

Advent Devotional December 21, 2019

Scripture

Psalm 80

*1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth
2 before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might,
and come to save us!
3 Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.
4 O Lord God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
5 You have fed them with the bread of tears,
and given them tears to drink in full measure.
6 You make us the scorn of our neighbors;
our enemies laugh among themselves.
7 Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.
8 You brought a vine out of Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.
9 You cleared the ground for it;
it took deep root and filled the land.
10 The mountains were covered with its shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches;
11 it sent out its branches to the sea,
and its shoots to the River.
12 Why then have you broken down its walls,
so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?
13 The boar from the forest ravages it,
and all that move in the field feed on it.
14 Turn again, O God of hosts;
look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine,
15 the stock that your right hand planted.
16 They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;
may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.
17 But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
18 Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.
19 Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

Devotional

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As I ponder this psalm, I hear a wistful and yearning tone. The repeated use of the word "restore" suggests to me that the sought-for restoration involved waiting. I have never known restoration to be a

quick process, whether it has involved buildings, paintings, or people. Restoration looks like, and often is, a painfully slow process.

Slowness is not something I am good at, though my vocation involves teaching people how to slow down. Slowness usually involves being thoughtful and paying attention. But paying attention to what? To whom? In my early years of learning to slow down, my mind would go crazy and “chomp at the bit”—not unlike the minds of the Israelites, whom the psalmist reveals as pleading, “come to save us! . . . let your face shine, that we may be saved.” Three times in this psalm they make this cry to the Lord. Waiting and yearning. Waiting and yearning. The struggle is real!

I have a friend who is obviously pregnant. She is waiting and yearning for her baby boy to be born. As she notes, pregnancy is not only the perfect metaphor for Advent but even for our life as a whole. As Christians, we live in the “already-but-not-yet” space till Christ’s return, when all things will be made new.

But like me, most of us are not good at waiting. The slow work of restoration does not come quickly or easily. Just ask any child who has long awaited Christmas morning and tried to stay awake all night on Christmas Eve to watch and wait.

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, may we practice a posture of readiness in our waiting for the time when you will again break into our current reality. As our brother Teilhard de Chardin reminds us to do, help us, “Above all, [to] trust in the slow work of God,” a long time though it may take.