

"That leads us to my address. And I'm very excited about this, this year because we have such a wonderful theme for Convention. God restores my soul. It's God who restores all of our souls. In fact, it's God who's called us together. It's God who's created us. It's God who has joined us together in this faith of work.

Now restoration can seem like such a wonderful, happy thing, but anyone who's ever restored a house, or a car, or anything really knows that there are parts and times during that restoration where you wonder why you ever did this in the first place where it becomes a greater mess than it ever was to begin with. And where it seems like it will never ever resolve itself. And when God restores our soul, there can be times when that is true too. Because the first step in any restoration process is to have a desire for something, a desire to be better, a desire for repentance.

There are moments in our lives when we're very well aware of our sinful nature and our need for God's love and grace. And at this time in the church, we're very aware of our sorrow I think. When we lose something we love that's special to us or when we need to restore something that has been broken, there is a sadness to it. And that is true in our church. We want things to be the way they were. We want to gather in person. We want to open our doors and have people come in. We want to have youth programs and choirs and singing and all of the things that we've had before and to have it restored to what it was, what it meant to be church was clear and understandable. We would gather with people we love.

In this season of our time together, there are many in our midst who are tired and sorrowful. People we love but see no longer, people we love but who are not gathering in the way they have in the past. And it is very tempting in this time to get lost in the moment, to think that it will always be this way. But we start with our desire to be restored in knowing and recognizing that God is the God of all things that is in us. And the church really is God's. We receive it, we participate in it, we rejoice in it, but it isn't something we own or can hold in our hands. And we also recognize that in order to be restored, it takes vision. It takes an understanding or an appreciation of where we're going and what we're hoping to see.

What is God doing in our midst? Where is God? We ask ourself. For some of us, we need the space to grieve that things are not what they were and that God is not restoring us to be what we were. In fact, God's goal is not for us to be 18 again or 25 or younger or taller or smarter or faster. God created us as we are with joy to be who we're called to be. And so in this time when there is sorrow or sadness or confusion, it's tempting to get lost in the moment and forget that God's vision is clear. God is calling us to something as the diocese of Central New York. And so this year's convention is different. It's not like any convention we've ever had before. Yes, we're gathered today in a hybrid way. Tomorrow we will gather in spaces all across the diocese, local regional people and others gathering together in other spaces and worshipping together in person.

It is tempting again to miss what was, but God is calling us into a new thing. We're being restored for the future. We're being restored for the ongoing work of God's kingdom that is different and changing and adaptable for the present time. I don't think any of us would go to church and find it desirable to go out back and to pump water or to not have electricity or to not have printed books. We might find joyous things in that about which together. But we are a people that have technology and phones. In fact, I have a lot of technology all around me right now. We are a people for whom God continues to call us as we are and as we're becoming. So the restoration we seek is not really to go back. The restoration is to feel how we have felt before, to feel God's presence with us, to feel the love of community around us and to know that we are redeemed and loved by the mercy of God. It's a new thing God is doing and our hope is not in our emotions. Our hope is in God's faithfulness. And so like that car or that house, as we begin to see

things taking shape and coming together and the transformation of something that was old becoming useful again, there is tremendous joy in this time.

I am so inspired by our diocese where the clergy continues to do new things, to gather in new ways. The support that you've shown for each other, the ministries that are growing in ways we could never have imagined. People who returning to worship, not in person maybe, but returning to worship in new ways. People who couldn't attend before, people who were excluded or kept out. And so in this restoration process when our desire is to be God's people for God's purpose, we began to see that God is at work in new ways and that all hope is not lost. And so we do grieve, but then hopefully we begin to turn and to see that God's ways are the best. Jesus came for the salvation of all people and the work of the church, dare I say it, God is not calling us, so we can have vestries and committee meetings. And at some of our churches, if I were to ask what is the main thing that you do each month it would be sort of vestries and committee meetings which are wonderful and the vestries a sacred trust and so essential and important.

But the ministry of the church is to make disciples for Jesus. The thing we do that we run on is sharing the love of Jesus Christ in a new and a transformative way. Not only for our world but for us. So in our diocese this last year, we see all kinds of new ways that we're exploring, living for Jesus. And it's an exciting time. We are an adaptive, faithful, hardworking, communal diocese in which we love each other and work through hard times. Our vision statement as a diocese is a world healed by love. That is the reason for which we are being restored is for a world healed by love, our mission statement to love God, one another and all God's creation, caring for the environment, caring for one another and learning what it means to love one another. Now learning is something that's dear to my heart as you know. As a former teacher, as an academic, I love learning. But there's a thing about learning that's very similar to a restoration, especially think of a car or remember when you clean out a closet and there's stuff everywhere and you think, Why do we have all these things? And you start cleaning it out and it seems to get worse at first. It absolutely does. But then as you continue to work, it begins to come together and suddenly it's cleaner and it's neater. And it may be less, but it's in a way more because now it's usable and workable and ready.

Learning with God is somewhat like that because sometimes what we learn destabilizes us. Sometimes what we learn is that we've been wrong about something. Sometimes what we learn is that we need to repent. Sometimes what we learn is that God is greater than our opinion and that our opinion may not be where God is. This coming year, one of the things we're going to be doing is we're going to go – have the opportunity for the whole diocese to go on a pilgrimage. And when I say whole diocese, what I mean is some of us will go on a pilgrimage by traveling physically. And some of us will go on a pilgrimage by being part of that journey either virtually or within our own prayer life and at home. And that pilgrimage is about a learning that is, so essential to all of us.

It is easy to see racial reconciliation as a nice thing to do, or something that's part of our faith. And yes, we love our neighbors but not really necessarily essential to our faith. But when God restores our soul and as we engage in that work of discipleship within our own heart, as we see God's work in us, we begin to realize that racial reconciliation is not optional. It is essential. Jesus Christ was a person of color. Our Lord and Savior calls us to restoration and renewal that involves our repentance, our lamentation, and our forgiveness and our transformation. As I speak to you, our world is burdened and harmed by race, by institutional racism. Some of us may not understand it and that is understandable. One of the things of racism is to keep us all confused and closed off. I was recently part of a gathering in which someone said something that was horrifically racist and yet the person saying it didn't understand that because they didn't have an awareness to see. And in the room the people of color were harmed by what was said. And

people who were white didn't know what to say, didn't like that it had been said, but felt very unsure what to say next. Part of our healing is to learn to speak and to hear and understand and grow in our ability. And it is certain absolutely certain that at times we'll get it wrong. It is also essential that we try and then we get some of it right, Because what we get right is where the transformation will be for all of us. All of us still have the burden of these hard things happening to those around us. Part of loving our neighbors ourselves is that when we love our neighbor, what we say is what we experience. So when we isolate and dehumanize and put others down with the antisemitism that's on the rise, with the Asian hate that's on the rise, with the ways in which racism is crippling all of us.

As people of Jesus Christ, our Gospel commands us to go. Our Gospel commands us to learn and our Gospel commands us to change our ways to turn around, to do something new, to repent. In order for God to restore our soul, we first have to repent. In order for God to restore our soul, we first have to acknowledge that we need restoration like an old car that can't start or a house that needs a whole cleanup job. We need restoration when it comes to our understanding of racial and dehumanizing actions of all sorts. But going on the pilgrimage in February and being part of it, whether you're praying for us, engaging in sacred ground groups or being a person who actively goes on the pilgrimage. All of us together, making one step of understanding to learn a new thing, to open our ears just a bit, to just take that next moment, to open ourselves up to what God is calling us to do because our faith compels us to do that. We cannot say we believe in Jesus Christ and ignore the plight of our neighbor. If we can't love our siblings, how can we say we love God? The Gospel of first John asks us. And so dear friends in this time when we're seeking restoration and peace, when we feel so tired in one way, so grievous in another and sorrowing, and war all around and there's so much confusion. God restores our soul with a light of Jesus Christ that comes to us with truth that sets us free with salvation, that forgives and renews us. And with an understanding that life will never be what it was, but we will never be alone in what is. God meets us at every turn. And in this diocese, we are a living example of what happens when God's love is alive in us.

And in closing, let me say something about parishes that have seen the fullness of their journey, the parishes that have ceased to gather in a space who are now part of other parishes. This is a time in which we are gathering in new ways to discover God's love and our midst. And what is sure and certain is that the Holy Spirit brings life and joy. Jesus came that we might have joy and have it abundantly. And if we're not feeling joy, it may be because we're not seeing Jesus. And the surest way to see Jesus is to take that next step in learning, where is love? Where is God calling? And what is my role? What is your role? What is our calling as people of God to offer the love of Jesus to those around us.

We are disciples of Jesus Christ. And this coming year we have new adventures to have and God is with us. I thank you for being part of this convention. I thank you for opening your heart to the restoration of Jesus Christ. And may we find peace in the midst of all that is happening, knowing that God's love is with us. God loves you. God has created you for joy, and God is calling you. May we answer and may we go to offer that love to the world. Thank you."