

BY THERE SCARS THEY WERE HEALED

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Reflection on Psalm 137

March 15, 2015

They had been driven from their homes like cattle into a new and distant land. They were God's chosen people, but it was hard for anyone to see God's favor at work in their lives.

They were exiles; aliens, strangers in a strange land. They owned nothing but their faith, their suffering, and their memories of the past.

In their despair, they wondered, *Have we sinned? Have we broken covenant? Has God abandoned us forever?*

There were days when it was difficult to tell which was stronger...their faith in the God of Abraham, their disdain for the enemy, or their memories of better times.

For all people, the act of remembering can be both painful and complex.

Memories can allow old wounds to open and bleed freely once more.

Memories can let little pieces of broken lives return with a jolt that makes us gasp.

Memories can open up cellar doors, and shine a light on things that lurk in the dark.

Memories can offer hope and healing.

But for those held captive, keeping memory alive is something more.

For captives, remembering is a dangerous act of resistance.

It is a signal to both captor and prisoner that as long as the memory of freedom remains, liberation is possible.

At the same time, the act of remembering can surface feelings that require courage to face.

Memories can give birth to a desire for vengeance so violent, so caustic, that it can corrode the soul just as acid can corrode metal.

How shall we sing the lord's song in a strange land? Babylon, you destroyer, happy are those who pay you back, evil for evil! Happy are those who seize your children and smash them against a rock!

And so, by the rivers of Babylon, the exiles sat and wept.

In times of captivity, we can be bound, not just by ropes and chains, but by hatred and shame.

We can be ensnared, not just by our masters, but by our own sins and fears.

From deep within a place of exile, it is tempting to dream of returning violence for violence; anger for anger; evil for evil.

A mother, shattered by the death of her daughter from a drunk driver, walks alone in the dark.

In exile, her only companions are fury and pain.

Her mourning is overshadowed by hatred and the memories of her child are distorted by dreams of revenge.

She wonders sometimes, if the darkness will last forever.

Held captive by violence, she sits by the waters of Babylon and weeps.

An addict, imprisoned by his relentless appetite, has broken every promise and betrayed every trust.

His lies to himself and to others have become second nature--part of the torn fabric of his life.

He is filled with memories of a different life and longs to escape, but cannot seem to find the way home.

Held by demons he can't control, he sits by the waters of Babylon and weeps.

Memories can be risky.

They can bind us tighter than any chain and keep us tied to failed promises, to consuming anger, to fruitless paths.

But they knew that amnesia could be even more dangerous.

They knew that even in perilous times, memories can remind us of God's liberating presence. Memory and hope are united in the human person.

For the community of faith, memory anchors us into covenant history, into a place of conversion and transformation.

It launches us toward the future and reminds us that hope is our portion and our heritage.

Even as they dreamed of revenge, they knew that God was gracious enough to forgive.

Even as they shouted in anger to heaven, they knew God was large enough to bear their rage.

As they sat, mourning and weeping, they were also insuring that they, the captives, would never abandon God.

They were reminding themselves that the God who had kept faith in the past, was the same God who now heard their cries of pain.

They trusted God with their darkest selves, knowing that God would never betray or forget them; knowing that a cry to God is also a prayer.

As they sat and wept, they knew that God would eventually lead them from bondage into freedom.

That journey to freedom can be almost overwhelming.

In desperate times it is easier to curse than to bless; simpler to hate than to forgive; more prudent to plan for revenge than to wait upon healing.

Giving up the hatred of someone who wounded us leaves us newly vulnerable.

Who will we be without anger as an organizing principle in our lives?

Fighting addiction means that life will change and new habits will replace the old.

Coming home from these places of exile is never easy.

It is a perilous journey requiring courage as well as faith.

We will not complete that journey unscathed, or without sitting awhile by the rivers of Babylon, weeping.

But tears are, in themselves, healing.

The scars we receive along the path are the mile markers and directional signs of our journey.

They remind us that after the resurrection, Jesus held out his own scarred hand to Thomas as proof of his own perilous journey— a journey that transformed the forces of bondage forever.

For by there scars they were healed.

"Stuff you need to Know"

Some thoughts shared by Susan McGurgan and of course some by myself through the power of the Holy Spirt.