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Paul Phillips

When a candle goes out we re-light it, to bring back the light. When a light burns out, we put a new one in. Our natural response is to restore the light. When the sun hides behind clouds for days we get anxious for its warmth and light. When we feel exhausted, spent, we hope for new found energy. Restore us, O God!

My sister-in-law's comment the day after Thanksgiving, and this is a quote, "I feel like a balloon that somebody let the air out." Too fatigued to carry on the holiday spirit? Maybe too much good food! Maybe too worried about the future. This time of year brings us from fat turkeys to empty wallets, from busy shopping malls to quiet times with family and friends, from rushing cars and speeding planes, to freshly baked goods from our kitchens, to walking over to the neighbors just because, to giving and receiving, to highs and lows, twists and turns. Is it any wonder we get exhausted? Restore us, O God!

The psalmist raises his voice, and I can see his arms raised upwards, his entire body stretching towards heaven, if he's not too tired, pleading to God, to the Shepherd of Israel and asks on behalf of his community, "Restore us, O God; let they face shine, that we may be saved!" This refrain would have been recited by

the entire assembly in the sanctuary. The community is lamenting the enemy invasion by foreigners in their lands, the destruction of their cities, the fear of ruin before them.

Some of us reminisces about times in our lives that were happier, about times that were less stressful and more successful, about times which were slower and simpler, about times when we not only knew our neighbors, we talked with them. It's instinctive to look back, to see where we've been, and where it is we're going. We, in America, are continually reviewing our history, how we began, where we've been, our really good years, and those years we'd sooner forget. Was there really a time in America where the population seemed to be more in concert with one another? Did we ever believe in the same ideals, the same God? The devastation that took place in Israel during the writing of this psalm hadn't affected everyone, but the community's response shows how they treated it as a common affliction. This is how people unite against evil. It's how we unite for the good of everyone. If one person is suffering, we all suffer. The scandal at Penn State University about child sexual abuse has rocketed across our country. We all suffer whenever a child is abused. The community in Israel understood this common responsibility for all and in turn, they would seek God for his saving acts for the entire community.

We have, in America, gotten away from our common responsibility for all. It

seems more and more, that most people are only out for themselves, get what they can, as fast as they can, and tough sledding for the rest. We, the national conscience of America, have lost touch with the American people. We have become worn down. We have given up the fight because we trying to get our own lives figured out. We have become overwhelmed by the problems facing our country and have forgotten to put God in the solution. America is in need of guidance and help. We are in need of a radiant light that never goes out! American needs to find its core values, its roots in its faith traditions, seeking God to save us, seeking God's glory and power to restore us. Where did we lose our way? Did we sense God was angry with our prayers, like the psalmist writes?

If God is silent when we are expecting comfort, our faith is chipped a little. When life's circumstances appear as if God isn't there, then our faith gets chipped away some more. God doesn't hear me. God doesn't see me or know me. God "has fed them with the bread of tears." And so I say to myself, "I don't see God or hear God. God has left me alone." And on it goes. We, in America, have so separated ourselves from God that as a nation, we **are** experiencing a trial of faith; personally, nationally! God hasn't withdrawn from us; we as a nation have withdrawn from God. Our hope is in the Lord, who made heaven and earth; who made us in his image.

We dare to hope because we know no other way forward. We dare to believe

in God because this is our faith passed down to us from generation to generation. To be able to hope; in spite of all that surrounds us which is negative and cynical, all that wears us out and drags us down; hope, is living in the light of God's glory. Hope is understanding that our existence is in God's hands. Eugene Peterson, author of *The Message*, says that hoping and wishing **are not** the same thing. "Wishing," Peterson says, "is something all of us do. It projects what we want or think we need into the future. Just because we wish for something good or holy we think it qualifies as hope. It does not. Wishing extends our egos into the future; hope grows out of our faith. **Hope is oriented toward what God is doing;** wishing is oriented toward what we are doing."

Hope is being able to persevere. Hope is being able to prayer even when it seems like God is silent. Hope is seeing the glass half-full, not half-empty. Hope is not giving up on yourself, or on God. Hope, I believe, is critical to a faithful life. Peterson goes on to say that we can picture wishing as though it were a line coming out from us with an arrow on the end, pointing into the future, pointing toward that thing we most want to possess. Hope is just the opposite. It's a line that comes from God out of the future, with its arrow pointing toward us. "**Hope means being surprised,**" according to Peterson, "because we don't know what is best for us or how our lives are going to be completed. To cultivate hope is to suppress wishing – to refuse to fantasize about what we want, but live in

anticipation of what God is going to do next.”

The key petition in this psalm, “Restore us, O God,” is heard three times. The psalmist’s call to “*restore us,*” means “*return us.*” It is a cry to be “restored” or “returned” into a right relationship with God, who then will restore the community’s fortunes. It’s not just the circumstances around our lives being restored, but the turning of our souls back to God, the anticipation of what God is going to do next, as Peterson suggests. Have we gotten off the path? Our hope is in the Lord, who made heaven and earth and is coming again.

Yes, Christ is coming! God is restoring us through the birth of this savior King, who will walk among us and teach us how to keep the light forever burning within our hearts. America has a spiritual hunger that is in need of restoration. She once knew a very precious truth that has somehow slipped from her grasp. The hope of the world rests in the manger scene, not in all the technology at our fingertips. “Restore us, O God,” is a call of people who are surrounded by technology but are still lonely for meaningful communication. The human dilemma is that we spend a lot of time groping on our hands and knees in the dark hoping to find a light that will reveal the meaning of life, or a lantern that will light our path. What we need is a Savior, the Light of the World, to come to us and reveal the truth and perhaps to remind us that the treasure we’ve been seeking isn’t the true treasure after all. God’s incarnation as the infant Jesus Christ is the ultimate

evidence that God has not abandoned us, but rather loves us, is committed to us and indeed is among us. Advent is an invitation to us to receive the gift of hope which, if received, is indeed our salvation. Amen.