

Restoration Unlimited

John 21:1-10

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All right, I have a confession to make: I like to save stuff. No, it's not that I like to save stuff, I love to save stuff. I hate to throw stuff away. It's a character trait my father possessed and I inherited this gene from him.

My dad saved stuff because he believed you never knew when you were going to need it in the future. He grew up during the depression, one of 9 children. They didn't have much and never threw away anything that still had value.

My dad had three large cans in our basement. One contained random screws, one contained small bolts and the other was full of nuts, that's the part that you screw into a bolt. I remember times when he and I would descend to the basement with a section of newspaper. He'd open it onto the table then dump the can of screws or bolts or nuts onto the paper as we searched for the right one. He saved all that stuff because, "You never know when you are going to need it sometime!" AND because to him it instilled value.

So, I like to save stuff and I come by it honestly. I save stuff because I believe it still has value. I save too much stuff, actually. So I recognize that I need to get rid of some stuff. I brought lots of clothing to the rummage sale. But I still have too much.

I noticed that someone had written a book that was very popular. "The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying-Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing" by Marie Kondo. It is on the bestseller list. It sounded interesting until I discovered her approach to decide how to get rid of things. Take a sweater, for example. You hold the sweater in your hands, you look at it and ask yourself, does this sweater still give me joy? If it does, you keep it. If it doesn't you get rid of it.

Here's my problem with that. Everything I have brings me joy. I remember where I bought it, where I've worn it, that I got it on sale, and I believe I will wear it again. It has value. It has value to me. I don't know. I just really have a hard time giving up on stuff, and people.

That's why I love this part of the life of Jesus where he restored Peter.

You remember Peter, right? He was the most popular of Jesus disciples. He was a rugged, hard-working fisherman who left his nets to fish for men and women. He, along with James and John, was closest to Jesus often pulling away with him in prayer and confidence. Peter said he'd never leave Jesus, never deny Jesus. He cut off the ear of a servant when they came to arrest Jesus. Peter was strong, unyielding, and passionate.

Then, in the heat of the events leading to the death of Jesus, Peter was questioned about his relationship to Jesus and denied Jesus on three separate occasions. As Jesus is tried, crucified, dead and buried we never hear from Peter again.

Then suddenly on Sunday morning when Mary reports the tomb is empty, we hear about Peter once again. He with John runs to the tomb to see for himself. He rejoices that Jesus is alive. He is there when Jesus appears to the disciples, when Jesus satisfies Thomas' doubts. And everyone lives happily ever after, sort of....because with Peter there is still this one thing between him and Jesus.

Have you ever watched a movie or television show and you are drawn to a particular character and the movie or show is coming to an end but issues with that character are still unresolved? And you're thinking to yourself, but what about whoever it was you were wondering about? To you, the movie has a loose end. An issue is unresolved. What about that person, that couple, what happened to them? Doesn't that drive you nuts?

I feel that way about the resurrection of Jesus. On Easter, everything is great. Jesus is alive again. Salvation and forgiveness of sin have been achieved. And that's awesome. But what about Peter? Sure he saw the empty tomb and rejoiced that Jesus was alive again. But the last conversation he had with Jesus was the one where he said he'd never desert Jesus and Jesus predicted he would deny him three times and then Peter denied ever spending anytime with Jesus, ever even knowing who he was three times.

So Peter and Jesus appear around the fire together and it's as if nothing was ever said? I don't think so. Jesus knows there's something between them, something unresolved. Peter is hoping that maybe Jesus forgot but he knows better and deep down inside he knows that things aren't right, things just aren't the same between Jesus and him. Peter and Jesus need to talk.

So our scripture for today begins with that issue between Jesus and Peter still unresolved. It appears that life is getting back to normal. Some of the disciples have gone fishing, but they are having no success. In fact, they are getting skunked. Jesus calls out to them. "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some."

The disciples catch so many fish it tears their nets. Who wouldn't love to catch all those fish? They bring their catch ashore. Then they all have fish for breakfast. Then it happens. Jesus and Peter talk.

"Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

"Feed my lambs."

"Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?"

"Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

"Take care of my sheep."

“Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter is hurt because he is asked three times. “

Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

“Feed my sheep.”

“I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go. Follow me.”
John 21:15-19

Many people believe that Jesus questioned Peter three times because Peter denied Jesus three times. Perhaps it was for emphasis, to stress the significance of this moment. Three times He asks. Three times Peter answers. Three times Jesus charges Peter. “Feed my lambs.” “Take care of my sheep.” “Feed my sheep.” Then Jesus says, “Follow me.”

Let’s go back. Do you remember an early conversation between Jesus and Peter, at the start of Jesus ministry? Jesus asked, “Who do people say that I am?” Then he said, “Elijah, one of the prophets.” “But what about you? Who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Mt.16:16

Jesus says, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” Matthew 16:17-18. Man I love that verse. I love what Jesus says to Peter, what Jesus says about the church. It’s Jesus’ idea. This is its first mention in the Bible. I love that Jesus says that nothing will prevail against the church.

So when Jesus and Peter finally talk, Jesus makes a big deal of Peter loving Jesus and of Peter feeding Jesus’ sheep because Jesus has big plans for Peter. Jesus is restoring Peter to his original place in God’s plan for his life. Jesus is reaffirming He never gave up on Peter; Jesus always had hope for Peter. Jesus never stopped loving Peter.

This restoration of Peter brings the events in Jesus and Peter’s life to completion. It closes the loop; Peter is right back where he belongs. He would go on to do great and amazing things. He taught about Jesus. He helped to begin the church. He preached to the Sanhedrin. He was jailed, beaten. Perhaps the greatest church in the world is named for him: St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, where the Pope says mass. I’ve been there. It’s an amazing place.

This is a great story of restoration. But there’s more to the story than what happened to Peter. This is a story of restoration unlimited. This is a story that teaches us that when we wander away from Jesus, when we don’t want for ourselves what Jesus wants for us, when we resist his ways and reject his advice that Jesus does not resist or reject us.

Just as Jesus never gave up on Peter, the story teaches us that Jesus never gives up on us. Just as Jesus always had hope for Peter, Jesus always has hope for us. Just as Jesus never stopped loving Peter even though Peter broke Jesus' heart when he denied him, Jesus never stops loving me, Jesus never stops loving you no matter what you have said or done. Just as Jesus always saw value in Peter, Jesus always sees the value in us. Who knows what His plans are for us?

I began today talking about my weakness, or is it a strength, for saving stuff. Shortly after we were married Toni's parents sold her grandparent's home. Before the house contents sale we were asked if we wanted anything. In their basement was an old cabinet that Toni's grandfather, for whom she is named, used to store boxes of wrenches and other tools. It had been painted with the most disgusting color of green ever made-chartreuse green/asparagus green. It had been an icebox. As soon as I saw it, I wanted it. My in-laws said "what do you want that thing for. It's a piece of junk!" I replied, "I'm going to strip it and put it in my dining room." I saw value in it.

It was a major undertaking. Coat after coat of stripper was applied. Coat after coat of paint then varnish was removed. I used steel wool, wire brushes of all types, various strippers, and brass cleaner, even toothbrushes. I sanded and sanded and sanded. Then I applied layer after layer of clear coat. I reassembled everything and this is what it looks like today in our dining room.

God sees value in us. God is incapable of gazing upon us without seeing our value, our worth without possessing hope for us, without feeling love for us. Just as Jesus never gave up on Peter, Jesus never gives up on us no matter what. But there's more...

Jesus told Peter he would use him to establish the church and that he did. The church is the physical manifestation; it is the physical presence of Jesus in the world today. You and I are the church. We are Ingomar Church.

As such, we are to be Jesus to others. We are the place where restoration, unlimited restoration, is to occur. This is the place where people come and they are received and they find God and they are accepted just as they are. There is not a sign outside that says, "All persons must shower before entering!"

We accept all people here. Everyone is welcome here because everyone has value and worth. We accept Caucasian people, Asian people, Indian people, African people, African American people, old people, young people, children, straight people, gay people, rich people, poor people, married people, single people, and divorced people. You all are welcome here.

We aren't perfect but we're trying. Our job is to look upon everyone as God looks at us and to accept them as God accepts us. We are called as the church to be Jesus to the world. As Jesus never gives up on us, we must never give up on anyone. As Jesus always holds out hope for us we must always hold out hope for everyone. As Jesus never stopped loving us we must never stop loving others. As Jesus always saw value in others, we must always see value in others.

That's who Jesus was. That's who we are called to be. Amen

