

Epiphany Sermon Series: "Is It All About Location?"

"Renovation"

Salem United Methodist Church

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Matthew 5:21-37; I Corinthians 3:1-9

February 16, 2014

Rev. Sue Shorb-Sterling

Our Epiphany Sermon Series asks a rhetorical question, "Is It All About Location?" So far we have not defined the word, "it," and won't today either. "It" is whatever each of us wants to make it. "It" could mean faith, church, God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit.... Sometimes the sermons have encouraged us to look at location as a place that is important. Other times we have seen how God's grace moves us from one point on our faith journey to another. Today we will continue to look at how God's grace can be like a renovation.

No matter how much we love our home and its location, after living in it for a number of years, our décor can age quicker than we do. When we realize this, we have two choices. One, we choose to either live with it, closing our eyes to our outdated surroundings, or two, we choose to renovate by updating our living space. We can renovate the exterior with new shutters, a new paint job, new roof, or update the landscaping. We can renovate the interior by updating the kitchen and/or the bathrooms, replacing outdated floors, or simply adding a fresh coat of paint with new curtains. Renovating the home's interior while living in it can be challenging. There is the inconvenience of not being able to use the space. There is the dust. There may be frustration with the contractors who are not working fast enough. There are moments where one thinks insanity just may set in. Here is a video, "How to Renovate Your Kitchen in 60 seconds and not Go Insane." If only all renovations happened that easily and quickly. None of us would go insane if it took a minute, but usually renovations take longer than planned. Often it costs more than we estimated because we run into unanticipated problems. Whether we take down a wall to create a more open concept plan, strip everything down to the studs to start over, or tear out the paneling, renovation takes time and perseverance. Again, we have choices. We can follow the plan or give up. Either way we will live with the consequences. We will either have a beautiful newly renovated space or we will live with the consequences of an unfinished space. It is the promise of the newly renovated living space that gives us hope and pushes us forward until everything is completed and put in its place. Then no matter how stressful the renovation has been, we say, "It was worth it!"

All three of our scriptures illustrate God's renovation in our lives. We first see this in Moses' sermon to the Israelites. Moses lays out God's renovation plan: to follow God's commandments. If the Israelites follow the plan, it will be worth it. They will experience a great life. If they don't follow God's plan, their life will not be worth it. The choice is theirs. With home renovations, there are many choices that have to be made. We choose the style we want. We make color choices. We choose the brand name. We make decisions about cost so we can stay within our budget. All of these choices are crucial. Whether we make wise choices or bad ones, we will be living with our choices for some time. If we make the wrong choice, it may seem like a life or death decision because we will have to live with its consequences. With God's renovation plan, Moses gives two choices for the people before they enter into the Promised Land. Choose God and live. Don't choose God and die. Choose to walk in God's

ways and the consequences are a new life. God desires that we have life. God desires to come into our lives, take out the old, outdated ways, and create in us a newly refurbished, blessed space that offers a new life. For years God offered these choices to the people. They chose to live in a place in which the offer of renovation was refused.

So God sends Jesus who takes this same renovation plan. This time Jesus is more specific. He instructs what needs to be torn out and what new needs to be replaced. The difference between Moses' sermon and Jesus' sermon is the difference between a renovation blueprint and a renovation computer app. Moses unrolled the blueprint and said this is what we don't do. Jesus downloaded the app and touched the screen so we can see what needs to be taken out, how it is to be taken out, exactly what will be replaced, and what it will look like when it is finished. In the passage from the Sermon on the Mount that was read today, Jesus takes one aspect of God's plan- the sixth commandment, "Do not murder" and shows us how like a house that the decor ages before our very eyes without us noticing it, we don't hear the words of God's plan anymore. Jesus states that one doesn't have to end a life to kill. One's words of anger can kill another's spirit. But God, along with our willingness to follow the plan, can tear off the dirty wallpaper of our hearts and get rid of the pain that words have caused. Our part of the plan is to go and make amends with the one who has hurt us. If this forgiveness is accepted, it creates a whole new color scheme that brightens the newly refurbished space. Then we can enjoy living in this clean, restored place. And we can say, "It was worth it!"

Our third scripture today is from Paul's letter to the conflicted church at Corinth. They were fighting about everything: who was the more spiritual, who had more wisdom, which pastor was the better one, in this case, a man named Apollos or Paul. Paul's letter is meant to bring sanity into their insane existence. They are killing the church with their words and actions. It is time for a make-over. Paul shows them the ugliness of their home, the ugliness of their heart. For Paul, God is the only one who can take the ugliness and create beauty. The rest of us are just the construction workers following God's blueprint app. No one person is better than another. We each have a job. Some of us may tear out the old, while others replace it with the new. We each are important to God's renovation plan, the creation of God's perfect kingdom on earth.

A renovation plan can look beautiful on paper or on a computer screen, but unless it is followed and executed properly, the renovation will not be worth the time and effort put into it. For the renovation to be successful, one has to follow the plan. For God's renovation to be successful, our obedience to the plan is crucial. This is not the obedience like a dog who obeys his master's every command to sit, lie down, or roll over. It is not blindly doing what one is told. The obedience that God asks of us is to listen with our minds and hearts. We need to open up the very core of our being to connect with God. A contractor who thinks he is following the renovation plan will check in with the designer or architect to see if he is doing it correctly. So we are to check in with God, to listen to God with the very core of our being. When we do this check in, when we open our hearts, God's heart can begin and continue the work of transforming and renovating our lives. This process never ends in this lifetime. It is ongoing. We will not see the finished renovation in our lifetime on earth, but we do get glimpses of what it is going to look like when it is finished. And it will be stunningly beautiful.

God's renovation process is an affair of the heart. It is God's love for us. Our obedience to God is an affair of our heart. It is our love for God. Both are bound together like a marriage

covenant between two people. God's renovation process and our obedience bind us together in a covenant, too. God will be our Renovator if we are open to the renovation and assist in the process. As with home renovations, God's renovation process can be messy. It can take time, patience, and perseverance, too, but when it is completed, we will say, "It was worth it!"

Resources: *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol. 1*, David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds.; "How to Remodel a Kitchen in 60 Seconds (Time Lapse)" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-XemGZWnSE>

