

## Up to Restoration

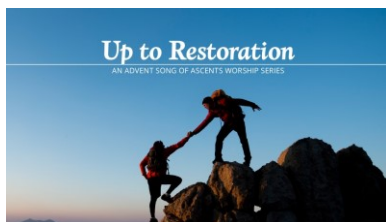
November 27, 2022

### Psalms 122

<sup>1</sup> I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!"<sup>2</sup> Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> Jerusalem — built as a city that is bound firmly together. <sup>4</sup> To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD. <sup>5</sup> For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of David. <sup>6</sup> Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. <sup>7</sup> Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers." <sup>8</sup> For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you." <sup>9</sup> For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your good.

### Isaiah 2:1-5

<sup>1</sup> The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> In days to come the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. <sup>3</sup> Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> He shall judge between the nations and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. <sup>5</sup> O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!



Welcome to Advent, the season of anticipation, a time of preparation. As we walk each week through the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love, we draw closer and closer to the night we celebrate our Savior's birth. As we journey, we are called to open our eyes to see God at work in the world and to tune in our senses to feel where God might be breaking into the world. Doing so, our hope, peace, joy, and love will be elevated and enhanced. I invite you to turn with me to Psalm 122 as we delve into the vision of the kingdom that God desires for us and to see where the bar can be set at its highest. As we do so, let us pray...

As Psalm 122 begins, the writer rejoices in the invitation to go to house of Lord. The psalmist was glad to be invited to go up to the house of the Lord. My friends, is that how you responded to Holy Spirit's invite to worship today? In the Psalm their feet are standing at the gates, anticipating going up to worship. The tribes go up to give thanks to the name of the Lord. You can feel the excitement rising. You can sense the longing to be in the Lord's presence as they worship. The picture is painted of all tribes – of all people – going up to worship. Imagine what that would be like!

This thought draws me back to one of the questions that Adam Hamilton posed in our "Seeing Grey" study. He asked what our nation would be like if all 224 million Christians were truly Christian. Imagine how our daily lives – our work, our school, our society – would be different if all people of faith went up to the house of the Lord each week for worship and then went forth to apply the ideals of justice, righteousness, kindness, and mercy in their daily lives. Envision that for a moment.

Perhaps for some of us, this vision of people streaming joyfully to the house of the Lord is too much of a stretch of the imagination. Perhaps some are heavy laden with so many things that it is hard to find joy and gladness as one enters the sanctuary, never mind envisioning this site.

The Psalm offers some prayers. Perhaps some need these prayers today. The writer prays for peace, for security, and for prosperity for Jerusalem – this place where all of God's people will be gathered. It is a vision for the world as God would have it be. It is a vision for a day to come. If you are struggling to find joy and gladness, may these prayers for peace enfold you this day.

For many of us there can be another barrier. We are so busy. Our busyness can overwhelm us, especially in a holiday season like the one about to be upon us. It is not necessarily a burden, but it can stress us out. It can take a toll on us physically and emotionally and even spiritually. And from the place of being overwhelmed and stressed out, it can be really hard to see what we need to see during this Advent season. It can be hard to see God at work in our lives and in the world.

So we are left to muddle through, to work our way through the slog of events and parties and such. When muddling through, we are not at our best. There we can only see what troubles us, what divides us, what limits us. We get caught up in it and we only see what is right there in front of our faces – the problems to solve and the roadblocks to navigate. But what if we could see better? What if we could see farther than the immediate? What if we could see the Lord at work? What if we could see on to the redemption and restoration that God offers to all of us?



This makes a nice Christmas card, but we doubt that this could be a reality here and now or anytime in the near future. We see a world full of war and violence, of enemies and greed, of corruption and sin. At least a part of us questions how this world of peace could ever be reality. That was how many received Isaiah's words too.

Isaiah was a prophet working for Judah. He resided in the palace in Jerusalem. He probably had an office just down the hall from the king. He was what we would maybe call an "insider." He wasn't like many of the other prophets that we know of – living out in the wilderness, relying on ravens to bring him food, fleeing for his life. Yet he didn't just spout the party line either. He often had bad news to share, a finger to point, gloom and doom to pronounce. But as long as he was there giving them warnings and calling them to a higher standard, then nothing bad would ever happen. Almost all shook his hand and said, "Nice sermon, pastor" on their way back to living their normal worldly, selfish, sinful lives. This reminds me of the pastor I once heard of, who after preaching the same sermon three weeks in a row, was asked if he had any other material. He responded that when the people started living out what he was preaching, then he'd go on to the next sermon.

In chapter 2 Isaiah saw the mountain of the Lord raised up above all other mountains. It is not as 'better than' but rather to be seen, to be a witness to the world. Isaiah's vision sees all nations streaming to Jerusalem. There, God will teach the people the ways of the Lord. And what will God teach? Peace. Then all will walk in the faith. In this time of peace, God will judge between nations and will settle disputes. War will be no more. The swords will be turned to plowshares, the spears to pruning hooks.

Peace will reign. Isaiah saw all this. He could see the hope. He could see the possibility of living another way. Then the invitation is given: *“Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!”* Come and see hope. Come and see the possibilities of God at work in the world. Come and see and hope even when others cannot. Come and move towards the kind of world that God longs for. Come and work for what makes and brings peace. Come and work to repair the brokenness and hurt of this world. *“Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!”* May this be our Advent invitation to one another.

The gospel text in our lectionary readings also highlights this call to walk in the light. Please turn with me to Matthew 24 as we prepare to read verses 36-44. Matthew is, of course, written well after Psalm 122 and Isaiah 2. The glorious worship in the temple has been replaced by something more akin to going through the motions. The vision of peace set forth by Isaiah has been replaced with Roman authority and power. The “Pax Romana” or Roman peace is a peace enforced through violence and intimidation. Just as the psalmist and Isaiah spoke of a day yet to come, so too does Jesus in our gospel passage. Hear these words of Jesus as he too speaks of a day yet to come:

<sup>36</sup> *“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”* <sup>37</sup> *For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man...*

*<sup>38</sup> For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup> and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away...*

*...so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40</sup> Then two will be in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken, and one will be left...*

*<sup>42</sup> Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming...*

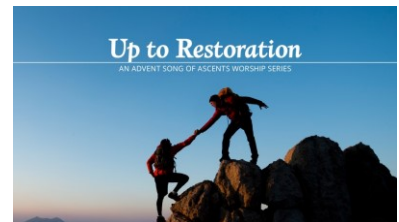
*... he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.*

In these words of Jesus we hear a call to live God's peace now. Connecting to the Old Testament story, Jesus tells us that his return will be like the flood was in the days of Noah. People were just going on with life, busy going here and there, doing this and that, and then, bam, the flood came and *"swept them all away."* Jesus says to us: *"so too will be the coming of the Son of Man."* When he returns, it will suddenly be upon us. Like a flood, Jesus will come in power and might, rushing into our lives and into our world.



We are warned to keep awake, to be prepared. One will be taken, and one will be left, whether in the field or at the job site, whether in church or out on the golf course, whether helping our neighbor or shoveling our own sidewalk. Jesus' words of staying awake call us to always walk faithfully, to ever strive to live righteous and holy lives.

Using the words of the Psalm, this is a call for each of us to go up daily to the Lord, always preparing ourselves daily to walk as children of the light, always raising our lives up to God for restoration and wholeness. In the days of Noah, all was "normal" until the rains fell. None were walking with the Lord except Noah and his family. All others were left behind to face the flood waters. But, my friends, this is not God's hope for our world.



This walk of faith is not an "every man or woman for themselves" kind of faith. No, this is a faith represented by the image for today's message. It is a faith where we journey together, lifting one another up as we walk alongside each other. It is a faith that calls us beyond these walls, beyond this blessed community too. It is a faith that challenges us to say to friend, fellow believer, and stranger alike, with both our words and our actions: *"Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!"*

Like the people of Isaiah's day, may we seek to learn peace. And knowing peace, may we seek to live peace – in our hearts, in our lives, and in our world. Doing so, through our witness may we teach others the peace of the Lord.



May we go up to the Lord's house, seeking to restore our mission, to restore our hearts, to restore our gladness, to restore our world. This Advent season, may we all go up to restoration. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. The way of peace is the call today. In what ways can you better live with peace in your life, bearing witness to the power of God's peace to others?
- 2) *Pray*. Who do you know that most needs to know God's peace in their lives? Pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance on ways to share this peace with them.
- 3) *Study*. Read Isaiah 6:9-12. What will life soon be like for God's people? What was the cause of these consequences?