



Broad Street Presbyterian Church

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“Restoration”

Psalm 23, Galatians 6:1-6

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Our bulletin cover depicts a fresco of the Annunciation, painted in the 15th century. It shows this work of art before and after it was cleaned up by a team of art restorers. There are people whose job it is to restore art to its original state. This is how it works. The art restorer looks at a painting, then they pull out their magic wand, they point it at the painting, say “abracadabra” and the painting instantly goes back to the way it looked when it was first painted.

That’s not how it works. It’s more complicated than that.

Art restorers are highly trained professionals. They are part historian, part detective, and part scientist. They make use of ultraviolet light and magnifying glasses to distinguish paint from varnish and dirt. Then they use carefully chosen solvents to uncover the true colors of the painting.

They make notes and take photographs at each stage to document every part of the restoration. This delicate work progresses slowly and incrementally, stroke by stroke. As the old layers of varnish and dirt are removed, the painting slowly begins to emerge¹ Restoration is a long and complicated process. But the end result is a work of art restored to something close to its original glory.

I’ve been thinking a lot about restoration this past week. What it takes to restore a painting. What it takes to restore a broken relationship. What it takes a restore a community or nation.

Restoration is a big theme in the Bible. In the Bible, nations are restored. Parents and children are restored to one another. Church communities are encouraged to practice forgiveness and restoration.

There’s a lot of restoring in the Bible. Perhaps the most famous use of the word is found in the 23rd Psalm. Here I’m using the King James Version.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.
He leadeth me beside still waters.
He restoreth my soul.

The Lord restores my soul. Oh, I like the sound of that.

I want the Lord to restore me, to gently clean away all of the dirt and varnish and disappointments and regrets that have accumulated over the years in order to reveal the person God created me to be. I’m talking about the

¹ <http://www.art-care.com/articles/painting-conservation-step-by-step.html>

self inside each one of us that existed before the world told us who we are and what we should want and who we should be.

According to the Psalm, God is in the business of restoration, of revival, of reminding us of our best selves. This is God's work. In the 23rd Psalm, all the action verbs belong to the Lord.

[The Lord] leads me beside the still waters.

[The Lord] restores my soul:

[The Lord] makes me lie down in green pastures:

I feel like I am hearing that line from the 23rd Psalm for the very first time. God makes me lie down. I have this image that I can't get out of my head. I am tired and lying down to take a rest but there are things that need to be done. I have a to-do list a mile long and the things that are on that list aren't going to magically get done while I lay there daydreaming. I start to get up but I am shoved back down by a powerful hand. God makes us lie down. There is power and strength in those words. The Lord forces us to rest.

I might be upset about all of this forcing and shoving except that I could really use a little lying down in green pastures.

The truth is that God doesn't force us to rest. God doesn't force restoration on us. God encourages us. God invites us to sink into God's care, to release ourselves and those we love into God's capable hands. God encourage us and invites us into rest and restoration. But it's still our choice. It's still up to us.

A story.

An American traveler was on safari in Kenya. He was loaded down with maps and timetables and agendas. Porters from a local tribe were carrying his supplies of food and luggage.

On the first morning, everyone woke very early and traveled fast and went far into the bush. On the second morning, they all woke very early and traveled fast and went far into the bush. On the third morning, they all woke very early and traveled fast and went far into the bush. The American seemed pleased. But on the fourth morning, the porters refused to move. They simply sat by a tree. Their behavior puzzled the American. "This is a waste of valuable time. Can someone tell me what is going on here?" The translator answered, "They are waiting for their souls to catch up with their bodies."²

Do you resonate with that story? Does your soul need to catch up with your body?

It's surprisingly easy to find ourselves in that situation. It's surprisingly easy to resist restoration. All we have to do is keep going - keep trusting in our own best efforts to make something of our life - keep trying to control the events and people around us - keep carrying that burden because who will pick it up if we put it down? Keep moving and yes, our soul will never catch up with us, our souls will not be restored.

These long summer days are a great time to practice saying "yes" to God's invitation to restore our souls.

There is more to restoration. It's not enough for us to be restored. We've got to get into the restoration business. To offer restoration to others. To create communities of restoration.

² Several internet sources.

Which brings me to our second reading. Paul is writing to the early church community that he founded in Galatia. He says that if someone in the church community messes up, they are to be restored in a spirit of gentleness. Paul seems to know that is not our first instinct. When someone else messes up, we are more likely to revel in their downfall than reach out to them in a spirit of love. Our first instinct is often “gotcha.” These days, we live in a “gotcha” culture, one in which just about everyone is guilty, but few are forgiven. We make think this is a new thing but, after reading Paul’s letter, it’s clear that this is not a new phenomenon.

Paul has advice to give to those living in a “gotcha” culture. He writes

Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. *You* might be needing forgiveness before the day’s out.

Well played, Paul. I’m reminded of Lutheran Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber’s description of church as the place where we take turns being the ones who disappoint one another.

She writes,

We take turns being the ones who are disappointing. And then, forgive each other and move on. And you know, maybe it’s that guy’s turn to be disappointing, but next week it’ll be me.³

What she’s describing - that’s the work of restoration. That forgiving each other and moving on that she describes is hard to do. People fail us. They disappoint us. They hurt us. Sometimes the pain and anger is extreme and forgiveness and reconciliation seem impossible. And, then there is the damage that we cause others. It’s hard to move past all that. None of us are very good at this work of restoration. There is no magic wand. It is slow, painstaking work that calls upon the best of who we are.

But, it is so worth the effort. When we forget that and it’s easy to forget that, it’s time to return to the 23rd Psalm. To remember what it feels like to claim Gods restoration. To feel our souls restored. And then to imagine a world where everyone gets to experience that. To imagine congregations and communities and nations where the promises of the 23rd Psalm are available to all.

The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want.

No.

The Lord is our Shepherd. We shall not want.
The Lord makes all of us to lie down in green pastures.
God leads entire communities beside still waters.
The Lord restores our souls.

The Lord restores our souls.

The Lord restores our souls.

Yeah.

³ <https://katebowler.com/episode-1-insight-outsiders-nadia-boltz-weber-full-transcript/>