Theme: HOW DO WE SING THE LORD'S SONG IN THE NEW LAND?

A Bible Study prepared by Rev Liva Tukutama, Griffith Uniting Church

LEADERS NOTES: Suggested time 1 1/2 hour

Aim:
To look at how the experience of migration has affected our faith.
To explore what has helped us to “sing the Lord’s song” in a foreign land.

Step 1 Stepping out in faith
Share in small groups the story of migration in our personal life or in the life of our parents or grandparents.

Step 2 Sharing back with the whole group
- In your small group sharing- what brought people to Australia?
- What has been most difficult?
- What do people most appreciate about life in Australia?

Step 3 Bible Study
Read Psalm 137:1-6 "How can we sing the Lord's song in the strange land"
Matthew 16:13-16 "Who do you say I am?"
Leader may find it helpful to refer to the notes/commentary.
After introducing the two readings people go back into their small groups to reflect further on the passages in the light of their experience.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

(A) How do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? Share your experiences.
(B) How do you struggle to relate to God in a new land? Name your personal struggles.
(C) Are there changes in the way you used to relate to God in your motherland and your present situation? Give reasons.
(D) How do you see/relate to God now in a new land? What new insights have you gained from your experience?

As a group write a “song” (or words of a poem or prayer!) that reflects the hope and struggles you have heard in the sharing of your stories.

Closing worship Sing or share the prayers and poems groups have prepared
Where do you come from? Where are you going? Who are you?

The life situations from which these questions come are quite clear. Babylon in the Old Testament and Caesarea Philippi in the New Testament. When pressed to sing the Lord's song in Babylon, the early Israelites with uncertainty and perhaps trepidation asked the question, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" And from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus was faced with the question of identity "Who do you say that I am?" Both questions are about identity. They come from two different situations but share a few things in common. Both cities, Babylon and Caesarea Philippi, were famous places for trade and commerce during their days of glory. Because of this both enjoyed the attention of travellers. They were parts of the known or the habitable world of their time, the oikoumene as we would call it today in the ecumenical movement.

Babylon with its hanging garden was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The setting of the Caesarea Phillipi was one of the most beautiful and luxuriant cities in Palestine at the time. Both places like many similar places worshipped Gods other than Yahweh, the God of Israel. So these two questions from our texts come to us from foreign places or pagan cities. The two questions raise the reality of one's understanding of who God is in relationship to their spiritual and communal life. The questions stem from ordinary life situations. Not only do we ask who God is, but God also asks us as, from our experience to name who God is. By asking the question, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" The early Hebrews were in, out of their anguish and anxiety, asking some deep questions about who they are and who God is. To sing the Lord's song is to keep alive the heartbeat of their community’s life. In Exodus 15:2, the writer stated, "The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation". Singing the Lord's song means having the staying power as God’s people: linked to a land and linked to God’s saving grace. Can we sing the Lord’s song in this different context? Is it the same God who is with us? What new things do we learn about God is and who we are through living in this new and strange land?

The Griffith Islanders are growing in their understanding of how to sing the Lord's song in a new land. They are recognising that they are now part of the wider Australian community and vice-versa. To sing the Lord's song here means finding, means being centred on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lord's song is of a God of hospitality, always inclusive and ever ready to embrace others. We encourage each other to continue to sing the Lord's song; continue to celebrate life and keep ‘holiday’ in the midst of our working days. This means learning to rejoice even while in exile, knowing that the Lord is in control of our situation. The song we sing is not a borrowed song; it must be born out of our love for our Lord and Saviour. One might ask the question as to what will be the tune and lyrics that we should use: Samoan, Tongan, Anglo, Chinese, Fijian, Italian? It must be the tune and lyrics that are in harmony with the heart of the Gospel; to love one another all the days of one’s life. In our multicultural contexts we are challenged to identify who Jesus is. He is calling us to give him a name from our experience and rename ourselves. It is the beginning of defining our identity as an integrated body of Christ. Theologian Jurgen Motmann, opened one of his book with the sentence: "this book is intended to help the Church finds its bearings... He went on to say that the following fundamental questions have to be answered afresh: Where do you come from? Where are you going? Who are you? The questions from the biblical texts send us back to those questions and help us to answer:
Where do you come from?

From the hand of the living God who engaged with humanity in anew way through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit!

Where are you going?
To make disciples of all nations; to fulfil the commission with which we have been charged.

Who are you?
We are the people whom Christ has promised to be present with to the close of ages.

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