

<i>Date Preached</i>	13-Dec-2020	<i>Date Initiated</i>	01-Dec-2020
<i>Where Preached</i>	SAK	<i>Appointed Readings</i>	Adv 3, Yr B

" Restore our fortunes, O LORD ... "



Welcome to Gaudete Sunday – that is, Rejoice Sunday. By tradition, this third Sunday of Advent "expresses the joy of anticipation at the approach of the Christmas celebration ... a lightening of the tone of the traditional Advent observance."* "Rejoice" comes from the first word of the Introit appointed for this day that we began today's liturgy with, and, also by tradition, we use a pink candle and rose-colored vestments, instead of the seasonal blue, to mark this day just slightly apart from the remainder of Advent.

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It was not "rejoice," however, but another equally positive, uplifting word that caught my attention in our readings for today: "restore.": We often speak of someone who has been restored to good health or good fortune. Things that have been lost or stolen are restored to their rightful owners and-or to their rightful places. Conservationists seek to restore polluted waters to their pristine condition. Peace is restored after strife, and order restores chaos.

For those of us who use Anglican prayer beads during daily devotions, one of the key meditative texts during Advent is the opening lines of today's psalm, which begins "When the Lord ~restored~ the fortunes of Zion, then were we like those who dream." These last two weeks of meditating on that—"restored the fortunes of Zion"—oh, what feelings of hope and comfort and fulfillment have welled up in me as I've repeated and tasted and savored those words, over and over again. Indeed, restoration is one of the macro messages of Advent: Christ came ... and is coming ... to restore humanity: restore it to the condition God has ordained for it.

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"Restored the fortunes of Zion." "Restored the fortunes of Zion." This history-slash-prophecy-slash-hope of restoration in Psalm 126 pervades the Old and New Testaments.

- At least six different psalms pray for God's restoration ... the healing, the salvation ... of God's people as a whole, or they praise God for already having done so.
- The very last question the disciples ask Jesus before He ascends into heaven is, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).
- The Old Testament prophets, seeking to re-ignite and re-direct the people's relationship with their God, either plead on their behalf for the restoration of Israel or foretell God's effecting it. "For I will restore health to you, and your wounds will I heal. ... I am going to restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob," says God through

* *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church, s.v. Gaudete Sunday.*

the prophet Jeremiah (30:17-18), and similar language is found in Hosea, Amos, Joel, Ezekiel, Zephaniah and Zechariah.

- And Matthew, Mark and Luke all use the verb "restore" to describe Jesus' curing the blind and healing the disabled.†
- The psalmist famously and comfortingly sings, "the Lord restoreth my soul" (Ps 23).

Although neither Isaiah nor St John use verbs meaning "restore" in the readings we hear this morning, clearly bringing "good news to the oppressed" and "bind[ing] up the broken-hearted," on the one hand, and "mak[ing] straight the way of the Lord"—that is, eliminating the obstacles that block this world's full knowledge of and existence in God and God alone—on the other hand, are precisely visions of divine restoration that Advent calls us to ponder. God is in the business of restoring ... and Jesus *is*, in fact, that Restoration ... embodied.

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Word-nerd that I am, all of this focus on "restore" and "restoration" made me curious about the etymology of this English word, and what I discovered surprised me. On its surface, the provenance of "restore" is straightforward enough. *Restore* is derived, via French, from the Latin *restaurare* (it practically sounds like "restore," doesn't it?), a word that meant much the same as our own: *staurare*, to make or set, and *re-*, again. But in that *staurare* lies the surprise, for it came from the Greek noun σταυρός, which means cross ... and most significantly for us Christians, *the Cross [gesture]*. And the source of the Greek σταυρός is an even more ancient Indo-European root word meaning "to set; to stand up; to fix upright." Hence, a cross – a σταυρός – is a stood-up pole.

So, if we telescope our modern English word "*rē-store*," on the one hand, and its most ancient root, on the other, we understand that to restore something is to re-set it ... is to set it back to the way it was ... or, perhaps, to the way it was always meant to be. Thus, when Christ hung upon the Cross—σταυρός—He re-set the creation. He picked up a broken, fallen and collapsed humanity ... a bumptious, self-entangled race of God's creatures who had no hope of ever restoring *themselves* to God ... and He stood us upright again. Christ delighted in placing us back, forever, in our rightful posture vis-à-vis God.

Tellingly, however, the restoration Christ worked did not simply turn back the hands of the clock or return God's people to some golden age of political dominance and economic prosperity. He did not overthrow the Roman oppressors or defeat all of Israel's enemies. It was not to human freedom and material plenty that Christ restored us. No, that would be an outcome far too small to merit the arrival of God upon the face of the earth ... would, as it were, 'waste' the outpouring of God's love and grace. Instead, Christ restored us to freedom in God and the abundance of God's love, mercy and forgiveness.

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And ... Jesus did not just restore us once, in His journey from the manger to the Cross to the Empty Tomb. Many Sunday, we proclaim the familiar words: "Christ has died. Christ is risen.

† Mt 12:13; Mk 3:5, 8:25; Lk 6:10.

Christ will come again." Christ restored us in His death. He *is restoring* us—right here, right now, in His Life Triumphant. And He will come again, to perfect God's restoration for all eternity.

And if Christ is busy restoring us right now, that means we are restorers to ... we are conduits for the ongoing work restoration Jesus never stops doing. What might we be called to restore ... to re-Cross ... to re-Christ?

- Perhaps our own faith lives? May Advent be a season to take stock of how we pray ... how we read Scripture ... how we spend time reflecting ... how we consume ... how we give ... how we regard others? Advent, I think, invites us to some quiet examination of our lives, to see how well they bear the signs of our own being restored in Christ.
- Perhaps we're called to re-Cross our commitment to others? Lockdowns and precautions have taught us what happens when food pantries run low and community funds can't keep up with evictions and power shut-offs; when prisoner can't be visited and those who already live alone most of the time are cut off from what little help they had been receiving. How do we ... like Christ ... restore those who live in such dire straits every day of their lives?
- Perhaps we're called to re-Cross this world? The current pandemic has telegraphed our country's increasing fractious and precarious political culture; the social, educational and justice inequalities that burden so many; the economic and healthcare vulnerabilities that millions of Americans live with year-after-year that suddenly erupt into crises without much of a trigger. What would it look like to begin to restore – to re-Cross – those ills of our society, rather than merely allowing them to fade back into the background once we can all go out to dinner and hop on airplanes again?
- Finally, perhaps we're being called to re-Christ the very Church itself. We've sorely missed sorely and dearly felt the cost of our not being able to come together as the Body of Christ for worship and service and Christian formation and fellowship. If we are to restore the Church, rather than merely resume it, Advent calls us to ponder how we will open its doors more widely ... will proclaim Christ's message more loudly and without embarrassment ... will dedicate more of our time, talent and treasure to those outside our doors, so they, *too*, may fully participate—both spiritually and tangibly—in the ongoing restorative work of Christ.

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We await ... we anticipate ... we long and ache for the Birth of our Savior ... to celebrate the arrival in this world of the Restoration Light. Yes, we know that Christ has already come and that He will come again. But right about now, in this winter of the year and this winter of the world, we are bursting to cry out, "He is here ... right now, right with us!" We yearn, as we should, to rejoice with Him Who rejoices in us. May we also, this Advent, yearn to *restore* with Him Who has restored us.



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