

THE MESSAGE for Jan 16, 2011
Jeremiah 33:6-11
The Not-So-Random Extreme Makeover
The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller

John and Wendy did their best to provide a home for themselves and their three daughters. John was a youth minister and Wendy was a nurse. At times, Wendy would not work so she could stay at home and care for the girls. John and Wendy would shop in thrift stores and reclaim furniture from dumpsters and on the sidewalk in front of people's houses. After years of renting, a new job gave them the opportunity to buy a house of their own, to provide some stability, and build up some equity.

The only house they could afford was a run-down fixer-upper in the suburbs of L.A. It was hardly a dream house. It was painted such a strange color of blue that the neighbors called it "the Smurf house." About the only thing the house had going for it was the address. It was located on Hope Street.

As it turned out, the house needed more work than they had anticipated. The pipes were rusted and leaking, and toxic black mold was growing in the walls. John and Wendy didn't have the time, or the skill, or the money to make the repairs that house desperately needed. They joked saying that the only way they'd get their dream house was for some rich guy to come along and fix it up for them.

Well... that's exactly what happened. One day, they woke-up to the sound of a bullhorn blaring, "Good morning, Cox family!" It was Ty Pennington and the team from *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, who showed up to work their magic on John and Wendy's dilapidated house.

If you're not familiar with the show, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, is a popular reality shows on TV. Each week a deserving and needy family like John and Wendy are sent on a one-week vacation while a team of servants works 24/7 to transform their home into a place of beauty and functionality.

For families struggling with health issues, physical disabilities, grief, or financial strain, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* provides them with more than just a new home. They get a fresh start, a new beginning, an opportunity to move beyond their hurts and hardships and begin living a new life.

That's what happens on "Reveal Day," the seventh day. The Cox family returned to find their ugly, rundown, toxic house transformed into a place of beauty and joy. They screamed and giggled and cried with delight. Someone did for them what they could not have done for themselves. Now they really were living on Hope Street.

A similar experience happened for the Litschi family here in Myerstown back in 2008. They won the *Channel 27 Mid-State Home Makeover Contest*. They and their 12 children all with special needs got a new lease on life. It happens!

Don't you love stories like that? It warms your heart.

Amber and I love watching *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* with Ty and his team because it's about more than just restoring a house. It's about restoring lives. The show taps into a hunger that draws us in, perhaps because we too long to experience a similar restoration in our lives.

Do you hunger for your life to be different?

Do you hunger for our world to be different? Only God in Christ Jesus can satisfy that hunger.

What Ty and his team do for houses, Jesus and his team of disciples do for people.

God is in the restoration business. And when we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," we are asking God to restore us, reconcile us, recreate us, and make all things new. The way things are right now is not the way they need to stay.

That's what our reading from Jeremiah is all about. The year is 587 B.C. The holy city of Jerusalem is being taken over by Nebuchadnezzar and his army from Babylon. Within a year the city will fall and the people will be deported to Babylon.

But before that happens, God calls the prophet Jeremiah to share a message with the people -- telling them that they have become so corrupt and so sinful that God is going to tear down the city in order to restore it. (*Read Text...*)

In any restoration project things need to be torn down in order for it to be built up.

Jeremiah's message is not well received – surprise... surprise... He reveals the people's sin of idolatry, their injustice, and their self-centered living. He predicts that Jerusalem will be destroyed by the Babylonians and there is nothing the people can do about it. Jeremiah is the bearer of really bad news. He tells the people not to resist. He says that they will be taken captive into Babylon. As you might have guessed his message is not well received by the people.

The king, Zedekiah, is not real happy with Jeremiah's words of gloom and doom. The king is so upset with Jeremiah and his "God message" – he throws Jeremiah in prison. And there he stays until Jerusalem falls – just as God, through Jeremiah, said it would be.

Jeremiah is not just a prophet of gloom and doom though. He also proclaims a powerful message of hope and new life. Jeremiah tells the people that God is tearing down the sin-filled structures and systems the people created so that God can rebuild and restore God's people. Listen to these God promises. God promises to forgive the people of their sins, to heal their brokenness, to bring them back from captivity, to fill the empty streets of Jerusalem with the sounds of laughter and joy, to transform their lives with

abundance and prosperity like they've never seen. Sounds like an extreme makeover of biblical proportions to me... doesn't it?

All of this is God's doings because God is good. *All the time.* And all the time, *God is good.* God's steadfast love endures forever. God is a God of restoration. God gets involved in our lives – and when God gets involved our lives are transformed.

Jeremiah predicted all of this would happen. And it did! History tells us that God lives up the promise of restoration. What Ty Pennington and his team can do for homes, Jesus and his team of disciples can do for people.

We are in the life restoration business because Jesus is in the life restoration business.

Mike – at 30 years old had it all – or so it seemed. He was bright, handsome, lots of ambition and drive. He was the envy of his friends, a beautiful wife, two beautiful daughters, a huge house, and lots of toys. All of this was possible because Mike was driven to succeed in his business. And succeed he did.

On the outside Mike's life looked perfect. On the inside his life was slowly falling apart. When problems occurred at work or at home (and problems come for all of us) when problems came for Mike, he would self-medicate with drugs and alcohol. Before long, the drugs and alcohol took over Mike's life. He spun out of control. He lost his freedom, his business, his moral bearings, his wife and daughters – everything, gone.

Mike was lost and hopeless and considered ending his own life. Instead, he turned to Don, a business associate. Don was success in his business too and Mike always admired him. Don always seemed to be grounded in something larger than himself.

When they met for coffee, Mike had not planned on sharing anything personal with Don. But he did. There was something about Don that allowed Mike to share, and share he did... everything... his guilt and shame, his pain, fears and failures.

That's when Mike found out that Don was a recovering alcoholic who had experienced the restoration and the new life that God provides through AA. Instead of judging and rejecting him, Don embraced Mike, sharing his own story of struggle, and assured Mike that there was hope, hope in the One who loved him and wanted to restore his life.

Don took Mike to an AA meeting that day, and that's when Mike began a journey of healing and restoration. It wasn't an easy journey. Mike had to give up control, face the painful truth about himself, and seek reconciliation with those he hurt. And yet, every step along the way, Mike sensed that he wasn't alone. He sensed God at work restoring his life.

Folk's that ministry is going on right here at Friedens. God is at work restoring the lives of people who are hurting and helpless and in need of God's saving grace. God's grace is at work in this place.

What Ty Pennington and his team can do for homes, Jesus and his team of disciples can do for people and the world around us.

God is in the restoration business. If Ty Pennington and his team showed up at your house and knocked on your door, you probably have a room or two in need of restoration. True? So consider this God is sending Jesus to knock on the door of your heart. What is in need of restoration in your life?

Is there a pattern of destructive or addictive behavior in need of healing?

Is there a relationship with someone that needs to be mended?

Is there a wall of guilt or shame that needs to come down?

What is it in your life right now in need of restoration?

When we pray "give us this day our daily bread," we are asking that God would enter into those rooms of our lives and do the work of restoration that we are unable to do for ourselves. We pray not only for our restoration, we pray for the restoration of the world.

Last week I challenged you to join me in collecting 225 pounds of food stuff for our outreach ministry to LCCM (Lebanon County Christian Ministries). The bags have started coming in. You walked past them on your way in to worship this morning. I'm asking you to bring in \$20 worth of food stuff - not from your pantry at home - but from the grocery store. Bring it by Feb 6 so that we can touch the lives of others with God's grace.

We're doing this not because it's the right thing to do, although it is. We're doing this because God's calls us to be agents of restoration and reconciliation in this hurting and hostile world.

God is in the restoration business and we are too. So, live your life transformed by Christ and God will do amazing things in us and through us. Someday Christ will come again for the greatest reveal of all times - himself. Until that day, we live by the hope and joy and peace that is ours in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.