

Friday afternoon worship | Sermon by the Rev. Anna Moon

Psalm 137, Revelation 7:9-10

June 4, 2021

Good Evening Michigan Conference! I am honored and humbled to share today's devotion with you all.

Let us Pray!

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to You our Lord, our Rock, our Redeemer, our God. In Jesus' name we pray!

Many of us feel like we are in a strange or foreign land, with so many changes since the pandemic, this tiny virus that changed the whole world, unfamiliar ways of doing things that was once familiar to us, trying to be creative with and learning to do things in new normal without losing why we do what we do...

Strange time of doing worship online. Before we were trying to get people inside the sanctuary but now, we are trying to keep our distance to show our love. How we miss being with one another and how we miss hugging and having food fellowship and singing with one another with full voice.

I am sure many of us miss singing together at the annual conferences. The sound of us singing the Lord's song together!! Wow. how much we all miss that, and we pray we will be able to sing together with full harmony once again and sing our Lord's songs to our Lord in one voice.

When I was given Psalm 137:4, I meditated on this over and over... As we see in Psalm 137 the Israelites were also in a foreign land weeping as they remember the Zion. How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

The Devastation they must have felt. Overwhelming sorrow of being in a foreign land but we also see in v. 5 there is that sense of they cannot forget Jerusalem. Their home! Where they worshiped the Lord singing the Lord's song.

We also cannot forget where we are from. We cannot forget our home! That is why we must sing the Lord's song.

Even though it is hard to sing Lord's song in this strange or foreign land in this temporal time of Pandemic, for with some temporal illnesses, for some devastation of losing loved ones.

But not only that in this strange land we see so much brokenness. As we see many hating, hurting others, senseless violence being done to others by some thinking they are above others, for some out of insecurity, some out of fear, for some just to blame on someone else...we are reminded that we are living in a strange land that is broken.

As I was meditating on "Singing the Lord's song in a strange land", I realized:

1. Singing the Lord's song in a strange land is about remembering where we are from, that is who we are and whose we are.

We remember the first home God created and it was very good. In God's plan, our home was to be where the Creator God has created for the creations to be living in peace in the Lord God and with one another. But when sin entered in, that perfect relationship was broken, and that first human had to leave home and away from God who loves us.

So, in that sense, even though we make home where we live, our home truly is where we are headed, the Kingdom of God and this world where we live is a strange or foreign land.

When Asians Americans were experiencing hate crimes, my heart became very heavy. Nobody should be treated this way. When I saw videos of elderly being targeted and I thought of my parents. When mass murder happened in GA, I thought of my parents in GA and told them to don't go out too much. Just be careful I told them.

What shocked me the most was when an Asian woman who was beaten in NYC in the middle of a day, in front of a building, there were people in the building who saw clearly what was happening, but no one helped but they closed the door. I think my heart just dropped when I saw that. No one stood up for her. No one yell at that man. No one was helping her. How scared she must have felt. How alone she must have felt.

I was targeted because I was an Asian American when I first came to the US. But I had my friends who had my back, so I knew those who were bullying were a very small number of kids who just didn't know better. I saw more wanting to help and wanting to know me and learn from me. Mr. Heart was my choir teacher and every day, he said "Hi Anna, how are you?" In my heart I said, "I am fine thank you and you?" I practiced every day, but I was so shy. But one day I got my courage and said in a very small voice, "I am fine, Thank you and you?" Mr. Heart was sooo excited! I remember his kindness and later he gave me a solo part to sing. Maybe that was why I also became a music teacher before I became a pastor.

Right after GA shooting, it was hard to preach that Sunday. That Saturday morning during prayer meeting we prayed for those who lost their lives and for their families. One of the prayer leaders lifted up the prayer request for the shooter and his family and his church community as well. As I was preparing the sermon I was reminded of Genesis 3.

When God created this world, it was very good but when sin entered, we see broken relationships start to form.

The temptation was to be like God that is to be equal to God or even above God. Which leads us also to think highly of ourselves, better than others, placing ourselves above others.

We also see a blame game starting in Genesis 3:12 when God asks Adam "... Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate."

Adam was not only blaming Eve, he was also blaming God. If you didn't make her, even maybe thinking, God if you didn't make that tree...

What happened to bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh?

Blaming others first when things go wrong. How often are we tempted to blame others?

When people test positive with COVID-19, not only are they physically sick, but many also share the guilt and shame they were feeling. Many feared that they might cause their loved ones to get COVID and a feeling of guilt and shame creeping in. I shared with them it is not their fault. We just have to follow all the procedures to keep each other safe because we love and there is nothing to feel guilty or ashamed about.

Satan loves to divide us, and one thing is a blame game. When we finger point at someone, we are reminded that one finger might point at the person, but 3 other fingers are pointing at us...

Wanting and thinking we are better and above others makes us act in certain ways. Jesus teaches us not to place ourselves above others but to be humble. Loving God and Loving neighbor is very that. Placing ourselves as who we are, the creations of God and loving God who loves us even to choose death on the cross.

To be the way of salvation, Jesus came down to dwell with creations. God the Son, who is 100% divine becoming also 100% human to move down to our neighborhood to dwell amongst us and to dine with us the sinners and as Rev. 3:20 Jesus says "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come to you and eat with you, and you with me." Still knocking at the door of our hearts of many who has not welcomed Jesus into their lives.

Jesus physically came down to this strange, foreign land teaching us to sing the Lord's song so we can remember whose we are, where we are from and where we are headed!! Jesus teaches us to sing the Lord's song and let our lives be songs to the Lord as we have marks of Jesus Christ so others will know that we are disciples of JC.

2. Singing the Lord's song in this strange or foreign land is about looking forward to our true home!

When I was in grad school in U of Il at Urbana Champaign, there was a conference called Urbana and since I was living in Urbana, I was able to fully attend the Urbana conference and I was so blessed. I was in the stadium filled with people from not only all over the states but all over the world. Students from all over the world, missionaries from many different nations and praising Jesus together... it was amazing. We prayed and prayed in many different languages. Some just came for this conference from Asia, Europe, Africa, I mean really all over the world and I felt like this will be what worshipping the Lord in the Kingdom of God will be like.

I have never been in a stadium filled with Christ followers praying for not only me, us, and our own nations but for other nations, and the world and praising and worshipping and just being in awe of God...

As we see in Rev. 7:9-10:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Celebrating different culture. Different nations, different tongues, different people from all tribes worshipping the Lord together... I can imagine worshipping in gospel style, majestic classical music, cool contemporary style, dancing and praising, and using authentic instruments, as we see in Psalm using all kinds of instruments strings, wind, percussion, etc.. and all God's creations sings the Lord's song to the Lord who is worthy to be praised in one voice.

That is God's vision for us to have when we think of the Kingdom of God. This strange land does not know about God's bigger plan. We as Christ followers know this God's vision. So, we also ought to have this vision God has shared with us.

Let us also sing Lord's song in this strange land not being conformed to this world telling us how it should be, but rather being set a part for the Lord and love being in this diverse, family of God singing the Lord's song together as we look forward to our true Home worshipping the God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as one voice.

Can you imagine that sound? Can you see those faces? What a joyful worship that will be?

3. Singing the Lord's song in this strange or foreign land is about living out our home here on this strange or foreign land as citizens of the Kingdom of God.

This world, this strange or foreign land teaches us to focus on what will benefit us and how to live for our own selves. But Jesus is teaching us to look up and fix our eyes on the Lord and in the Kingdom of God. Our goal is not worldly success but to serve and worship the Lord and abide in Christ Jesus to learn of His ways.

Pandemic is temporary, our illness, physical body is temporal, our home here is also temporal.. This is not our home we are just passing through.

Since early summer of 2019, I started to experience some balance issues all of sudden and started to lose my mobility. By end of 2019, I was using a cane and a walker. I prayed for healing and I still do. But I also realized that this body is not permanent. My illness, physical disability makes me think of my limits. What I can do and what I cannot do, and also learn new ways of doing things and even thinking things. Sound familiar?

But this did not stop me. Even through Pandemic, I was able to do ministry by recording from home. I was able to connect with the congregation members through email, text phone, and even through zoom fellowships and Bible studies. Even in Pandemic, even this unknown, I was able to do the ministry God has called me to do.

In this strange land, I was singing the Lord's song which reminded me, this body, this illness is temporal.

Eugene Peterson in Message interprets 1 Peter 2:11-12 as 11 Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul. 12 Live an exemplary life among the natives so that your actions will refute their prejudices. Then they'll be won over to God's side and be there to join in the celebration when he arrives.

Even in this temporal strange land, we are called to sing the Lord's song and live out how Jesus Christ taught us live so those who do not know Jesus will get to know and also believe in Jesus.

This strange land tells us that we can do whatever we want to, but Jesus teaches us to not to live according to our flesh but be filled with the Holy Spirit. Not my will be done but Thy will be done. God's will be done.

Paul reminds us in Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

We are made to worship the Lord and love one another and build each other up and encourage one another to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in this strange or foreign land to be set apart for the Lord as we live as God's Kingdom people as we continue to remember and sing the Lord's song in this strange land!

North Lake UMC was my first appointment, and the congregation was such a blessing to me. I was welcomed and loved by everyone in the congregation. We worshiped, prayed, laughed and cried together and grew together in Christ Jesus as one body of Christ. I was so grateful to Rev. Alice Sheffield who prepared the congregation as I was coming in the first Asian American women clergy and I know their current pastor Rev. Todd Jones loves the congregation and is loved by them all.

Now pastoring at TroyHope, the English ministry at Troy Korean UMC, with such a wonderful, passionate, and generous congregation many from different backgrounds, and culture, I am blessed and also humbled to pastor, serve, listen, learn and share as the Lord is leading us to grow to sing the Lord's song in this strange land in such a time as this.

So, let us continue to live as the kingdom people; loving God, loving one another as one body of Christ, as we act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God as we sing the Lord's song in this strange land.

For Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.
(Revelation. 7:10,12)