

***Lenten Sermon Series: From wRecked to Restored-“From Forfeit to Fruitful”***

***Salem United Methodist Church***

***Jeremiah 31:31-34; John 12:20-33; Psalm 51:1-12***

***March 22, 2015***

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This Lenten sermon series is called, “From wRecked to Restored.” The “w” in wrecked is silent, so we capitalized the “R” in the word. This way it connects with the word “Restored.” As we journey to the death of Christ and his Resurrection, we are exploring how the love of God can restore the wrecked parts of our lives and the world to a new existence.

Everything has a purpose. When it wears out or has lost its purpose, there may be ways to repurpose it. My grandparents grew up during the Great Depression. They were poor farmers. Every item on their small farm was valued. If a tool broke, my grandfather would find a way to fix it, because there was no money to buy a new one. My grandmother remembered as a child watching the men unload the bags of feed for the animals. The feed bags were printed in calico prints. She and her sister would begin the process of choosing which feed bag, once it was emptied, would be sewn into a Sunday dress for them. When the Sunday dress became worn, then the dress would become their “everyday” dress. When this dress became worn, it would be cut into patches for a quilt or used for rags. One piece of fabric had four different uses. My grandparents’ generation were repurposing before repurposing became a popular term. Everything has a purpose. Here’s another example of repurposing. My father loved cars. One day he went to the junkyard and purchased two worn-out 1949 Plymouths. He took the good pieces from these two junked cars and built a car that when he took it to competitive car shows it would win the “Best of Show” award. Two cars that were forfeited, given up, were able to be restored. Two cars that were destined to rust into oblivion became fruitful again. Everything has a purpose. Today salvaging has become a big business. When an old building is about to be torn down, there are businesses that will go in and take out all the beautiful woodwork, architectural pieces, and the historical details. Then they or others will take what has been salvaged and transform it into creative, beautiful functional pieces. An old oak door can be reclaimed into a head board for a bed. An antique claw foot cast iron tub can be turned into an outdoor seat by having the side cut out, repainted, fit with comfy cushions. A US Navy foot locker becomes a cabinet for a sink. Everything has a purpose, even old, worn out things. The things some see as having no use and believe should be destroyed; others see as having potential and breathe new life into it.

This is how God views humanity. We have purpose. We will always have purpose to God no matter how rotten we become. When the people of Judah had been living as they wanted and not how God told them to live, God had the prophet Jeremiah tell them some horrible things. In Jeremiah 18:11-12 God speaks, “Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the LORD: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings. But they say, “It is no use! We will follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of our evil will.” When these people refused to turn from their evil ways, God had no use for them, no purpose. They were a stubborn people. Have you ever known anyone who was stubborn? Other terms we can use for stubborn are headstrong, willful, obstinate, contrary, inflexible, or pigheaded. Stubborn people will not change their attitude or position on something despite any good reason or argument to do so. The people of Judah were this kind of people. God is ready to throw them on the trash heap. Jeremiah was sent to convince them to turn away from worshipping other gods and turn back to God, but he wasn’t able to do so. They were having a lot of fun worshipping the other gods. So God tells Jeremiah to preach to the Israelites that God was sick of their evil ways. Jeremiah was to take a clay pot, throw it down, and smash it to demonstrate what God would do to them. That’s pretty harsh. Later on God gives completely different words to Jeremiah. God states that he will create something new, a new covenant. God is taking something God forfeited, those stubborn, obstinate people, and will transform for a purpose. God will write the law on their hearts. A few weeks ago we talked about God writing the law on stones. God is creating new hearts in the people, transforming their evil into love through the power of forgiveness. And will blot out all memory of their sin. It’s like the past didn’t exist. When I look at the pictures of the repurposed pieces of furniture, after a while I don’t see what they formerly were. They are born anew. The old is gone.

In Lent we sometimes talk about giving things up. As we make these sacrifices we are then reminded of the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross. But then there are people who give up things they don't like anyways such as brussel sprouts or liver. What good is that? This Lent we've been inviting us to begin a new spiritual discipline: such as doing daily devotions, worshipping every Sunday, creating worship experiences outside of Sunday, curbing our spending and instead giving the money to a mission, such as ASP, and finding time to serve others in some way. The purpose of spiritual disciplines is to discover the new covenant that God has already placed in our hearts. The purpose of spiritual disciplines is to repurpose our lives. Practicing spiritual disciplines is forfeiting something else in our lives so that we can be repurposed or transformed into something fruitful for God.

Rev. Craig and Lisa McLaughlin of Mt. Zion UMC in Bel Air were praying for God to transform the life of their daughter, Hannah. She became an "instant addict" in middle school when she was introduced to drugs and alcohol. Her family didn't know it at the time, but Hannah was self-medicating, as a means to deal with being sexually abused when she was younger. Hannah had been in various treatment facilities and participated in twelve step programs. After being introduced to heroin, she began spiraling out of control. She was arrested and served time in a juvenile detention center. One day she decided she was quitting and threw her dope and the paraphernalia in the dumpster. Later as she was crashing and in need of a fix, she went back to the dumpster to find her stuff, but everything was gone. Then she noticed the writing on the side of the dumpster, "Everything will be ok." She saw this as a sign from God. But later she found her way back into the drug world and was trafficked to earn money to pay for her high. Her parents found her and brought her home, but Hannah continued to battle her addictions. Her mother said that it was "like watching a long, slow suicide." On March 24, 2014 she found her daughter dead from an overdose. Throughout these years of addiction, her parents and her church prayed for a miraculous healing, but God did not do that. Her parents do not believe that their prayers were in vain. Instead they believe that God was always present with Hannah. "She lived amid all this love and all this prayer, but Hannah didn't become a bitter, angry, or hateful person. She never lost her heart." A Facebook post states: A huge thank you to all of you who loved Hannah, prayed for her, encouraged, her, helped her to try to be sober-you poured so much love into her heart. Some people might think it all didn't work, but I know it all made a huge difference. Because of all our love Hannah was able to remain a loving, caring, grateful person despite the horror that she couldn't escape. True love is never wasted." Heroin is the number one crime problem in the state according to our governor. The number of overdoses has risen by 60% in two years. Hannah's story is being told to educate others about heroin's lethal dangers. And to educate their loved ones that true love is never wasted.

God's true love is not wasted on humanity when Jesus faced his death on the cross. Jesus' birth, childhood, baptism, teaching, healing, misinterpretations, his trial, crucifixion, resurrection, and returning to God in the ascension were not wasted. The incarnation, God made flesh in Jesus, is God's gift of love to us. Christ's life, death, and resurrection becomes our life, death, and resurrection. Those parts of us that are wasted, trashed, forgotten, lost, or forfeited, God reclaims, repurposes, and restores. The image of a grain of wheat buried in the ground as a dead seed is transformed to create life, to produce more wheat, to bear fruit. This is our life. We don't lose it, but God transforms it in some way so we can serve, so we can bear fruit. Hannah's parents will never be the same. A part of them died when Hannah died. But God is restoring their lives as Hannah's story is told, because True Love is never wasted. God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn it but that through him we would be saved. Another way of saying that is, Jesus did not come to change God's mind about us. Jesus came to change our mind about God. Just like some of us can see how a table can be made out of some salvaged wood, God can see how to take our wrecked human ways and restore us into the image of Christ. Jesus life, death, and resurrection were not wasted on us because God's love is never wasted.

**Reflection Question:** What is wrecked in your life, in the life of someone else that needs restoring? How is God leading you to be an agent of repurposing for someone? Pray for God's mercy, for God's restorative power, for God's repurposing in our lives.

**Resources:** [www.blackdogsalvage.com/](http://www.blackdogsalvage.com/); "Heroin's Tragic Story Touches UMC," <http://bwcumc.org/heroinstragic-story-touches-umc/>