**That one verse**

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Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship

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Psalm 137; Lamentations 1:1-6

A note: this sermon discusses disturbing topics and images.

Someone has said that if there were one verse in the Bible that they would just take out, it would be Psalm 137:9, “Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!”

I wonder what it would take to be so angry at someone that one would consider it a good deed to smash their baby daughter or son against sharp rocks.

Can you imagine being in a South Sundanese village, trying to eke out a living and get an education for your children, when raiders arrive, and you are unready. They shoot your husband and steal your cattle. They terrify your children. Perhaps they sexual violate you (and they are likely to be HIV-positive). Perhaps they steal your children away. Would you want to do anything but the same to them?

Can you imagine sitting at the bedside of your grandmother as she dies of cancer caused by radiation from a nuclear bomb against the city of Nagasaki, where she had many relatives and friends who died in the blast? Perhaps you were just getting to know your grandmother as an adult, not just your Oba-chan. But this cancer, caused by human violence, is eating her away. Would you want to return harm for harm?

Can you imagine looking over your once bustling city: You remember when the streets were filled with happy families, marching in the annual processions – or just going about their business. But then, a foreign army invaded and forced into exile large numbers of people in two waves: first the elite, then those with skills and abilities. On every street, houses have been emptied or destroyed; the temple where you worship has been torn down; the crops taken to feed people far way; the once-protective city walls pulled down, leaving your even more vulnerable to raiders and invaders. Everyone you know has lost someone, people stolen or killed: a baby, their father, or sister, or nephew, or cousin, or friend. Would you wish a similar fate for them?

Or what if you were at the other end, if you were one of the exiled ones, sitting at the banks of a foreign river against your will, taunted by your captors: “Sing us one of your Jew songs, they sound so plaintive and beautiful. You should be glad you’re away from your stinking Jerusalem! Where’s your harp, don’t you Jews always have your harp with you?” How could you sing? How could you forget? Why would you *not* want even greater destruction to come against them?

When I read Psalm 137 and Lamentations, I think I don’t have the right to sit in judgment on those whose own rights to life, liberty, and happiness had been so brutally stripped away.

Rather, I ask myself if there are ways in which I am profiting from the exploitation of others. And the answer is, of course, yes.

* I have directly and indirectly profited from the exploitation of enslaved Africans and African-Americans in the United States in the aftermath of slavery and the ongoing oppression of peoples of color.
* I have profited from the exploitation of laborers in the United States and abroad who make much of the clothes I wear, the technology I use every day, and the food I eat.
* I pay taxes which go to build drones that drop bombs on innocents–sometimes on terrorists, but sometimes on innocents, people a half a world away, terrifying and often killing them. I have heard the curses of their relatives, cursing us, and can I blame them?

And, of course, I ask myself what I can do about this exploitation. The answer to this will always be partial and inadequate, and different for each of us, perhaps. I ask this question knowing nothing that I do will be quite enough.

But there are things I can do.

* I can vote against demagogues
* I can work to put an end to military drones
* I can give and engage in justice-related causes
* I can become better informed about difficult situations in the world, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict
* I can be an ally to those who have been left out, and amplify their voices

I have been thinking about Jesus’s words that it is harder for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God than it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. In other words, it is impossible for people of means to enter the kingdom on our own. But Jesus says that with God, all things are possible. Will Jesus make a way for sinners like me to enter God’s kingdom? I do know that we must produce fruit worthy of repentance.

Where is God calling you?