, are for dreamers. These kinds of dreams are for the very young or the very foolish. They are not real.

But wait. Let's linger in the dream mode a little while longer. After all, it is Easter morning!

Every single one of you has had a dream that was big for you. A dream that was, or is, life-changing. A dream that is YOUR particular dream. Call it up right now. Think of your best, most noble, most fulfilling dream. See it take shape in your mind. See its color and texture.

Close your eyes if you need to. Savor your dream. Taste how it feels on your tongue. Smell how fresh it is! Let it fill you up like water flowing over the banks of a dry riverbed. Let it carry you away like the song of a bird. Let it echo.

What does this feel like? It feels hopeful and exciting but scary, too. It makes us feel different than we usually do, a little foolhardy, a little impulsive. It gives us energy. It makes us smile, even laugh. It makes us feel. . .

Hope? Dare I say it? Resurrection?

Psalms 126 is a liberation poem. It refers to one of the Bible's three Great Liberation Events:

1. Liberation from slavery in Egypt
2. Liberation from **Babylonian Captivity**
3. Liberation from Sin and Death

In Psalm 126 God's people remembered how God rescued them from Babylon and brought them back to their home in Jerusalem. They were so happy to be back home they didn't know what to do with themselves. They were falling all over themselves with laughter. They pinched themselves---was it real or just a dream? Even foreigners from far away heard the sounds of raucous Hebrew laughter ringing across the Judean desert!

Their coming home was resurrection! They whose way of life had been dead and buried, whose homes were covered in dust and tumbleweed, were alive again. Women swept their own front porches again and toted water from favorite wells again. Men picked grapes off long neglected vines. Children stuffed their faces with fallen figs. Sons and daughters stood open mouthed and marveled at how much the oak trees had grown. Husbands retold old stories. Wives dusted off long-dead dreams.

It was glorious, but this resurrection party did not last. It soon gave way to business as usual. Mending broken plows. Scraping together a meal with not enough flour. Tending sickly sheep. Seasons of gentle rain turned to days of dusty drought.

Somehow, though, as they wiped the dust from their eyes, they remembered the dreams of God. They remembered the price of freedom. They knew in a way they had not known before that new life could not come without death. They knew resurrection followed the grave. God had given them second chances before. God would do so again.

Today we celebrate Resurrection, the third of the Bible's great Liberation events. The release from Sin and Death. The skeptical among you might well say this is a pipe dream. You have a lot of company if you feel that way. Resurrection **is** for dreamers, God's dreamers. That would be us.

We are all here today searching for something, and it's not Easter eggs! Some of us may even be secretly hoping for God to **DO something**. God, unlock our dream-starved hearts! Shake up our stone cold certainties! Give us a word or sign that once and for all casts out doubt and fear and proves once and for all that death is not the final word.

And yet. . .

Even if something undeniably miraculous happened right here today, even if God shouted out loud and clear and appeared as a holy hologram in our midst right now, most of us would sooner or later return to business as usual, mending our fences and fixing our tools.

God works in more mysterious, and at the same time, mundane ways. God breathes new life into old dreams: this is resurrection, not just some day, but now.

We get new life when we refuse to give up on the good dreams which have inspired us. "I am finally going to write that book."

Resurrection comes with surrender. "Maybe I haven't been going about this relationship the right way." "I thought my world would end when I lost my job, but it didn't."

We are freed from the power of death when we allow tragedy to form new dreams in us. "God, somehow I have to let people help me make sense of my daughter's death."

Resurrection happens when a door is slammed shut and we are forced to squeeze our way through a narrow window. "We can't have a baby so we are going to adopt."

New life comes when we figure out the old one isn't working. "Since I quit my job, I feel like I have come back to the land of the living."

God creates new dreams when dreams have faded: this is new life, not just after we die, but new life today. "I now dream of family, not fortune."

Tombs open up when we finally realize what we thought we treasured so much was something moths were eating and thieves were stealing. "We are going to start living more simply so others can simply live."

We are freed from the captivity of death when we turn our lives over to life, the life Christ offers. This is resurrection, here and now, and hereafter, too.

God summons possibility where once there had only been roadblocks. This is God's way, not the spectacular way of shock and awe, but the slow and bending way of helping us trek around mountains instead of blasting through them for us.

God's way is often the slow, painful way, where our hands get callused and our backs get sunburned, the long and circuitous route of the way of a

cross followed three days later by the nervous words of mere women, *"He is not here."*

Their words seemed like idle tales, and even they (who were there!) did not believe them (Luke 24:11).

They were like dreams, really, just like dreams.