

## Freedom for the Captives

2018-12-09 - Year C - Advent 2 - The Rev. Christopher M. Klukas

Malachi 3:1-5; Psalm 126; 1 Corinthians 4:8-21; Luke 3:1-6

- Senator John McCain died this year on August 25th. He was most certainly an honorable man, a noble politician, and a Christian. But he was also a prisoner of war in North Vietnam for five and a half years during the Vietnam war.
- During this time he suffered from lack of medical care, frequent beatings, and years in solitary confinement.
- When the day of his release finally came, he was hesitant to believe it was true until he shook the hand of an American in uniform.
- In an account of his experiences and his return home, McCain wrote, “There is no way I can describe how I felt as I walked toward that U. S. Air Force plane.”<sup>1</sup>
- Perhaps he felt much like what is described in Psalm 126:1-2.
  - We can’t precisely pin down when, in the history of God’s people, this psalm was written, it may have been after the return from exile. but it could be applied in so many different circumstances, even today.
  - Kidner, “So the psalm, speaking first to its own times, speaks still. Miracles of the past it bids us treat as measures of the future; dry places as potential rivers; hard toil and good seed as the certain prelude to harvest.”<sup>2</sup>

### Anticipating the Harvest

- “Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb!” (Psalm 126:4, ESV).
  - The Negeb was a very dry place, but when it rained, the dry river beds could quickly fill up with water.
  - This brings to mind images of God’s sudden and miraculous action.
  - This psalm quickly turns away from this image, however, and turns to another.
- vv. 6-7 Sowing and Reaping
  - Unlike the suddenness of the rivers in the desert, farming is slow and arduous and it requires persistence.
  - It still requires the miraculous provision of God, but it is also dependent upon our own labor as we work towards the harvest.
- Jesus uses similar harvest imagery when he tells the disciples to pray to the Lord of the Harvest to send out laborers into the harvest (Matthew 9:38; Luke 10:2).
- We can apply this Psalm to our own situation, here in Middleburg.
  - Many of you can remember days of old in this church when things were thriving.
  - Now there is hard work in front of us, and it can be discouraging at times, but we know that the God who has acted in the past will continue to act in our future.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2008/01/28/john-mccain-prisoner-of-war-a-first-person-account>

<sup>2</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary* (vol. 16; Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 476.

- Diligence and persistence over time with miraculous boosts from God along the way.
- We need to be diligent in planting, weeding, and watering.
- “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6, ESV)

### **Ransom Captive Israel**

- “Ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear...”
  - The images of this verse recall the exile of the people of God in Babylon and use that image as a metaphor for our present exile as Christians.
  - When we layer this hymn on top of Psalm 126, we can see the past action of God in the exodus, the return from exile, and now in the first advent of Jesus when he took on human flesh and came to save us.
  - While Jesus won a decisive victory on the cross, this world is not yet as it should be. We remember the action of God in the past, and like those who returned from exile, we long for the future salvation which is yet to come.
  - This world is not truly our home. Our citizenship is in the Kingdom of God, and we long for the day when the Son of God will appear and set things right.
  - Until then we are captives.
- What holds us captive?
  - Our sin
    - John 8:34-36 - we are slaves to sin
    - Only the Son can make us free
    - As Christians, sin doesn't have the grip on us that it once had, but we still struggle against sin, and sin is always trying to pull us back.
  - The god of this world
    - “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:3–4, ESV)
    - O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free / Thine own from Satan's tyranny; / From depths of hell Thy people save, / And give them victory o'er the grave.”
- “Then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” Indeed, the LORD has done great things for us already, \* whereof we rejoice.” (Psalm 126:3-4)
  - Jesus is and will be victorious!
- Until that final culmination, we do the work of the Kingdom diligently and persistently as we wait with hope.
- “O Come Desire of nations bind, / in one the hearts of all mankind; / bid thou our sad divisions cease, / and be thyself our King of Peace.”