

## Bible Reading and Prayer: Psalm 137

Year C, Pentecost 16

By Beth Barnett

Reading Psalm 137, we identify the ways sadness affected the people of God in ancient times, and the way sadness affects us.

You will need:

- Printed copies of text / text on screen
- Image by Chris Booth
- Pale blue yarn, cut into 30cm lengths and some at least a few metres long
- Pieces of paper and writing implements
- Sound track to 'On the Willows' Godspell, Schwartz

Time required:

10 minutes

### Connect

Show image of Psalm 137 by Chris Booth (attached) either on screen, or print as a poster.

Say something like: 'The Melbourne artist Chris Booth has created a picture of a part of the Bible. It's a part of the Bible that is a Psalm – a song or poem about the life of God's people. So it could be a poem or song for us too. While we are looking at the picture, my helpers are going to give each person a piece of blue thread – like this – that looks like these blue lines in the picture. Hold onto your thread for later.

*(Distribute the 30cm lengths of yarn among your gathering.)*

### Context

Ask: What is happening in this Picture?

*Take all suggestions with open affirmations like ‘thanks for telling us what you see’ and ‘thanks for pointing that out to us’. Possible responses may include – a river, a city, people crying, trees, people standing over the ones crying.*

*Continue speaking:*

Today’s psalm reading is a lament. A really really sad song. Sung by people who have had some very very great sadnesses happen to them. They are God’s people – but life is full of sadness. Sometimes for God’s people life is full of great sadness. There are many of God’s people all around the world today that have lives full of sadness. We are God’s people too, and some of our lives have sadness. What are some of the things that makes people sad?

*(take all responses with open affirmation and thanks)*

These are all things that make people sad.

We’re going to read the Song of sadness from the Bible now, together. And we will hear some of these things that are making God’s people sad.

- being far away from home
- not feeling like doing what we usually enjoy
- being, teased or treated meanly
- painful memories
- being nasty to others

These people’s tears are so sad that they run into a river – the river of the place they have been captured and taken to. The soldiers that have captured them stand behind them telling them to be happy and sing songs to cheer up. That’s just mean. Telling someone who is sad to just get over it and smile and sing never helps. This makes the people of God even more sad. They are angry – and think mean things about the people who are teasing them, and being mean makes them even more sad as well.

## **Content**

As you hear the words of the Psalm, the sad song, listen for these things. If they are the things that make you sad, or someone you know sad, wind your thread a little around one of your fingers to remember this – knowing God remembers too.

By the rivers of Babylon—  
there we sat down and there we wept  
when we remembered Zion.  
(being far away from home)  
On the willows there  
we hung up our harps.  
For there our captors

asked us for songs,  
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,  
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”  
(being, teased or treated meanly)

Sadness

How could we sing the LORD’S song  
in a foreign land?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
let my right hand wither!

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.

(painful memories)

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!”

O daughter Babylon, you devastator!

Happy shall they be who pay you back

what you have done to us!

Happy shall they be who take your little ones

and dash them against the rock!

(being nasty to others)

At the end of Bible Readings we often say ‘this is the Word of the Lord; thanks be to God’...

This is a way of saying that whatever we have heard in the Bible, we know has something to tell us about God’s care for us. Today we have heard that God hears our sadness and the sadness of the world – something to be thankful.

‘This is the Word of the Lord; thanks be to God’



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## Prayer Extension

Print or re-draw a large poster version of the art. Attach long, pale blue threads of wool to the faces of the weeping people, dangling down the full length of the poster, and pooling on the floor.

Invite participants to name (either verbally or writing on pieces of paper) things they are sad about that they want to tell God about. Attach these to the end of the threads of wool.

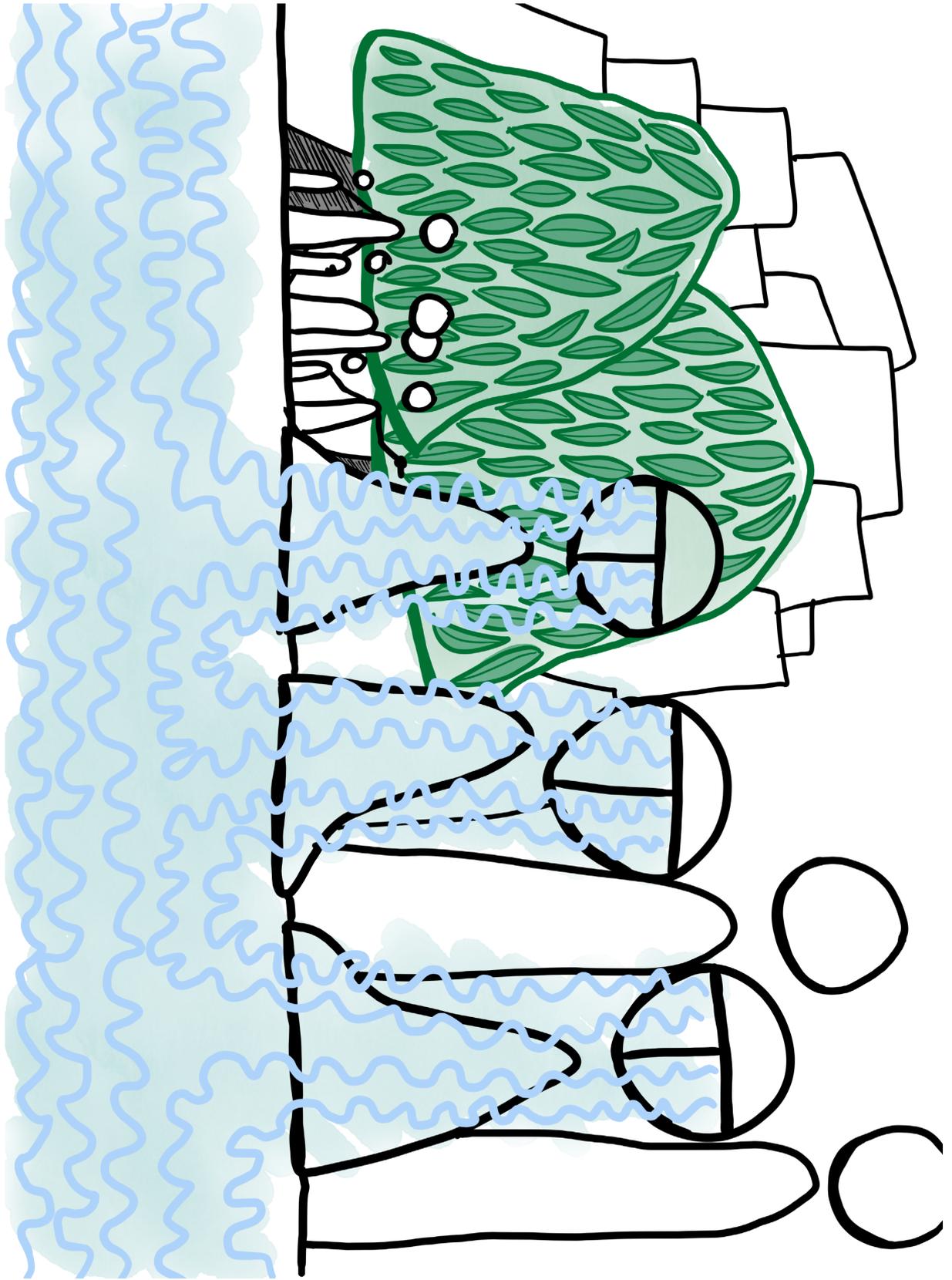
For a more contemplative atmosphere, play the track 'On the Willows' (with lyrics taken from Psalm 137) from Godspell, Stephen Schwartz, 1971.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FO6r\\_hajQvM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FO6r_hajQvM)



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