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First United Methodist Church

Springboro, Ohio

July 12, 2015

Series: “Restoration In Progress”

Scripture: Matthew 23:25-28, Ephesians 4:20-32

Message: “Restoration from the Inside Out”

Last week we began the worship series, “Restoration in Progress.” We are using this metaphor of a house being restored for our lives and the work God does within them. As we come to faith and the Holy Spirit fills us, God begins the process of restoring the beauty, health and wholeness in our lives that he created us with and for. When we talk about the word salvation, that’s really what it’s about. We are using scenes from the HGTV show Rehab Addict to help us visualize this restoration process.

So when we consider rehabbing a house, the first two steps are buying the house and doing the foundation work. We began with these last week. We are bought back from our sin by the death and resurrection of Jesus. As we come to faith, we build our lives on the strong foundation of God’s ways.

In the rehab process, once you have the house and have done the foundation work, what’s next then? The next place we focus on is the inside. Restoration has to begin there. The goal of having this house is to make it a healthy home, a place where love, laughter, tears, growth, compassion, and grace can flow freely. When the inside of the house is in good shape, then the outside will follow.

When we think about this, it sounds like common sense. But when we compare it to our first instinct, it’s a bit counterintuitive, opposite to our natural tendencies. Our first response is often to worry about what others think. And usually that involves worrying about the outside. This time of year usually when we have a spare moment of sunshine, we mow the grass rather than clean inside. Why, because we don’t want to be the only one with long grass on the street. People will judge what we do on the outside, but don’t seem to pay as much attention to the inside.

It’s not just our yards or houses either. We spend a huge amount of time and money worrying about our physical appearance. We exercise, we spend more than we should on our clothes, accessories, and our weight so that we will look “good.” But we don’t spent nearly as much time or resources on the inside, on our spiritual and mental health.

Yet that makes such a difference, even more than the outside. Because this is the place where we have to live with ourselves. This is the place that those we know and love the most live with us. And the Bible tells us, while people might judge the outside, God looks at the heart.

In our scripture reading from Matthew, this is what Jesus calls the Pharisees out on. They have worked so hard on the exterior. Everything about their actions and appearance is highly religious. But Jesus says, while the outside looks great, the inside doesn’t match. In fact, it’s a disaster. Their faith that should be the motivation for these actions is non-existent.

Jesus compares them to the tombs in the area that are kept up beautifully. People clean them and whitewash them regularly. They sparkle. But inside? They are full of death, bones. The outside looks righteous, but the inside of these men is full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

Now there is nothing wrong with the outside looking nice. Especially when it comes to the actions that result from faith. We’ll get to that later in our restoration series. But the inside needs to match.

When someone looks in the windows of your life, do the inside and the outside match? What do they see?

So as God continues the restoration process, the next step is internal restoration. This is a hard process because it covers so much. There are all sorts of rooms with all sorts of purposes, walls and the floor and plumbing and the electrical systems. It’s harder too because you live there, and life is messy. How do you choose where to start?

So first, we need to start at the top. We examine the attic and the ceilings to make sure that there are no leaks. When you’re restoring a house, if you have a leaky roof, your work will not last. It’s a scary thing sometimes because replacing a roof is an expensive prospect.

It’s the same in our life. We need to start at the top. In our minds. We need to examine our mental health and allow God to work with us on this. Many people deal with mental health issues that range from mild depression to very serious issues. Often we’re embarrassed to talk about these and we suffer in silence. And we, our relationships, and our faith, and our witness suffer because of it. The restoration work God does in us and we seek to do in the world will be much harder and much less effective until we begin to get help from a doctor or counselor. If you have been struggling with mental health issues and you need some extra encouragement to get help, please let us know. We have resources we can connect you with.

Then we need to examine the sewage system in the house. We need to make sure that there are not any clogs or tree roots growing into the pipes or that the basement floods in storms. These do not make for a nice smelling house and will cause a great and regular need for restoration.

The parallel in our own lives for these are the things that Paul talks about in Ephesians. He says, when you come to faith, God will work with you to get rid of bitterness, rage, anger, fighting, speaking harshly about others, and plain meanness. Many of us do okay most of the time on these things, but then a storm comes along, or a situation where our feelings are hurt or someone has not done the right thing by us. And we find that the sewage system doesn’t work as well as we thought. It backs up easily and that toilet gets backed up with anger and meanness that overflows from our lives into loved ones or often innocent strangers such as a sales person or someone driving too slowly for our tastes. The basement where we keep our bitterness starts to flood and we become destructive to ourselves and others.

Then we need to look at the electrical and heating and air conditioning. When we’re too hot or too cold, we don’t enjoy life as much. These systems help regulate the temperature of life. They parallel with the spiritual practices such as prayer, worship, study, loving and supportive community, that help us to deal appropriately with life as the highs and the lows come along. Our faith doesn’t mean that life will be perfect now. It does mean that we have different way of dealing with it, a spiritual thermostat you might say that kicks in and helps us to stay at healthy temperature spiritually.

We need these sort of systems because life is not easy. We come across many challenges that really knock us for a loop. If we don’t have these, what comes out of us and how we deal with things often isn’t in line with God’s desire for us. Life is not easy, but restoration work is not easy either.

I chose this week’s Rehab Addict clip for that very fact. It shows the frustrations that our host has as she works to restore this particular house. And, how she handles them with some of these important spiritual practices. Let’s watch.

(Sorry, due to editing this link is not available in format used for worship)

Did you notice how frustrated she was over the flooring? Tile over hardwood! Sometimes we think we should handle things our way—tile. God’s way is so much better—hardwood. We have to choose God’s ways over our own as we are in this restoration process.

And then when she was most overwhelmed, her builder left her and she called in a new crew. Their work was terrible. But did you see how she handled it? Assertively but not aggressively. Her pipes did not back up and overflow on them. She simply paid them, shook their hand, and said goodbye. A very simple example of calm integrity, but often difficult to do.

But then she was further behind and out of money. What did she do? Called in those she knew, loved and trusted—her brother and her cousin. And they helped navigate some of the things she could have done on her own but was overwhelmed by in the moment.

It’s a powerful reminder that God gives us each other for love, support, and help, especially in difficult times. Our restoration and the restoration of the world will go much more effectively when we use these gifts ourselves and share them with others.

As the Holy Spirit dwells in us and we are restored from the inside out, may we like Paul encourages us, “put off your old self and put on the new, being made new in the attitude of your minds, being like God in true righteousness and holiness.”