

Devotion for Week of June 26, 2022

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

This is my last devotion about Cherokee legends. This legend was told by Edna Chekelelee, of the Wolf clan. It's called "The Trail of Tears Basket." I hope you recognize the theology in these stories and the intersections of God and their ancient culture.

"There was a basket that was given to me in Oklahoma. I don't like to talk about the Trail of Tears, for it's really sad. And sometimes it gets to me, and sometimes I can feel it. Especially when I got a basket that I carry that's over a hundred and fifty years old, and it's still good and sturdy, and it's a white oak basket that went on the Trail of Tears.

No telling how many people have died in front of this basket. If this basket could talk to you, there's no telling what all it would tell you that happened along the Trail of Tears: how many people were killed, how many people got hurt and had to be buried beside the road when they couldn't walk. And no telling what all I could tell from what I listened to when I was a little girl.

At the end of the Trail of Tears, when they got to Oklahoma, they had a song that they sang after the hardships and after they had walked so far – more than a thousand miles – and got to Oklahoma.

And this was the song that was sung: "Oh How I love Jesus."

We're studying Isaiah in Sunday School about the imminent return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon about 638 BCE, and I'm reminded of the first verses of Psalm 137, written during that captivity:

By the rivers of Babylon—

there we sat down, and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.

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!"

How could we sing the Lord's song

in a foreign land?

But they still had their harps with them, and I think they DID sing, because when we sing of God's mercy and grace, we have hope. We can survive captivity in Babylon and on an Oklahoma reservation, and God will eventually lead us home.

Jeanne