

## “ Seeking Restoration”

### Psalm 80

This seems like an odd text with which to begin our Lenten journey. We are used to beginning our journey of Lent with the story of how Jesus goes out into the wilderness for 40 days. We are used to hearing how Jesus was stripped bare of his sense of self and how he wrestled with his identity as the Son of God, and prepares to take up the mantle that will be placed upon him as people began to call him Messiah. We are used to hearing how Jesus overcame temptation and renewed his commitment for his ministry. We are used to hearing how Jesus prepared himself for what lay ahead of him in Jerusalem. To begin our Lenten journey, we are used to hearing a story of the story of Jesus’ wilderness experience, a wilderness experience that we are invited to enter in as well, wilderness where all our illusions are stripped away, where we are invited into a break from the normal routine, where we are invited to enter into a struggle with what it means to live a life centered and grounded in God.

We are used to starting our journey of Lent in the wilderness: wandering, wondering, and waiting.

But today we hear the words of Psalm 80, a psalm known as a communal lament as our text to begin our Lenten journey, a text that calls for God to restore

God's people once more, a text that reminds God who God has been and how God has acted in the past for the people of Israel, a text that demands that God will save God's people once more

Our text may not be the typical beginning of Lent text but its words and phrases place us in the heart of the wilderness just the same. As we read Psalm 80, we are in the wilderness, where we are asked to come before God, where we are asked to remember that we are vulnerable, that we are helpless, that we are in need of God's grace and God's mercy and that we cannot receive these gifts through our own efforts and works.

Psalm 80 places us in the wilderness just the same and we find ourselves stripped bare of our sense of self, and pushed out of comfort zones. This morning, through the words and phrases of our text, we find ourselves waiting, wandering, wondering about what it means to live a life centered and grounded in God as we hear the peoples' pleas to be restored once more.

In our Scripture this morning, we hear the words from a group of people who find themselves separated from God, helpless and in need. We hear the words from a group of people who feel abandoned by God and wonder why God is not acting to save them. We also hear words of hope among their words of lament as this very same group remember the promises of God and calls on God to act once more, words that remind us that our very foundation of faith is built on God's

willingness to restore us to God over and over again, is built on God's willingness to welcome us over and over again, is built on the very fact that our lives depend on God's willingness to restore us to the flock over and over again, even when we go astray.

The beautiful thing about the words and phrase of Psalm 80 is that it shares the honest emotions of a group of people who are called to be in a real, authentic relationship with God, which is exactly what the season of Lent encourages us to do as believers: to put aside our pretenses and realize that we are God's and God's alone, that we are called to be in a relationship with God and not just any relationship but a covenantal relationship with God, a relationship built on trust, a relationship built on love, a relationship built on commitment from and for all parties involved, and most importantly a relationship that is built on holding each other accountable when that agreement is not being upheld, even when that party who is not upholding the bargain is God. The beautiful thing about Psalm 80 is that it reminds us that even when God seems to be absent, God's grace, God's power to restore, God's power to make us whole is always available to God's people. It is just a matter of us turning our lives in the direction of God's loving and open embrace. God is never shut off from God's people, even when it seems like God is absent, God is always there.

The beautiful thing about Psalm 80 is that it is a reminder that we cannot do this journey alone, that we cannot be made whole on our own, that we cannot be healed on our own. It is only through the gift of God's grace and God's mercy are these opportunities of healing, wholeness, and restoration to God's flock made available to us as God's people.

And that is exactly the good news that we find as we read Psalm 80. In our text this morning, we understand that something has happened to the people of Israel. We aren't exactly sure what happened, but we can tell it is not good. And the thing of it is that as readers, we really don't need to know the details of what brought this group down so far, all we need to understand is that the relationship, the covenant has been broken and now is the time for it to be restored.

The people call upon God who like a shepherd has lead them in the past, guiding them, protecting them, watching over them but now seems to be ignoring the flock as they are attacked by their enemies like wolves in the night. The people call upon God who seems to be absent and inactive in their lives, who seems to be letting the people's sorrows and burdens overwhelm and overtake them and destroy them. The people call upon God to restore God's people once more and to give them new life, reminding God of the ways that God has cared for them in the past.

The people are holding God accountable to their covenantal relationship and in essence and the good news is by doing so, they are reminding themselves that this is not the God that they have known in the past. That their God would never leave them alone, abandoned and forsaken.

The people hold firm to the belief in spite of it all that The God that they have known and have experienced in the past is loving, slow to anger and merciful and they need that God to act now on their behalf. While this God seems to be feeding them bread made with their tears, the God that they know and have experienced in the past has feed them manna from heaven, satisfying all their needs. While this God seems to be offering the people tears to quench their thirst, the God that they have experienced and known in the past has offered them Living Water that revives their parched souls with God's grace. While this God seems to let their enemies trample the tender vines of God's people, the God that they have experienced and known in the past loving lifted and planted these vines in the best soil, nurturing them, tending them, caring for them always.

The God that the people seem to be experiencing now is not their God and not the God that they have experienced in the past. So they cry out: "Restore us, let your light shine so that we might be saved." Restore us once more so that we might have new life. Restore us once more so that we will be made whole. Restore us

once more so that our relationship will be healed, knowing that their God's grace and mercy is always available for God's people.

As the people of Israel cry out these words, they do so holding on to the belief and to the faith that only God can restore them, that only God can make them whole, that only God will give them peace once more. Without the blessing of God, any hope of restoration fails because the people are powerless to do so on their own. The people know that while they cry out a song of lament, their words are also words of hope because they know that their God, who like a shepherd, who lead them in the past, will bring them back and restore them to the fold once more.

And that is the good news this morning and that is the blessing of the season of Lent. We are being offered a chance to be restored to the flock, not by penitence and despair, but by grace alone. We are being offered a chance to embrace the wonderful news and gift "that God was willing to go to any length -- or, more appropriately, to any depth -- to tell us that we are loved, that we have value, that we have purpose." The wonderful blessing of Lent is that instead of reminding us that we are awful people, it reminds us that God loved us so much that God gave his only Son. The wonderful blessing of Lent is that instead of having to earn God's grace, we are given the chance to really live with what it means to be given God's grace freely and unconditionally.

The wonderful blessing of Lent is that it is an opportunity to seek the one that we call the Messiah: Jesus Christ, to seek a better understanding of the life, work and death of that Messiah for God's people, to seek a better understanding of Jesus as our healer, our Redeemer, our Anointed one. The wonderful blessing of Lent is that we have been given an opportunity to restore, to heal, and to deepen our relationship with God and with others through the gift of God's grace.

As we journey through Lenten, we have been given the opportunity to seek the Messiah, our Savior, our Lord and hear the good news once more: That even when it seems like God is absent from our midst, God will never leave us abandoned and alone. And we have to look no farther than the cross to realize that gift.

May we seek the Messiah who came to restore us to God once more. Amen.