

'Restore thou them that are penitent'

(Book of Common Prayer, Morning Prayer)

One kind word from someone can restore your whole day, if you have been feeling at a low ebb. Reading about an act of altruism and generosity can restore one's faith in humanity in an otherwise gloomy and doom-stricken press. A change of job or career or routine can restore the flagging spirit and inject new purpose to life. A quick pint at the Crown at the end of a day of doing hateful tasks can certainly revive and restore!

But at a deeper more significant level attendance at church and daily prayer can restore the spirit. The Church has a wonderfully rich tradition of liturgical worship – the Book of Common Prayer being one such spiritual well, by which the soul can restore itself by dwelling on the beauty of its language, the rhythms of the prayers and simply being in fellowship with one another.

Restoration lies at the heart of the Christian life. It is the offer of what Jesus called 'life in its fulness' or 'life in abundance'. It is the restored or transformed life in God's presence and love.

But this life is not given away easily. To acquire it requires effort, for as the great Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously said, costly grace cost God the death of his Son; so, for the Christian disciple life in its fulness also requires constant sacrifice, commitment and reflection. 'Cheap grace' by contrast, Bonhoeffer said, assumes that little or no effort is required of us in our daily lives.

The BCP understands the meaning of costly grace. Some people, I know, think that the Prayer Book focuses too much on sin and our failure as human beings – so that we have to be constantly bewailing our 'manifold sins and wickedness', when we should be doing more rejoicing and thanksgiving to God.

But, the BCP understands that to appreciate fully the generosity of God's love then it is important to see that we have 'left undone those things we should have done' and that we have indeed 'strayed like lost sheep', and that the burden of our sins is 'intolerable', for only then will God 'restore thou them that are penitent' according to the promises he has made through Christ.

The art world provides us with another way of thinking about the radical nature of restoration. Last week I took some paintings into Daryl Nantais on the high street because over the years the paint had flaked, and the aging varnish dulled the picture. The pictures have been duly sent off to the restorer. But are they being restored or merely conserved?

Well, according to one internet art restoration website, the terms have a very similar meaning but when a picture is *conserved* the aim is remedial and merely to prevent further decay so as to preserve its 'cultural heritage'.

Whereas *restoration* is far more radical. A picture which is deemed in need of restoration has to have been so badly damaged that it has lost its 'significance or function'.

Much depends on how you view human nature, but it is clear that the Prayer Book thinks that we need much more than conservation; only restoration will enable us to enjoy 'newness of life'.

Conservation and restoration both require effort, but as Jesus said to the loyal crowd who were following him on his journey to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51), unless they were prepared to make some radical commitments, then their quest was for cheap grace not the costly restorative kind.

So, Jesus sets them three challenges (Lk 14:25-33):

Where do their ultimate loyalties lie – with God or their families?

If necessary, would they take up the cross – in other words, what is their level of commitment?

Have they really understood the time, effort and practical demands of being a disciple? Jesus likens this to the person who sets off enthusiastically on a building project but hasn't fully thought through the practicalities of what will be needed.

Jesus' promise of restoration and newness of life builds on the tradition rooted in the Book of Deuteronomy and the prophets – especially Jeremiah. Knowing how the people of Israel have suffered exile and slavery politically and spiritually many times, the writer of Deuteronomy understands that when God says, 'Choose life!' that this is more than mere conservation of what presently is, it is restoration of what needs to be.

The language of this promise from Deuteronomy 30:15-20 is picked up in the BCP when the priest invites the people to make confession of their sins in the prayer which begins, 'Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins...' In order to live the blessed and prosperous life, then according to Deuteronomy we must be prepared to walk in God's ways, follow his commandments and listen and 'hold fast' to him and not other gods or other worldly attractions.

The main alteration BCP makes to Deuteronomy is that restoration is promised not in a restored *land* but in the sacrament of the Eucharist. For it is in taking Holy Communion that we participate in God's costly grace and sample life in abundance as embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.