

Restore Us, O Lord
Psalm 80:1-7,17-19

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be truly open to the word of God this day. Amen.

Out in Arizona there are places along the grand canyon's rim where you can park your car, and get out to take scenic pictures. One tourist traveling alone from New Mexico to California, decided to stop at one of those scenic overlooks. No one else was there since it was a week day and off season for tourism. He walked over to the edge with his camera and started snapping pictures. He took one looking off at a distance, one picture he took zooming in on the ridge opposite with all the colors shining in the sun. Then he looked over the edge and decided to take a picture looking down. But as he looked into the camera, he didn't look to see how close his feet were to the edge of the cliff. And sure enough over the side he went. Falling over the ridge the man grabbed for anything to try stopping his fall, and lucky for him there was a bush sticking out from the cliff wall around 10-15 feet down. He grabbed hold of those branches for dear life. The ground dropped away below 100 feet or more. Filled with terror, he screamed for help, "Help, is there anyone up there?" A moment later the man heard a calm, powerful voice, answer back, Yes, I can help. The tourist continued to plead, "Help me, Help me, Help me!" Then the calm voice said, "I will help you if you trust me. Do you trust me?" The man holding on for his life didn't have much of a choice, he said, "Of course I trust you, just please help me." The powerful voice said, "Well then, I will help you, let go of the branch." After a tense moment, the man holding on for his life, yelled again, "Is there anyone else up there."

Perhaps you have heard that joke before, perhaps I have even told you it before. But it seems fitting when we hear the psalm today. It is a plea for help, a call out in crisis. It is one of those foxhole prayers, or running the yellow light prayers. You know the kind, the one that while in a crisis, when you pray that you will do anything if you just make it through whatever the crisis is at that moment. On the cliffside, I will trust whoever stops by to offer help. In the foxhole if I live I will be good from now on and go to church every week. As you drive through the yellow light, you pray that the cops aren't around and if so then you will be a careful driver from now on. These are quick prayers of pleadings, begging, hopes beyond hopes.

And that is what this Psalm is about today. It is a three part Prayer, always seeking help, Restore us, O God, let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

Now first off you have to know that this prayer is not one of David's psalms. Not all were written by King David, this one for instance comes years later. In 921, After King Solomon, the son of King David has died, the country of Israel, the twelve tribes are split into two parts, the northern kingdom becomes Israel and the southern Kingdom with Jerusalem still as its capital becomes Judah. Within 200 years the Northern Kingdom is devastated. What was once a free and mighty nation now is laid to waste, the people captured and under foreign rule. Homes are destroyed, businesses burnt, crops carried away. The people are living as exiles from their own land.

And so in this distress they call out to the Lord. They call out remembering back to the times of David, to the times of Moses, to the times of Abraham when God spoke to his people and called them his own. This first prayer is a reminder of who they are and who God is.

Now it seems easy for us today, I am sure to know who God is and who we are in God's eternal family. But in this time, the people had forgotten and turned away, they had over and over again fallen into sin and rejected God. It is as if every time they choose to sin they fell off the cliff and they would then remember that they need help calling out to God. But would they be able to fully trust God and commit to following God, nope over and over again they reject God's will and fall further and further down that cliff until in 721 the Assyrians completely destroys them and Israel is no more.

Now they call out to God remembering and claiming him as the one who leads like a shepherd. The same images that King David used for God, when God picked him to become King. This is the same familiar imagery that Joseph knew as a shepherd and son of a shepherd. The same imagery that Moses knew when as a shepherd in Midian, God came to him and called him to return to Egypt and lead his people once again from their captivity to freedom. The same God who sits on the throne So the people remember that God is the one who leads, that God is the shepherd and that they are the sheep. That he is the same God that went before them with the ark of the covenant leading them back to the promised land, leading them in victory over their enemies, leading them in glory and in triumph. They remember in these words the very power of God.

But they go beyond identifying God, they also remember who they are, the people of Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. These are the most beloved descendants of the patriarch Jacob. You all remember the stories of Joseph and how he was favored by his father, given a coat of many colors. Joseph's two sons are Ephraim and Manasseh, two of the twelve tribes of Israel and of course Benjamin is the younger brother of Joseph also loved greatly by

Jacob, because he was born of Rachel. So in other words they remember in their prayers that they descendants, of the same family of the most beloved of Jacob. The Man that God wrestled with and renamed Israel. God's chosen people.

Then they ask for restoration. They seek hope, victory, peace, life. They seek to be restored as God's people. Yes, they have fallen away, yes they realize they haven't listened to the Lord, but yet they call out in this prayer, just like a fox hole prayer, help me Lord and I will be better. Restore me Lord, shine your face upon me I we shall be saved.

Then in the second part of this prayer Psalm we get them pleading more, How long oh Lord will your be angry with us. How long before you help. We are the laughing stock of our enemies. We cry and cry and seek your help, Lord. All is despair, all is ended, all is hopeless, Lord give us your salvation.

To turn away from God to turn away from the light of God is to be with out hope. To have the Face of the Lord shine upon you once again, is to know what it is to have hope and that is what these people are seeking more than anything. Restore us, O Lord, let your face shine upon us and we shall be saved.

Finally in the third part of this psalm prayer, they call out for the Messiah, the chosen one that will come to restore them, the one we know as the Christ, Jesus himself, who restores all humanity and shines the light of God on us forever.

In three sections they prayer for this great gift, awaiting that time when God will lift them up out of their despair, lift them out of their valley of pain, pluck them from the depths of the Cliffside and restore them again as his people forever.

In this prayer psalm we can see how they called out to God in their despair, pleading for help, for restoration, for salvation. What is powerful about the psalms is that even though they are written so many years ago, over 2700 years ago, they can still speak to our own spirit, our own soul. Today in this 21st century we can stand besides those pleading people of God, and sympathize with their prayers, because we know what it is like. We know the Lord, and yet we wait until he comes. We know the power of God and who God is, and yet we doubt and we fall away, seeking our own means of hope. We know that God has made us his beloved children in baptism, and yet we reject that gift and forgot who we are in this world. We know of anger, of despair, of pain, of illness, and sickness, we know of hopelessness and say those same words, How long o Lord, how long before you restore us. We know of Jesus the messiah, the one who has come and is coming again in that great day, to restore us forever. And yet we gather here like those first writers of this psalm and call out to God.

God's promise is still real today as it was in their time. God's plan is still in effect. God's will is still being done. God's reign is still to be fulfilled. And despite our worry, or pains, or whatever cliff we feel like we have fallen off of in this world, God is still there holding on to us and raising us up into his restoring Glory. That is the good news of this psalm. That is the Good news that fills us this day with hope and peace. May we begin this new church year reminded of who God is and who's we are, for God is with us, God is restoring us, God is saving us, now and always. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you today and throughout the week to come.
AMEN.