

Sermon (homily) October 2, 2016 Singing in a Foreign Land Cara B. Hochhalter

Psalm 137:1-8 and 2 Timothy 1:1-9

Singing your songs...in a foreign land. Sometimes when people are in a foreign land they play their music to remember their homeland...sometimes musicians travel to other places to teach about their homeland through music.

The other evening I went to Northampton to hear a Palestinian, Ramzi Aburedwan, play in an ensemble with four Middle Eastern musicians. Ramzi's music is incredibly moving...telling the stories of love, beauty and suffering...one song told of a woman who longed to make her body as a bridge between her people and their homeland.

You see, Ramzi was a boy of 8 who threw stones at Israeli tanks during the first uprising against the occupation of Palestinian land. But while he was in school in a refugee camp in Ramallah...music captured him. He studied at the National Palestine Academy of Music and then at a Conservatory in France....he could have gone on to play for a symphony in London or Berlin... but he could not let go of his dream to return to Palestine and start music schools for children and youth who continue to suffer in refugee camps.

Now he runs three such music schools under the name: Al-Kamandjati...he says that for these children the music provides three things: safe haven---creative and non-violent resistance and trauma therapy. His amazing story is told in this book, *Children of the Stone*, by Sandy Tolan who also wrote *Lemon Tree*.

Singing in a Foreign Land...

Let us be in prayer: God, whose music fills our hearts, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Our Psalm today tells of a people longing for their homeland. This was during the Babylonian exile, when the priests and elders of the little country of Israel had been carried away, forced to live in a foreign land...and their captors taunted them by asking them to sing the songs of their Jewish tradition. They were being mocked. And they cried out, "How could we...how could we sing our songs in a foreign land while we were in captivity?"

The Jamaican [reggae](#) singer, [songwriter](#), musician, and guitarist, Bob Marley, who in his own spirituality often drew from scripture...He sang a version of this Psalm 137

...and it goes something like this: *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, and there we wept, when we remembered Zion....But the wicked carried us away 'n captivity...Required from us a song, but how can we singing of our song in a strange land...Cuz the wicked carried us away 'n captivity...required from us a song...but how can we singing of our song in a strange land?*

How can we sing our song in a strange land?

So I ask you, have you ever felt in a strange place...perhaps not actually in another country...but in a strange place in your life? Were there songs that helped you stay connected? Songs that reminded you of your faith? What songs hold your spirit and your love for this land and our people? Are there songs that you wake up with in the morning?...Maybe you remember some hymns from your childhood...or even now?

I think people in other cultures may sing more than we do...what do you think? Do you sing while you work ... while you drive? Do you sing to your children and grandchildren or extended families? The power of music is real.... as Alice tells us, "There must be a God, because music doesn't come from nowhere."

And here is the link with our 2 Timothy text... Remember the writer was someone probably using the name of Paul, the apostle, and imagining Paul's place in prison writing to his student, Timothy. He is trying to encourage their new faith in God through Christ...and he basically tells them to sing their song!

He recalls how deeply their faith was passed on from their grandmother Lois and mother Eunice...there is something about naming these specific people that is so touching, making me think of my own grandmother and mother who also passed on their faith to me.... It is a living faith and Paul is sure, that the faith lives on in Timothy.

How do you suppose this grandmother and mother passed it on? Did they sing it? The letter says to "rekindle the gift of God that is within you....for it is not one of cowardice but one of power and love and self-discipline."

Think about the ways that music rekindles your faith...and helps us to pass it on. What songs help you carry your faith? What are the songs that hold you up...when in a strange place? Esther has asked you to tell her what hymns you would like to sing...

This lovely hymn that we sing at baptism...perhaps this song passes on the faith...for little Emmytt and his family...it certainly touches my heart...

*Child of Blessing, Child of Promise, baptized with the Spirit's sign: with this water
God has sealed you unto love and grace divine.... Amen.*