

Restore

Advent Midweek #1 – 12/06/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Psalm 80:1-19 Pastor Keith Besel

v.v. 3, 7, 19, [Literally from the Hebrew,] **“Yahweh O God of armies, restore us and let Your face shine and we will be saved.”**

Introduction

⌘ When Hoshea, king of Israel, came to power in 732 BC, he made some unbelievably bad choices. Hoshea decided to take on the mighty Assyrian Empire. In doing so, he solicited help from the armies of Egypt. The only problem is that Egypt’s armies were not as great as they used to be. So Hoshea’s attempted revolt against his Assyrian overlords ended up in disaster. King Sargon II of Assyria devastated the capital city of Samaria in Northern Israel and carted 27,290 people off into captivity.

→ This humiliating oppression and difficulty; something much worse than any of us can ever imagine, though I know we so quickly moan and cry out against this world in which we live tonight; this is what prompted the Psalm that we consider here tonight in the first week of Advent.

→ The author of this psalm, Asaph was one of King David’s gifted musicians and poets. Psalm 80 follows directly after the closing verse of Psalm 79 where the people have confessed in song, “We Your people, the sheep of Your pasture, will give thanks to You forever; from generation to generation we will recount Your praise.”

→ Now in Psalm 80 those “sheep” begin with a cry of penitence and sorrow as they find themselves in a time of great distress, “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock!” (v.1) Tonight we will see that these words serve us as well; as our expressions of penitence here in Advent. They serve as an important foundation for our resounding hope in the coming Savior. Yes, they serve us as a *Resounding Psalm for Advent*.

I. Israel Needed God to Restore Them

⌘ Everything about Hoshea’s revolt was wrong. He was the wrong king, who picked the wrong fight, against the wrong enemy; asking the wrong ally for help. You see, this very real game of thrones was over, and Hoshea lost – big time.

→ It is believed that Psalm 80 was written in response to this tragic collapse and defeat of Israel’s Northern Kingdom. Think, for example of what it must be like for the everyday residents in Ukraine or Gaza right now.

→ You can imagine war-torn, hungry refugees, with their last ounce of energy, coming south to the temple in Jerusalem to implore God to have mercy and restore His people who are now devastated by this invading army – yet all of it because of their lack of faith in Yahweh.

⌘ “Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up Your might and come to save us! Restore us, O God; let Your face shine, that we may be saved! (vv. 1–3)

→ These people; these sheep had made their own plans; trying to play their own game instead of God’s, and it all came crashing down. They thought, “I’m smart; I’m strong, and with a bit of clever international politicking – without God’s help – I can defeat this enemy, Assyria.” But now they are facing the results of trusting in the chariots and horses and armies of man instead of God. They are licking their wounds with no choice but to face their embarrassment – the fact that the monster was so much more than the armies of Israel could handle, even with Egypt’s help.

II. When Our Plans Crash

⌘ It might have happened more than 3000 years ago, but this isn't something that is foreign to any of us, is it? We know exactly what this is like. We make our own plans – which school we'll attend, which career we'll choose and the path we that have all figured out in our own head – how we're going to work out that plan. We trust in our own heart; our fickle emotions as to whom we're going to ask out, whom we're going to marry, how many kids we'll have, how we'll spend our money, how we'll spend our retirement, etc. – and too often in all of this, we give little or no thought to God's will; to God's purpose in our lives.

➔ Throughout life, we pick our opponents and we choose our allies – the people we'll butter up in the office or cozy up to socially – not because we actually care about them but because we think they can help us get ahead in life. Though most of us don't consciously think this all out, deep inside our selfish selves, it goes like this: "I'll make all the right moves at work and at school. I can manipulate my family and friends, and even convince my brothers and sisters at church, to get what I want, and then everything will be just like I always dreamed it will be."

⌘ But it turns out we make lousy moves and dirty deals – that's the truth behind most of those problems that we blame on everyone else. We let our eyes be blinded by greed and lust, and our hearts be covered over by anger and selfishness. We build our own kingdoms with that unholy trinity of Me, Myself and I, and it all comes crashing down. As clever as we think we are, the monsters of sin, sickness, and death eventually chew us up and spit us out.

➔ And whether you want to admit it or not folks, I'm afraid we're all in the same boat. We all know that ever since the Garden of Eden, sin has corrupted every one of our hearts. As a Christian I want to do good, but I just end up with a mess of my own making. I forget God. I fall to temptation and I wander away from God's will. Too often anger becomes my default reaction. Plain and simple, I am a mess.

➔ And I know that you know what that's like. Sometimes all we can do is look at the mess of life and cry out with verses 4-6, "O LORD God of hosts, how long will You be angry with Your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us an object of contention for our neighbors, and our enemies laugh among themselves."

➔ Yes, we blame God for all of our troubles and tears, but we have brought it upon ourselves. After all we are the ones who sin, not God.

III. God Remains Faithful to Restore

⌘ But brothers and sisters, there is Good News. In the middle of our life of misery; in the middle of our mess; even as we stumble and stray in our faith, the faithfulness of God is unmoved and steadfast. He comes to us where we're at and He restores His people. You can take this to the bank as an absolute, unchanging truth: God is faithful to fulfill His Word, and His Word for you is love.

➔ Listen again to the psalmist in verses 7–10 as it is literally recorded in the Hebrew, "Yahweh O God of armies (that means there is no one stronger or mightier), restore us and let Your face shine and we will be saved! You led a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared and turned the ground; it took root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches."

⌘ There's a dual mean within these verses, dear Christians. The first meaning points to the way that God faithfully brought His people out of their slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt like a tender

vine. He led them through the wilderness and planted them to prosper in the Land that He had Promised to them.

→ But verses 14-17 point us to the secondary; most important understanding of these words. “Turn again, O God of armies! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine (i.e. Your people)...and for the son whom You made strong for Yourself.”

→ You see, at just the right time, when Israel was ruled by a hostile power, God did restore His nation. But the nation we’re talking about now is not a geographic nation that can be identified on a physical map. It’s not a GPS location with borders. And neither are the enemies that God would overcome. Name your empire and pick your monster; Assyria, Babylon, Greece or Rome – none of these would last nor will the nations and rulers that seek to oppress and strike fear in our hearts still today.

⊗ But there is another vine, the One who said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” (Jn. 15:5) When He was young, God brought this Vine out of Egypt as well in order to clear away and turn over all sin. That Vine, Jesus was planted firmly upon a cross and then planted even deeper inside a tomb at His death.

→ But before all of that; at just the right time, Yahweh our God announced through His army of angels that filled the skies over Bethlehem at night that He brought His tender Vine to life here on earth in a tiny infant swaddled in His mother’s arms. A pile of straw was His throne, but He was – and is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, sent to restore us all in the middle of our sin-filled mess.

⊗ Jesus is His name and He is the Son of Man – born of the Virgin Mary, yet at the same time Son of God and Savior of all the world. He is God who came in answer to our cry for help and by His cross and empty tomb, He saves and restores you and me and all His people back into the loving arms of our Shepherd.

→ Now that we have been restored by His power and might; by His grace and love, we proclaim in confidence because of His strength and power at work in our hearts, verse 18, “...we shall not turn back from You; give us life, and we will call upon Your name!”

⊗ The name of baby in the manger, Jesus – means “Yahweh saves”. He is “Yahweh, the God of armies” (v.19) in the flesh. It is His “face” that “shines” upon us from the cross and the empty tomb; in His Word; through our baptism; and in His body and blood in Holy Communion, so that as verse 19 says, “we will be saved” at His glorious return on the Last Day.

→ How amazed do you suppose Asaph would be to know that his words actually came to life in Bethlehem; in a manger; in the flesh and blood of the Messiah; in the Savior of us all? To Jesus be all glory forevermore. Amen.