

RESTORATION

A Chat for Faith Teams

Accompanying the Devotional Series

"In Everyone You Meet: Encounters with the Risen Christ"

By The Rev. Dr. Walt Lichtenberger

Gathering Together - (10 minutes: 0:00- 0:10)

Introduce yourself around the table. Share your name and something about yourself that others may not know.

Light a candle and invite God's Spirit to be present.

Opening Prayer: *Ask for a volunteer to pray the following...*

Gracious God, life is fragile and easily broken. In your compassion and forgiveness, heal the hurting parts of our lives. Restore us with your presence so that we might know the healing that passes all understanding. Be Present in our conversation today. Help us in our learning to be kind, inquisitive, and responsive to your grace. Make us aware in our listening and speaking that you have gifted each of us with wisdom and experiences to share. Give us the courage that we need to welcome change and transformation. Through Jesus Christ, amen.

Introduction: (5 minutes: 0:10- 0:15)

Early in my life, I received the gift of a toy chest. It was handmade by my Grandpa Weite. It had a green vinyl padded top that was a seat, though I don't recall ever sitting on it. On the front, he attached a wood cut-out of Bugs Bunny that he drew.

These days, the toy chest is in my basement and holds a small collection of items for any visiting children. Throughout my childhood, however, it was filled with all sorts of treasures.

There were trucks, action figures, lego pieces, and an assortment of match-box cars. All of them mixed up and in one place. In a constant state of being jumbled, the toys rested atop each in strange contortions. There were so many toys that the chest lid didn't close properly. Maybe that is why the chest didn't get used as a bench!

At the start of playtime, you had to rummage through the toy box. Mine was a perpetual search for 'lost' toys. Things always seemed to be hiding. While looking for a particular toy, you would invariably find a toy that you hadn't seen in a while. By the time I discovered the item I was looking for, I always had a bunch of extra toys for play.

To this day, the sound of my toy box rummaging lives in the recesses of my memory. It was a cacophony of plastic clinking against plastic, wood thumping against other wood, and metal clanging against metal. Occasionally, I will hear this when I observe children at play; it always takes me back to my childhood toy box.

There was a space at the bottom of the toy box where the broken bits and pieces accumulated. In one corner, you might find a single plastic wheel attached to a metal axle with no vehicle in sight. There was always a piece to a forgotten puzzle. Perhaps, you would find a leg or torso of an figure out of action.

Buried under all the toys that got playtime was a 'junk-yard' of discarded plastic, wood, and metal. Although each part once had a purpose, brought childhood joy, and was connected to something bigger - by the time the broken bits found their way to the bottom of the toy box, they were useless. The garbage was their destiny.

When Jesus walked the roads around the Sea of Galilee, he encountered brokenness. Instead of at the bottom of a toy chest, it was in the lives of hurting people. Everywhere he went, Jesus heard the cries of real people crying out for help.

Jesus responded by healing. In so doing, he made a bold proclamation about God's desire to bring restoration. The reign of God sought to put broken pieces back together. Shalom - peace - wholeness was part and parcel of God's dream for all people. Jesus freely shared this gift with the crowds. Encounters with the Risen Christ are restorative.

Instead of disregarding and discarding the broken parts of our lives and this world, Jesus brings restoration. With Christ, there is forgiveness and the healing presence of God. We are not left alone with our missing and busted parts. God's comfort and care give us the strength and courage that we need to face challenges.

What is more, in Christ, there is a connection to a community. The Christian community that gathers around its Risen Lord is to be a place of hospitality and mutual support. At least that is what Jesus teaches. You are the light of the world. You are salt. Baptize and teach everything that I told you.

When Jesus breathed the Spirit upon that early gathering of Christians in the locked room, post-Easter, he resurrected its life. Since that moment, the Spirit continues to renew, reanimate, and restore that gathering of imperfect and broken disciples.

Restoration is about more than putting one life back together; it is about bringing life back to the whole community. It is the ongoing resurrecting work of the Spirit to which God invites us to take part.

In Christ's Light,
Pastor Walt

Reading God’s Word: (5 minutes: 0:15- 0:20)

Luke 4: 16-21

“When [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Responding to God’s Word: (5 minutes: 0:20- 0:25)

Initial reactions (5 minutes)

What surprises you about this story? What initial questions emerge?

How does it make you feel?

What does it teach us about Jesus, God, and restoration?

Exploring Restoration (45 minutes: 0:25- 1:10)

Choose one or more of the following options to generate group discussion.

Option A: Digging Deeper into Scripture:

At the time of Jesus, illness, disabilities, mental illness, physical deformity, etc. was viewed as a sign of sin and disfavor with God. Those who were in these categories were seen as unclean and excluded from full participation in the life of the community. Jesus’s ministry of healing demonstrated a different set of values. Contrary to the “common sense,” was Jesus’s radical inclusion of those on the margins. He demonstrated that God desired restoration of all people and community.

These are additional readings from scripture to broaden the conversation on Restoration. You are invited to read them and then answer the questions below.

Matthew 8:28-34: "When he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demoniacs coming out of the tombs met him. They were so fierce that no one could pass that way. Suddenly they shouted, "What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" Now a large herd of swine was feeding at some distance from them. The demons begged him, "If you cast us out, send us into the herd of swine." And he said to them, "Go!" So they came out and entered the swine; and suddenly, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the water. The swineherds ran off, and on going into the town, they told the whole story about what had happened to the demoniacs. Then the whole town came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their neighborhood."

Matthew 5:43-44: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, "

Ephesians 5:1-2: Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Mark 3:7-12: "Jesus departed with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him; hearing all that he was doing, they came to him in great numbers from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, beyond the Jordan, and the region around Tyre and Sidon. He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him. Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are the Son of God!" But he sternly ordered them not to make him known."

Matthew 12:9-14: "He went on from there and entered their synagogue. And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse him. He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him."

Questions for discussion:

Which of the passages above resonate with you the most? How does that text relate to Luke 4:16-21?

Which of the passages make the least sense to you? Why?

What do we learn about restoration from the above scripture? What promises are made? What is not promised? What is the time table of restoration? What does it look like to be restored by God?

When have you experienced the restoration of God? Was this experience what you had prayed for or was it different from your expectations?

Option B: Connecting Bible Stories to Our Own Story

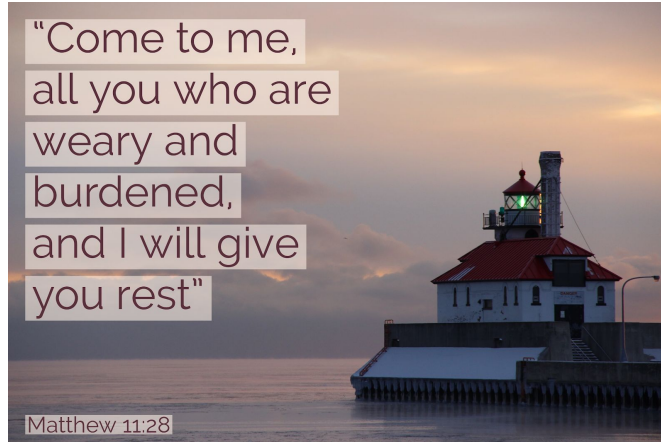
Imagine that you were there in that synagogue in Nazareth when Jesus read from Isaiah. How do you think you would have felt to hear him announce that the reading was fulfilled in your hearing?

How might that have sounded to you if you were someone who was poor, broken hearted, or had a loved one imprisoned? What might you have heard if you were a wealthy patron of the synagogue?

Imagine that Jesus walked into a worship service and after reading from the book of Isaiah said that his mission in life was to fulfill that passage. How would you have responded? What would you say to him during the coffee hour?

Option D: Inspirational Images





Discuss the Inspirational images above. How do you connect or disconnect with them? What do they say about restoration? What images would you choose to go with these scripture texts?

Option E: Gleaning Wisdom from Experience:

Look at the following questions through the lens of your Faith Team. Allow for the recurring foci and conversations of the group to guide your conversation.

Where do you experience restoration in your life? Where is it most absent?

What issues are you dealing with that could be reframed through God's desire for restoration?

What concerns you most in our community as a person of faith? Where are we most in need of restoration? Why? What can be done about it?

CALL to ACTION (5 minutes: 1:10-1:15)

Based on your conversation as a group, consider the following questions:

What action does God's desire for restoration inspire in you?

How might you be able to share your time, talent, and treasure in response?

What might we do as a community of faith together in response?

Bringing Our Time to a Close (10 minutes: 1:15-1:25)

Sharing of appreciation for learning: *Ask each person to name a single insight or learning that they will take home with them.*

Salt, Light, and Prayer: Go around the table a second time. Ask folks to share three things: 1) something positive from their week; 2) something with which they are struggling; 3) someone who is in their prayers.

The Lord's Prayer: Close with saying Jesus' prayer together (choose a version as a group)

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

-or-

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Appoint someone to be recorder of the prayer requests. At the start of next week, the recorder can remind the Faith Team of the previous week's prayer concerns. This will allow for updates. Your Faith Team might also want to send a note to those for whom it prays.