

Summer *Movies and Faith* Series
Everyday Heroes – Inside Out
August 2, 2020

Overarching theme: In 2020, FUMC will be a **Go** church!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

Psalms of Lament:

The psalms make public much of the inner life of the community of early Israel. Some are intended as communal, official acts of praise or petition. Others offer in intimate detail the pain, fears, delights, and hopes of individuals (particularly David). Over the centuries, such prayers, the public and the personal, were written down and collected.

The psalms are poetic discourse between Israel and God, who is said to hear and answer. Many are frank, unrestrained conversations. Some are prayers and praises that soar to the heights of spiritual devotion. Some arise from deepest pain and distress and display the depths of human misery, anger, and frustration. The psalms present a rich cross section of speech to and about God, and in some cases include speech from God. At their heart is the conviction that God is one to whom all can speak. Countless generations have learned from these prayers, as various experiences have provided contexts for human understanding and ventures of faithfulness. Over and again, readers found their voices, as God's own voice joined the dialogue.

– Adapted from The New Interpreter's Study Bible, p. 749

Reflect on this Scripture:

Psalm 137 NRSV

By the rivers of Babylon—

there we sat down and there we wept

when we remembered Zion.
² *On the willows^[a] there
we hung up our harps.*
³ *For there our captors
asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"*
⁴ *How could we sing the LORD's song
in a foreign land?*
⁵ *If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!*
⁶ *Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy.*

⁷ *Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem's fall,
how they said, "Tear it down! Tear it down!
Down to its foundations!"*
⁸ *O daughter Babylon, you devastator!^[b]
Happy shall they be who pay you back
what you have done to us!*
⁹ *Happy shall they be who take your little ones
and dash them against the rock!*

Commentary:

Perhaps because it is a psalm about singing ("songs"/"song" is used five items in vv. 3-4), Psalm 137, with the omission of vv. 7-9, has often been set to music and used in worship services. The psalm in its entirety, however, including its shocking conclusion, has much to teach us about prayer, about ourselves, and about God. One thing it teaches us, for instance, is the lesson that in extreme situations, grief and anger are both inevitable and inseparable. The worst possible response to monstrous evil is to feel nothing. What *must* be felt - by the victims and on behalf of the victims - are grief, rage, outrage. In the absence of these feelings, evil becomes an acceptable commonplace. In other words, to forget is to submit to evil, to wither and die; to remember is to resist, to be faithful, and to live again.

From this perspective, the psalmist's outburst in vv. 8-9 is both a psychological and a theological necessity. The psalmist is motivated toward revenge out of loyalty to Jerusalem - indeed, loyalty to God! John Bright claims of the psalmist, "It would not be too much to say that he hated so because he loved so". Yet, there is no evidence that the psalmist did act out the expressed desire for revenge.

Rather, the psalmist expresses these feelings to God in prayer (v.7) and apparently leaves them with God. Thus the cycle of violence is broken by the psalmist's honesty with God.

Psalm 137 as a whole, then, is an "invitation to a kind of prayer that is passionate in its utter honesty." To pray is to offer ourselves and our desires – anger as well as grief – to God and to know that God loves us as we are.

– Adapted from The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol IV, p. 1228

This week, we are considering the creative and evocative 2015 Pixar film, **Inside Out**. The film depicts what is going on **inside** the mind of 11 year old Riley Anderson as she navigates her families' relocation from Minnesota to San Francisco. Riley experiences this huge life transition as an **exile** of sorts, as she is physically distanced from friends, familiar surroundings and almost everything she holds dear. In the film, we see her former normal state of 'joy' morph significantly as she experiences sadness, fear, disgust and anger in this state of exile (these five emotions creatively depicted as different characters vying for control in the 'headquarters' of her brain). Her parents just want her to be their "happy girl" again, but it is only as Riley ultimately experiences and expresses her sadness to them that they all connect in a deeper way. This allows Riley to reframe her experience and approach her new normal in a healthier way.

In a way, the Book of Psalms is the "**Inside Out**" book of the Bible. These prayers, many of which are associated with David, give us permission to express the full range of human emotion – joy, sadness, fear, disgust, anger, etc – to God. Psalm 137 in particular was a prayer written in response to a huge life transition for God's people, the Babylonian Exile, as they are physically distanced from friends, familiar surroundings and almost everything they hold dear. This Psalm expresses profound sadness about this immense loss as well as disgust with the Babylonian request that God's people entertain them with the happy songs that they characteristically sang when they were back home before the exile. Psalm 137 further expresses deep anger at the cruelty of the Babylonian army and ends with a provocative "eye for an eye" plea for vengeance.

While a most unusual prayer (to say the least), what is most astonishing is that the people of God felt the absolute freedom to express themselves to God in such a completely honest, raw, unedited, 'no holds barred' kind of way. By offering their feelings so completely to the only One who could fully understand and make things right, they avoid the spiritually toxic repression that can be destructive to self and others. Further, by offering candid prayer rather than acts of revenge, they avoid continuing an endlessly escalating cycle of violence. Instead, God acts on their behalf, seeing them through Exile and ultimately making the people of God a "light to the nations" (Isaiah 49:6), a prophecy that Christians see fulfilled

completely through the “son of David”, Jesus. Babylon will not have the last word. God’s Kingdom is forever. The Lord’s song can be sung again, regardless of the time and place!

This can be an important word for us who live in what might seem like an exile season in which we are often distanced from friends and much of what we hold dear. Especially in this difficult, frustrating time, if we can express the full range of what we are experiencing to God, God can help us understand our exilic lives in a new way. We can be reassured that he is ever working for good. By God’s grace we can be a light to the world around us as we remember that Covid-19 will not have the last word. God’s kingdom is forever. We can sing the Lord’s song in this land today.

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

How do you react to the “completely honest, raw, unedited” prayer of Psalm 137? What do you think would have happened if the psalmist had repressed these feelings, rather offering them in prayer?

Have you been able to relate personally to some of these expressed feelings?

How would you rate the honesty of your own prayer life before God? What would it take for you to get more ‘real’ with God?

Activity of for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Psalm 137:1-4
*By the rivers of Babylon—
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.
2 On the willows^[a] there
we hung up our harps.
3 For there our captors
asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”
4 How could we sing the LORD’s song
in a foreign land?*
3. Practice being an “everyday hero” by praying more honestly this week – perhaps using a journal to write out your prayers. After this week, reflect on the impact of ‘unedited prayer’ on your relationship with God.