

Lent 2019

Stepping Stones

Week Five – *Restoration*

Monday, April 8th

Jim Pierce

“We are forever being made new in Christ”

Wait a minute. Last week we were reminded that we are a new creation in Christ, with everything old having passed away and everything become new (*2 Corinthians 5:17*). Now we get this new word dropped on us — restoration. That’s not a word about being made new, it’s a word about taking something old and fixing it up, repairing it, like I’ve been doing to the house we live in since we moved there in 1990. Seems like a paradox to me unless . . .

. . . unless somehow there is continuity between new and old. And sure enough, there is. Theologians describe the story arc of the whole Bible, from beginning to end, as Salvation History. It is the story of what God has been up to, still is up to and is going to be up to, taking our whole broken world and saving it. The story is centered in God’s amazing promise to hang in there, no matter what and get this job done. Instead of just walking away from this broken creation and going somewhere else, God says, “No! I’m staying right here. I’m going to take this mess and make something of it.”

In Jeremiah 18 we read that God sent the prophet to a potter’s house to watch the potter working at his wheel. The vessel the potter was making of clay didn’t turn out. Jeremiah says it was spoiled. But instead of throwing the clay away, the potter mused it back down, put it on the wheel again and reworked it into another vessel as seemed good to him. After Jeremiah watched the potter do this, God said, “Can I not do with you, O House of Israel, just as this potter has done?” (*Jeremiah 18:6*). The answer, of course, is yes.

That’s salvation history. That’s God’s promise, more radical than just fixing up an old house, or tearing it down and taking all the pieces to the dump. Restoration, new creation is God taking all of those broken pieces and making them into something new.

What does this mean for us? What does it mean for the whole of creation? Just as there is continuity on the potter’s wheel, with the lump of clay that was first fashioned into one vessel reworked into a new vessel, so God keeps working on us, so God keeps working on the whole of creation. God is forever at work making something new of the old you, the old me, the old creation, re-shaping us into what God wants us to be.

As I look back, I can trace not only my journey but God’s handiwork, as God continually makes me new in Christ. As you look back you can see the same. What we are becoming, we do not yet know. But we do know God isn’t done with us yet. For that we give thanks.

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way! Thou art the Potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after Thy will, while I am waiting, yielded and still. Amen.

Tuesday, April 9th

Jeff Langdon

“If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Our lives are full of stuff. Comedian Jerry Seinfeld is convinced that our homes are nothing more than what he calls “Garbage Processing Centers.” Everything you buy and bring into your home is destined for the dump! For example, we bought the latest kitchen craze last year... the air fryer. We used it once or twice. It really was nothing special, and it just took up space. It then made its way into the kitchen cabinet... out of the way. Once in the kitchen cabinet, it got in the way, so we moved it to the pantry closet. Once in the closet we forgot about it. We won't remember it until we clean out the closet when we do our Spring Cleaning, which we really do only every couple of years. We will then find it and wonder why we ever bought it... so we will throw it away or give it to Goodwill, so they can sell it to someone else who will eventually give it back to Goodwill or eventually just throw it away.

Your home and our home are full of these treasures... but all of these treasures will eventually find their way into the landfill or the dump. Paul is writing to the Philippians about these treasures. He is at the end of his life... his career...and he is pondering his legacy. He is looking back to see what was important and maybe what was not important.

If you went on a treasure hunt in your house, what would you find? What do you value? This is an important question... because if we go thru life and value the wrong things, you can lose the meaning for your life. **Looking back on your life...what is important.** What do you want to be remembered for? How have you or how did you make a difference? How do you reflect the love of Christ in your life?

I sense that Paul is reflecting on the balance in his life. He says he knows what he should value. He knows what he should be committed to. Not money, not a big house, not a new car, not expensive clothing. Paul says “Whatever gains I have, these I have come to regard as loss

because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.”

Paul had been thru a restoration of a sort... his life had received new meaning because for Paul, nothing was more important than Christ. Most of us think that Christ is important to our lives. But for most of us, Christ is not the most important aspect of our lives. Yet, we have been restored to Christ, made right with God, because of Grace. Surely that should be the treasure that we seek. Surely that should be the treasure that we store up, in the closets of our life... living a life reflecting the love of Christ to the world.

God, help us live as a restored people, reflecting your love and living in such a way that our treasure is shown in the way we seek justice, show mercy and live humbly with you. Amen

Wednesday, April 10th

Juel Pierce

The psalm for Sunday is a psalm of almost dreamy joy, remembering God’s promise to restore the people to their home in Zion, to make it great again. The metaphor the psalmist uses is that of a river in the desert—a flood, if you will. We’re not so enamored of floods these days, having experienced (or seen around us) their destruction. But this flood carries with it the promises of a joyous harvest for those who have experienced the desert aridity of nothingness and exile.

This flood is a reminder of Mary’s gift to Jesus in John 12. As he sits in her home, eating dinner, she pours a flood of expensive perfume over his feet, drying them with her hair. Jesus interprets her gift as preparing him beforehand for his burial. She makes his coming death a promise of restoration, just like the water in the desert, just like the exiles coming home, just like the resurrection to come.

This flood of love that comes to us through these gifts—water in the desert, perfume for anointing—reminds us that even in the midst of Lent, as we approach Holy Week, we have the promise of restoration and resurrection.

O God, may you flood our lives with your love. Restore us to you through our daily dying and rising in baptism. May we adore you as Mary did, and as we prepare to join you in your death and resurrection. AMEN.

Thursday, April 11th

Rev. Roger Lenander

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

- Psalm 51:12

We have purchased a couple of new vehicles over the years. What we found with the joy of ownership was inheriting the fear of the first scratch/dent. Driving around in a new car is a wonderful experience. No rattles or squeaks, the shine of the chrome, color of fabrics, and especially that new car smell! But every time we took it into public we parked with fear and trepidation. Like parents of a newborn who want to keep their child from any disease, we chose carefully where we parked and who we parked next to.

But no matter how careful, being in the world means that first scratch/dent is coming. It can come from someone’s carelessness, or from a rock flying at your car like a missile and leaving

its mark. Ping! You look in horror at even the slightest mark and your heart sinks. It is no longer a new car. You know it can be fixed like new. But you will always know that the first mark changed the way you would feel about it. The solution? We now look at used cars with at least one imperfection.

Truth is, we never get to experience that feeling of being brand new as a human. By the time we become aware of our body, heart, and mind it is already dinged from our own actions or the actions of others and things in this world. Restored in Christ is the process of God returning us to that new creation condition. In the meantime, we travel in this body, mind, and spirit that is not done getting scratched and dented along the way. We have the confidence in Christ that the day is coming when all things will be made new in heaven and earth. That is the joy of our salvation that God has gifted to us in our crucified and risen Lord. So, rather than spend this time wishing I could travel in a different body, I embrace who I am because of Christ to the world today. I welcome that day when this life's journey reaches its final destination and Christ will hand me the key to life everlasting that will never have to live with the fears of this life.

Jesus, as you have prepared a place for me to live as your new creation in Christ, let that joy rise up in me in this life that I may rejoice all the day long. Amen.

Friday, April 12th

Misty Coyle

We are forever being made new in Christ. Last week, we meditated on being a new creation. Out with the old and in with the new because of Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. Not because we asked for it; but because God made it so. What now? The next few stepping stones are small and large, flat and rigid. Pretty hard to feel comfortable with your balance.

The large and flat stones are the easier stones to step on. They are the stones we know and are comfortable with the actions needed for those stones. Give money to the poor, feed the poor, clothe the poor, help build shelters for the poor. We got that down good! What about the small and rigid stones? Most of the time, I try to jump over those stones to get to another easy stone. Or, I use the tip of my toes to quickly move from the small to large stones. This is not how we are to go from stone to stone if we are truly following the way of Christ. We are no longer "under all those oppressive regulations and fine print, we're free to live a new life in the freedom of God." [Romans 7:3-6 (MSG)] In other words, you gotta love like there's no such thing as a broken heart.

The song "[No Such Thing as a Broken Heart](#)" by Old Dominion was on the radio this morning. To love our neighbors is to form a relationship with them. For me, I know it's easier to form a relationship with someone who's needs I understand, and I can help them solve a problem. The people who need more time; who "test my patience" are the relationships I have a hard time forming...because my heart has been broken trying to help someone. If you listen to the song though, you gotta love like there's no such thing as a broken heart!

If I get too comfortable on the large and flat stepping stones, I am going nowhere. Even though God is just on the other side of the river, waiting for me. Waving for me to "come on!" I look down and *think* I know better than God and those stones are **not** safe enough for me to step

on! Christ restores us every day. He knows we forget about what he gave us. He knows we can't forget what broke our hearts and we just want control, but:

*You know you can't keep the ground from shaking,
no matter how hard you try,
You can't keep the sunsets from fading,
you gotta treat your life like
You're jumping off a rope swing
maybe 'cause the whole thing
is really just a shot in the dark
You gotta love
like there's no such thing as a broken heart
You gotta love
like there's no such thing as a broken heart*

Healing God, please, keep restoring us every day. Give us the heart and strength to love our neighbors because we want to be witnesses for your glory. You keep us balanced even when we feel the ground shaking. Hold our hand as we cross the stones to follow your ways. Whisper gently in our ears so we can spread your word. Guide us lovingly as we do your work. Amen!