

Report from Powell House Co-Executive Directors

The soundtracks playing repeatedly in our minds for the past months have been the songs of GODSPELL, the musical in which we saw our son perform during the last weekend in July. As with all great musical theatre, the songs continue resonate in our brains and spirits well after the show is over. A specific earworm has developed for “On the Willows”, which is sung as Jesus says goodbye to his disciples when they share the last supper before he is crucified. It’s a poignant scene full of fear, grief, regret and sorrow. In particular, the words “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” has echoed through these days, as it has become a backdrop for Charlottesville, North Korea, Las Vegas, the political posturing and bluster. In true academic fashion, Regina had done some research on this line. As you can see below, the lyrics for the song come almost directly from Psalm 137. Psalm 137 was written to convey the anguish, anger, and accountability of the Hebrew people following their exile at the hands of the Babylonians. Their emotions expressed out of abandonment, failure, and pain permeate their questions; “How can this have happened to God’s people? What are we to do? Where is our future?”

These questions also resonate in our current social, political, and spiritual situations... humanity is certainly off-track and “exiled in a foreign land” far away from our creator’s intentions. We find ourselves responding to this scenario from the position of being at Powell House, where grace, redemption, reconciliation are offered and experienced on a regular basis. We encourage Powell House programs, facility, staff, clientele to feel empowered to “sing the Lord’s song” with words, actions, presence that reflect the presence of God’s reign from HERE! This is precisely the work, evolving from this ideally situated setting, that we should continue to be engaged in; creating and offering to ALL the reality of peace and love existing among us. Yes, with the strategic plan we will have a well-designed process for launching us into the future! Additionally, grounding our efforts in the awareness that we are engaged in bringing forth the reign of God here in our world is essential. Let us continue to bring to NYYM and the greater community all the good gifts that Powell House provides toward healing this world. In Psalm 137 and GODSPELL’S words; “Let us sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land”!

On the Willows

*On the willows, there
We hung up our lyres
For our captors there
Required
Of us songs
And our tormentors mirth
On the willows, there
We hung up our lyres
For our captors there
Required
Of us songs
And our tormentors mirth
Saying
Sing us one
Of the songs of Zion
Sing us one
Of the songs of Zion
But how can we sing?

Sing the Lord's songs?
In a foreign land*

--from GODSPELL © 2012

Psalm 137

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?

--NRSV version, © 1976

--Regina Baird Haag and Dennis Haag