

<sup>1</sup> When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.  
<sup>2</sup> 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.'  
<sup>3</sup> The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. <sup>4</sup> Restore our fortunes,  
O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negev Desert. <sup>5</sup> May those who sow in tears reap  
with shouts of joy. <sup>6</sup> Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall  
come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves. (Psalm 126)

How does it work that a text, which is more than 2500 years old, speaks to us  
as if it was written for us today?

Being imprisoned, dreaming, being set free, laughing, shedding tears and  
shouting for joy, crying, sowing, harvesting... this is part of our experience, of  
our feelings, of our lives even today. If we took time to write down some mem-  
ories and experiences regarding all of these keywords, if we connected them  
with our personal story and our life history... I think, we'd have to do a lot, we'd  
have lots of stories to tell, we'd have to listen to a lot of stories about others.  
And all of us here this morning could share more than one story...

Being imprisoned, dreaming, setting free, laughing, shedding tears and shout-  
ing for joy, crying, sowing, harvesting...suffering and hope, disappointment and  
gratitude, patience and desire, giving up hope and rising again, loneliness and  
community...and much more feelings and stories are part of the hymn, psalm  
126, the prayer.

In the year 587 before Christ, the Babylonian army captured Jerusalem and  
broke down the walls. The houses of the rich and important people were burnt  
down and most of the inhabitants were deported as prisoners to Babylon. The  
temple, built by Solomon, the center of Israel's faith and worship was de-  
stroyed.

God's people reacted in three different ways.

Some of them said: This is God's punishment! They complained about the sins  
of their fathers and about their own. Some of them cursed their fathers whose  
sins were the reason for their suffering: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes,  
and the children's teeth are set on edge' (Ezekiel 18:2). Most of the people  
accepted the new situation and tried to set up their own business in the for-  
eign country. Nearly nothing of their hope for God was left over.

That is the background to Psalm 126, which was written by a group of Jews  
living in the exile in Babylon. They are singing against the resignation of their

own hearts. They are singing against the resignation of their sisters and brothers who lived with them. They hold on to God's promises that there will be healing for Jerusalem with peace and justice. And at the same time they suffer and cry because their path leads them through the desert, where there is no life at all.

They cry and they confess at the same time in contrast to what they see and experience every single day: **"Those who go out weeping...shall come home with shouts of joy!"**

A life lived in the tension between dreams and reality, jubilation and crying for help, laughter and weeping. As if it had been written and sung out of our own souls.

Let us focus this morning on four or five thoughts and images from this psalm, let us connect them with our lives and let us link them up to our life and faith.

#### WE ARE STILL PRISONERS....

We are still bound in our fear of life. We are still bound to our faint-heartedness. We still suffer from our need for safety. We still hold onto things, which do not keep us grounded. We are still caught up by our bad experiences, we cannot let go and we find it hard to trust and hand over...

We do not have the inner freedom to turn to the one next to us, the more so as he or she is a stranger...

We are still prisoners of our fear, of our mortality, of our limits. Only sometimes, sometimes there comes a little first smile: **When the Lord restores the fortunes of Zion, then we will be like those who dream and smile.**

#### SOWING IS AN ACT FULL OF HOPE...

Sowing is hard work in some ways.

As soon as you sow, you give out of hand. You give the presence out of hand. Today's seed becomes the seed of tomorrow.

As soon as you sow, you let go. You spread. You waste. You invest into tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. You do not invest in today.

A hymn is a seed. Time is a seed. Love is a seed. A spare room and money, knowledge and education, skills and talents....seeds! Clothes and bread, gestures of care, my faith, my power...seeds.

How big is the temptation in difficult times, to consume the seeds just for myself, to stockpile seeds just for me, to use the seeds up for me alone?

However: Seeds are nourishment for the future, not for today. Seeds are not made for being eaten up. Seeds are the future, for me and for you.

When will it be, **that the Lord restores the fortunes of Zion, and we are like those who dream?**

Sowing is an act full of hope.

Always connected to the anxious question: Where will my seeds fall? On rocky ground? Among thorns? On the path, where they will be trampled down or blown away?

Sowing is an act full of hope. It was Jesus who promised that some of the seeds will fall on good soil and will bring forth grain a hundredfold. Then there will be laughter and joy and celebration.

Sowing is not always cheerful work.

Sowing, where it still is done by hand, is done with a gesture of throwing away. How similar are sowing and throwing away? How often do we feel that all we do is thrown away? How often do we feel ourselves being thrown away? That our whole life and story are somehow thrown away?

Changing the perspective changes a lot, if not everything!

Are we not thrown away but sown? Our whole life-story not thrown away but sown?

No - sowing is not always a cheerful job but always an act of hope.

With the promises of Jesus in our hearts, we are sowing our hope into the lives of our children. We tell them the stories of the Bible that life will have a good ending. We tell them about God who is there for them in their lives and always remains with them.

We are sowing by telling our children about ourselves. We share our faith with all the limits, temptations and cracks in it. We are sowing by strengthening the images of resistance and life in our children.

We are sowing in tears when we suffer from an awful disease. Bearing and accepting illness in patience and prayer today can be the bread of tomorrow for someone else. He will remember us in times of misery; she will remember the power of our tears and be comforted and fed by our faith.

Sharing the path of someone else's life means sowing. Praying for someone else means sowing. My neighbor realizes: I am not alone. Somebody is sharing my path. Somebody is hoping and praying for me. Somebody is letting go of

his time, his power, his answers, himself and throwing himself and me entirely into God's hands. Somebody is not staying in the distance but loves me. Love is seed, a grain and bread for the future.

Until **the Lord restores the fortunes of Zion, and we are like those who dream!**

WE DO NOT CRY ENOUGH...

Is there so little growth among us because we do not cry enough?

Strange question?

But: Are we too dulled and indifferent?

Is there too little yearning for a better world in us? For another way of living in community? Are our hearts too cold and too untouched?

As soon as I hope, I start suffering. Our world, how it is, is a heavy burden.

Sowing and letting go hope is a confession: That I am not happy with the world as it is. It is a confession that it is not enough: Having only myself. It is a confession that I will take on responsibility and care for tomorrow.

I am sowing and connecting my life to the life of the others.

And I am asking:

What is growing in my life out of the tears shed by others?

In the German Hymnbooks, you can find many songs written by Paul Gerhardt. He lived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century during a 30 year-long war in Europe. He lost four of his five children in this time. You can find his tears in the music of his hymns and therefore they are able to comfort people until today.

Another hymn in the German hymnbooks is from Julie von Hausmann. The words are "So nimm denn meine Hände" – Take my hands...

Her husband worked as pastor and missionary far away in Africa. One day she travelled to join him there and marry him. After weeks on the boat, she arrived and learned that he had died three days ago.

You can find her tears in the words of her hymn and therefore they are able to comfort people until today.

What is growing in my life out of the tears shed by others?

Will an Easter Celebration grow out of the tears of the Passiontide?

Will the suffering of Christ be the seed for resurrection and let people live an upright life already today?

Will there be a feast of harvest where people share bread, asylum, justice and peace?

Seeds are not made for being eaten up. Seeds are not made to be saved in the bank. Seeds are the nourishment for the future, not for today. Seeds are hope, for me and for you.

**Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.**

When we sowers do not sow but eat the seeds, we will be full for a short time. But we remain alone and destroy future. When we sow, when we trust and believe, when we live responsibly, when we follow Christ – our seeds will fall on good soil and bring forth grain. They will comfort and feed the needy ones. No tear will be shed in vain – until the day comes when God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

**Then it will be said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoice.**

Amen