



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

The Lord's Prayer

Week of 6.15.20

By Kellie Anderson

In the early 1980s I watched the movie *Godspell* as part of a high school retreat. The musical is based on the Gospel of Matthew (with other references and some artistic license.) I haven't thought of *Godspell* in years but one song came to me Sunday morning. "On the Willows" -- one of the most poignant songs in the performance -- is based on Psalm 137; 1-4, a song of lament by the Israelites in captivity.

By the waters of Babylon,

There we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.

On the willows there we hung up our lyres.

For there our captors required of us songs,

And our tormentors, mirth, saying,

"Sing us one of your songs of Zion!"

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

The Israelites in slavery included intellectuals, religious and civic leaders, and artists and musicians. What better way to humiliate and desecrate an entire group of people than by capturing their best and brightest and forcing them into slave labor. In these verses, their captors jeered, "Ha! Fools! You are always singing about your God who loves, defends, and saves. Sing us one of your happy God songs now!"

"On the Willows" and its verses from Psalms made me think of our nation today.

1) LISTEN: Have you listened lately as Black and Brown people are weeping? Have you heard them say that they are weary, exhausted, broken? Have YOU wept at the ongoing, generations-old sin of racism in our world? These are not NEW circumstances! They are imbedded in history and in humanity. Wrong actions, attitudes and norms are -- as Randy said in his sermon -- as ancient as Satan's persuasion and our disobedience in Eden.

2) LAMENT: Imagine the Israelites in such despair that they simply hung their instruments in the trees, sat down, and wept while their captors tormented them for refusing to perform. Imagine someone standing over you with a whip and demanding that you sing songs of worship. God's people lamented as they remembered a time when they felt oneness with God in Zion. (Remember, the Babylonians weren't to blame for their separation from God – their own sin caused that.)

Are we held in captivity by the sin of racism? Sin is a cruel and mocking captor but Jesus released us from its chains through his death on the cross. Have you been freed only to stay in captivity willingly?

ALL of us must lament our separation from God because of the individual and collective sin of racism. Our hard hearts must be broken for healing to occur. How have you responded to the public and private lamentation in the African American community? How have you shared in our community's grief?

3) LEGISLATE: As people of God, how do you compare our current culture with Babylon? How do you think the world views Christ followers when we do not confess, beg forgiveness, and ask God to create a clean heart in us in our relationships to other races (especially today with our Black and Brown brothers and sisters) and then use our faith in His power to bring about change?

What keeps you from doing this?

4) Now for the hardest question: Have you ever been accused of racism, or of unfairly exercising privilege or bias? What was the condition of your heart at that moment?

God created us all with equal value. As His child and as a follower of Jesus, how have you responded when you have encountered the sin of racism in your own thoughts or behaviors? Perhaps you've not been accused outright, but you've heard the voice of conviction in your heart?

And how have you responded if you have encountered racism in others?

I have been accused of racist behavior. I was devastated. I have an adopted Black brother so I assumed I never needed to check myself for this particular sin -- until I was called out. I wept tears of shame (and anger, I'll admit) that Black sisters in Christ saw racism in me. But I needed that challenge – it woke me up. I'm asking God to keep me awake in this area.

Friends, God's kingdom must start in our hearts. People are in pain and it's intense. Our world is broken and lost. Our "Nehemiah work" is not done. Our minds must listen; our hearts must lament. And when God illuminates ignorance, arrogance, and resistance to HIS plan, we need to get to work. Only then, will we shine like stars in this generation.