Rev. Dr. Suzanne Allen

First UMC of Springboro

August 2, 2015

Series: Restoration in Progress

Message: Restoring the Outside Too

Scripture: Daniel 1:8-21

 Our scripture for today is this great story from the Old Testament book of Daniel. The country of Judah has been conquered by King Nebuchadnezzar. Now if you can get over the fact that your country has been conquered by the Babylonians and that you have been taken by force to live in a foreign land, after that, the situation isn’t too bad.

 The king wants to train some of the best and brightest of Judah to work for him. He plans to give them three years of training in language and culture. A group of them are brought to stay at the palace and are even given the same food and drink that those who sit at the king’s table have.

 It doesn’t sound like torture. They’re invited to eat a meal fit for a king every day for three years. But there are two problems with this. First, when you eat like this every day, think vacation or the holidays, you start to feel too full, to get a little sluggish. Your pants don’t fit as well.

 And, for those from Judah who followed God’s laws, there was a lot that was set before them that didn’t fit with God’s meal plan. So Daniel had to make a choice. He decided to ask if he could have a different meal plan, a vegetarian option you might say. He would eat vegetables and drink water rather than meat and wine.

 The official agreed to try it but with all of the worry of a doting grandma. But won’t you be hungry honey? You’ll get skinny and sick and then what will I tell the king?

 Isn’t this a great story to follow up with after our scripture from last week: “Do not conform to the ways of this world, but be transformed.”

 As they followed God’s dining plan for the trial period, they found that they felt better, they grew stronger, and they had more energy than anyone else in the king’s household. They were ready to serve mentally and physically and the king was impressed by them.

 Our current worship series is about God’s power to restore our lives. We have spent several weeks thinking about the internal spiritual and mental restoration. This week we want to spend some time thinking about how God restores the external, our physical bodies.

 It’s important to remember that the two are interconnected. As God restores us, it’s not an either or process but a both-and. When we don’t feel good spiritually and mentally, it’s hard to take care of our bodies. But when our physical bodies are run down and hurting, it’s hard to keep strong and positive in our mental and spiritual life. It impacts our life with God and our work with God. It’s like riding a bike with a flat tire. It’s so much harder and not nearly as much fun. When your body isn’t taken care of, restored, the rest of life is harder. It’s not as much fun.

 But when you get your tires pumped up, it is so much easier to ride. When we let God restore our physical bodies as well as our spiritual self, it becomes easier to do God’s work. Our bodies are tools for that work.

 In our series we’re using clips from the HGTV series Restoration Addict to help us visualize the hard work of restoration and the transformation that is possible when we put our faith in God.

 Today our clip is of the restoration of the exterior of a house in Detroit. Let’s have a look and then think about the spiritual wisdom that we can draw from this.

 Video segment: <http://youtu.be/tzZ919S_ocU> 5:51-8:00, 11:26-11:36, 19:15-20:00

 Getting started is half the battle. That’s true with anything, but particularly our physical health. We are creatures of habit and our bodies will fall into whatever routine we’ve set. We have a hard time creating a new routine.

 So we just have to do it. Getting started is half the battle. And we feel better just doing something—making that appointment, going for a walk, eating an apple rather than that guilt and the should nagging at us.

 Sometimes we don’t get results right away. Sometimes it gets worse before it gets better. But it does make a difference.

 I’ve had neck issues for a few years now that have slowly gotten worse. I kept trying different things to address it…small things that would help a little but not a lot. People consistently asked me, “Have you tried this option?” After a while I thought maybe I should but there was the time, the cost, the unknown. But some nights I could hardly sleep. So this past year I made my health my Lenten discipline and I made that phone call. It did have to get worse before it got better, but now I can sleep again without that pain waking me up.

 What is it that God has been nudging you to do to care for your body? What have others been suggesting out of care for you? Paul reminds us that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and that we should care for like we would this sanctuary. It’s not out of vanity, but out of wanting to give our best to God’s work.

 A huge part of the exterior of a house is about hospitality. If a house is run down, not maintained well, you tend to avoid it. If there are bars on the windows and no trespassing signs, you are sure you’re not welcome.

 But when there are flowers and a welcome mat and it looks like someone is home, maybe sitting on the front porch waving as you go by, that’s a completely different feel.

 As God does the work of exterior restoration in our lives, we make this change. The bars come off of the windows of our lives. We’re no longer in safety mode with our lives shut tight from others. Instead we are physically present in a relaxed and welcoming way that blesses and heals others and draws them into God’s love. Think of Daniel’s witness of the joy and health of following God’s dining plan.

 I want to encourage you to partner with God in the work of exterior restoration so that you have physical energy and can enjoy working with God and restoring the world. It’s important work. It’s work that impacts every part of our lives. Did you hear her comment, when we have an illness, it impacts everything else in our lives.

 So today, commit yourself to the next step of exterior restoration, to taking care of your body as the temple of God so that you can enjoy the work of welcoming others into God’s Kingdom in Jesus’ name.