"Beyond Restoration: Hope in Action"

Romans 8:22-27; Psalm 85:6-11 – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn
Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), La Mesa, California – September 20, 2026
Reconciliation Special Emphasis

Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that our hearts and our spirits might be revived by the power of your invitation into righteousness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

There are those who think that it diminishes the Bible to consider it anything other than a direct dictation of God Most High. A sampling of the various perspectives represented throughout scripture, however, makes clear that such a simplistic approach diminishes God. Meanwhile, I find it a wonderful comfort that what we find in scripture, instead, is a succession of testimonies of God's people throughout the ages, as they strove for faithfulness, through thick and thin.

Thus it is that we can read Psalm 85 together and recognize that the voices seeking assurance in these verses are perhaps living in a season of discouragement that feels familiar. There is a lot that is good right now, but my friends, there is no denying that we've had a bit of a rough summer. We're still reeling from difficult losses of multiple loved ones. Partnership efforts are moving more slowly than we'd like. And our finances are shakier than we had thought, erasing some of the progress we'd thought we'd made. To say it's been discouraging is to name several things, all held within that powerful word. Such challenges sap us of our courage, the word in the middle of discouragement. But dig just a little deeper, and we see that in the

middle of courage is "coeur," the French word for heart. Discouragement is a heart problem, perhaps in this case, a condition of too many things weighing on our hearts, too much stress blocking the flow of God's mercy and love.

So what a relief it is to discover that scripture provides succor for such a moment. The people of God have been here before – in need of salvation, revival, a word of peace. For centuries and centuries, the people of God have found themselves bereft and turned to God for hope. Thus, we too can bring our weary, worried hearts to God and plead for revival, trusting that God is faithful.

These cycles of revival and decline and the dialogue they sustain between God and God's people have additional lessons to teach us, however, beyond just the truth of God's faithfulness. When we're discouraged, feeling as though decline is inevitable and can only lead to dissolution and disappearance, we have a tendency to seek solace by reminiscing. We are not alone in this. The ancient Hebrews did it too – to the point of looking back at slavery in Egypt with fondness when things got too hard in the wilderness that was leading them to liberation.

But just as scripture reminds us that God is faithful, it also teaches us that nostalgia is not a revitalization strategy. The theme for our Reconciliation Special Offering this year calls us to look "Beyond Restoration." We are not being invited to try to put things back together the way they were "before," whenever "before" may have been. We are being invited into "Hope in Action," that will involve building

something new. Revival will not look like the "good, old days." God's salvation does not lie in repeating the patterns of yesteryear, but in cultivating faithfulness that matches the present moment.

Scripture does not tell us what revival looks like for us; there is no blueprint or ten-point plan for 2026 laid out here. But we are told what faithfulness looks like: God has told us, O mortals, what is good: and what does the Lord require of us, but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God?" Here in Psalm 85, God answers the people's cries for salvation with a vision of what it might look like: "Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky."

God's revival comes when our faithfulness prepares the ground. "Hope in Action" means doing church like we've actually learned the lessons we've been trying to teach for years – becoming an anti-racist church that is willing to speak out and stand up for racial justice and reconciliation; truly leaning into a full welcome of all people, including especially our LGBTQ+ siblings; protecting the vulnerable in our midst, those who are targeted, the widows and orphans and foreigners in our midst, the ones the Bible has lifted up for centuries as our special assignment.

It is my belief that the world – our community, the world right outside our doors – is hungry for authentic faithfulness. Folks are looking for truth, for people

and communities who speak and live honestly, who conduct ourselves with humility and grace, who dare to take the risks that following Jesus requires. Revival is in God's hands. Faithfulness is what is in our hands. Can we practice the steadfast love of God? Can we pursue righteousness? Can we live as people of peace, deep peace that is not simply the absence of conflict, but the living presence of justice? This is what "Hope in Action" could mean. And it would go beyond restoration, beyond nostalgia, beyond sentimental visions of the past, into a future that we've only begun to imagine. "Hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." But that "waiting with patience" is not a passive thing. It is not merely sitting still, wishing God would fix everything. It's living hope out loud, actively, creating the world we long to live in. Doing the work of racial justice and reconciliation. Proclaiming divine welcome to all God's children. Protecting those who live in fear.

There is no shortcut to revival. The only pathway is faithfulness. Over and over, we re-commit ourselves and then wander off. Cycles of fervor and dissipation. We forget the work that led to revitalization last time and cry out to God to just make it happen for us. God has shown us, O mortals, what is good. If indeed we can actively live out our hope, humbly pursuing justice and mercy, revival will come, one way or another, and we will see faithfulness springing up around us and rejoice. Hallelujah and Amen.