

By: Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow

Rev. Wendy Depew Partelow is Vice President of the ABC/NYS Board of Mission.

Restoration

I've been thinking a lot about Restoration. Psalm 80 begins: *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock, enthroned above the cherubim, shine forth. Stir up your might, come save us! Restore us O God of Hosts, let your face shine that we may be saved!*

The Psalmist repeats three times the cry: *Restore us, O Lord God of Hosts, let your face shine that we may be saved!*

Restore us, O Lord - renew us - revive us! You said you were doing a new thing. (Isaiah 43:19). You promised to make all things new (Rev. 21:5). And yet I know that we are not ready yet and that *your patience is our salvation.* (2 Peter 3:15).

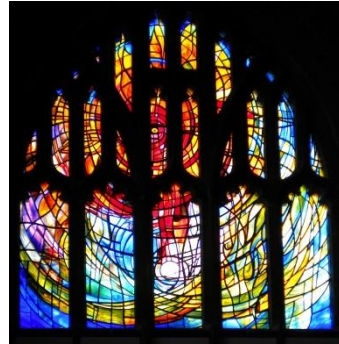
Your *patience* is our salvation, Lord! Your patience is our gift: the gift of time to get things right, the gift of time for your people to truly be *your people* full of justice and righteousness and mercy; full of humility and patience and love.

The cry to *restore* is a cry for a time that barely *was* as described in the first two chapters in Genesis. The world was formed and it was good. Humankind was made to inhabit the earth and care for it, and it was called *very good*. But then it went bad, *very bad*.

And so now we have periods of great joy mixed with periods of deep sorrow, showers of blessing mixed with torrents of cries for deliverance. *Restore us, O Lord! Stir up your might, come save us! Let your face shine that we may be saved!* We cry for God's deliverance as we experience the poverty, oppression, burden and strife of our own injustices toward others.

Perhaps it is all we can expect until we experience the Promise: 'new heavens and a new earth where righteousness is *at home*.' (2 Peter 3:13). *At home* - where righteousness is loved and valued. *At home*, where peace means prosperity and righteousness kisses justice. (Psalm 85:13)

But we want it now, Lord. Restore us, now, O Lord, "let your hand be on the one whom you made strong for yourself. Then we will never turn back from you; give us life and we will call upon your name. *Restore us, O Lord. God of Hosts; let your face shine that we may be saved.*" We promise, Lord, this time we really, really promise if you will restore us to our former glory we will be faithful. This time we will be faithful, Lord, *really* - this time we will.... I hear this promise from my drug addicted son often, and so I know how weary God must be when we keep making our promises: Really, mom, only



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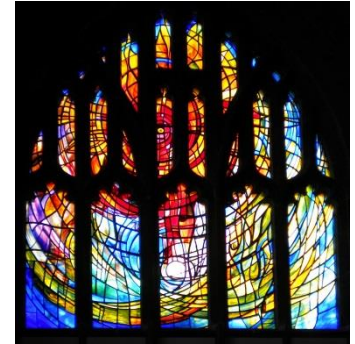
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\$10 and I won't ask you again for the whole week ... I promise. It's only Tuesday and I know the promise will be broken at least 6 times more before the week is out. But, aren't we like the addicted sons and daughters of God? We are addicted to our way of life, our nice homes, our variety of foods, our nice vacations, our vacation homes. And because of our addictions others suffer from poverty, from preventable diseases, from injustice in the courts, and from violent actions. And thus our addictions become sins not only against our fellow human beings, but against God.

Usually I can let my son suffer his own consequences but occasionally - because I love him so much - I give in. I imagine that God works that way as well - we suffer the consequences of our own sin, and then God says. - as he did to the Israelites - that we've suffered enough: "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that *she has served her term, that her penalty is paid*, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." (Isaiah 40:2). Then directly after that follows the promise: *In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert the highway for our God.* (Isaiah 40:3)

And this brings us to John's call, to *make the paths straight* for the coming of the Lord; the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with Fire. It brings us full circle to the one for whom we wait in this Holy Season of Advent.

When we are most faithful, we trust in the promises of God, because God can be trusted to follow through with these promises. Because, to be trusted carries with it responsibility, accountability, and purpose. And we can see throughout the ages God's faithfulness and reliability to fulfill God's promises. Now, to *trust* in the promises requires *us* to *let go*: *let go* of always wanting to be in control, *let go* of having our own way, and *let go* of our over-abundance of resources so that there is enough for all God's children.

When we try to be in control we are in a tug of war with God. In a tug of war some one wins and someone loses. In a tug of war one side slips and slides and is pulled down, joints out of sockets, and there is collateral damage - things and people that had nothing to do with the war are trampled along the way. Then, when the God side finally wins there is wreckage and breakage and woundedness to be healed and restored. The point of listening to and following the will of God is: if nothing gets broken then nothing has to be restored.

And so when God says, "I, the Lord, love justice, I hate robbery and wrong doing; I will faithfully give them their recompense [or an opportunity for repentance]; and I will make an everlasting covenant with them;" (Isaiah 61:8) we see that God's promise is true. For he sent John, baptizing and preaching a gospel of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; to prepare the way for the Christ, Son of David, Son of God who comes to signify that the promise is true. The everlasting covenant continues through Jesus' birth, life, suffering, death and ultimate resurrection in glory. Yes, God's promise is true for those who believe.

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