

Sometimes things are so bad, we can't comprehend them getting worse.

Besieged; under constant attack, bombs falling and bullets flying. Living like a nocturnal rodent, hiding underground during the day, seeking food and water during the night. It is so cold that dead bodies don't smell, don't decompose. They simply freeze.

When things are so bad, and can't get any worse, you are then ripped apart afresh as you and yours, are torn from the land of your birth. Neighbourhoods, communities, your language and your culture ... all gone as you are forced out of your homes, streets and towns. Trafficked across international borders and imprisoned in a foreign land.

This is happening in Ukraine today; these people are not refugees ... they are exiled civilian prisoners, taken into Russia by force.

This is the birthplace of Psalm 126.

This is Israel's exile in Babylon ...

This Psalm promises them ... they will be Home again ...

I don't know why we don't use the Psalms more often in our worship? They weren't used at Howick either. It seems an unusual thing as they dominate our lectionary readings for every day.

The Psalms are the songbook of Israel and probably the most treasured book of the Bible for most, apart from a favourite gospel. On the whole they speak personally about faith; sadness and joy, failure and success, about waiting and hardship.

Of all scripture, the Psalms know us, our fears and doubts, our human cries and vulnerabilities, to "know what makes us tick", we might say. Of all scripture, they cover the widest slice of time, having been written and recited over centuries and out of many situations, coming together in a complete edition very late in the first testament period.

The Psalms as someone has written ... "are simply necessary" ...

And our Psalm for this morning seems all of that ... "necessary".

For centuries this Psalm has been read and wept over, thought about and memorised, held on to as prayer, it has been a promise of home for all who those have felt torn from what it means to be human.

It is a promise that the stupor of dreaming will end, that laughter and joy will triumph, and that God will have God's say. That justice ... will be done.

It is a promise that restored fortunes will be real, better even than before. That joy will live and laughing, exultant.

It is a promise that this miracle will be so profound ... that the world will see and proclaim "look at what the Lord has done for them."

The Negeb is a desert plain, for most of the year; barren, dry, parched and seemingly lifeless. But when the rains come, the watercourses fill and the ground is saturated ... life blooms, exile is over ... and that which was sown in tears Is reaped in joy.

How hard must it be to sow in a frozen hell hole? To sow kindness and love? How difficult is to scatter seed under heavy shelling and bursts of gunfire? The seeds of peace and hospitality? How can you seek a future when you are chilled to the bone; hungry, thirsty and frightened?

When your life is smashed beyond repair, everything as bad as it could be and you feel like the Negeb; barren, parched and lifeless ... how can you hope for home?

How can you do this?

Because as in Psalm 126 ... if God has brought us home once

God can do it again ... and again and again and again.

This is why the Psalms ... "are simply necessary."

Thanks be to God.

Amen.