

THE MESSAGE for December 12, 2010

Advent 3

Matthew 11:2-11

Restoration

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The other evening we had some friends over to our house for dinner. We spent much of our time together talking about the joys and challenges of parenthood, while our children played together in the other room. We talked about how hard it is to help our children learn self-discipline. How self-discipline begins by helping them learn responsibilities and respect by doing some basic chores around the house. The real challenge is getting them to do those chores the first time we ask – not the fifth or sixteenth time.

For instance in our house I find myself repeating things like:

please, pick up your toys,
get your coat and shoes on we're leaving,
get dressed the bus will be here any minute,
did you feed your fish yet,
did you brush your teeth yet,
did you flush and wash your hands,
would you please stop jumping on the bed...

When it comes to building self-discipline in our children, I'm guessing the #1 challenge most of us parents wrestle with is what I call "the messy room syndrome." Messy rooms seem to be a common problem. I've come to realize that a kid's room usually resembles either a landfill or a small town that's been hit by a tornado. How many of us parents have ever said (or children heard these words), "You can't go out with your friends until your room is cleaned up and your bed is made!"

There comes a time when our patience wears thin and then wears out. After the umpteenth time of reminding, persuading, coaxing, and even twisting an arm or two (literally), there comes a moment, when a lack of response or a lack of self-discipline from a son or daughter, when a parent simply – for lack of a better term – explodes. We might use phrases like: unhinged, unglued, unnerved, unraveled, freaked out, and a favorite in our household is – blow a gasket.

Have you ever blown a gasket? It's that moment, right after you've been pushed to the edge, your patience is gone, you've had enough. Phrases come spouting out, like: "I've had it!" or "We're done with this!" or "That's it! No more!" It's usually delivered in a loud tone, with a red face, maybe even a protruding vein in the forehead. This is the moment that leads to what is needed most, "a parent timeout with Jesus."

We find a similar situation in the Old Testament book of Isaiah chapter 35 one of our assigned readings for today. The people are in a time out with God. In chapter 34 God has had enough with God's people. God is really frustrated and angry with their

disobedience and their unfaithfulness. Tired of repeatedly asking them to clean up their rooms and take out the garbage of their lives – so to speak. Read chapter 34 of Isaiah sometime today.

In that chapter we read about God’s anger, and wrath, and righteous indignation poured out on all nations for their self-centered sinfulness, their injustice, and their unfaithfulness to God and God’s ways. In other words God is really, really – I mean really – peeved at the mess people have made with their lives and the world.

God has had enough. God’s heart is breaking because God’s people continued to live in a pigpen and failed to clean up the garbage in their lives. What grieves God the most is seeing people choosing to live outside of God’s life-giving ways. God has had it! God blows a gasket and announces: “That’s it! I’m done! No more!”

But there *is* more... with God there *is always* more...

In chapter 35, God announces a promise of global restoration. Kind of like saying, “If you people aren’t going to clean your lives or the world, I will, with or without you. What’s it going to be?” We read about God’s grace and mercy restoring everything – the wilderness, the desert, the crocus, and all living things. There will be peace and harmony throughout the land. And God’s people are called to participate.

God saves! God restores!

God is in the restoration business, which includes you and me and everyone and everything. The picture is so beautiful so powerful that no one can miss it. It’s heaven on earth, Isaiah declares. God’s restoration looks like this:

The weak will be strengthened.
 The fearful will be empowered.
 Blind eyes will be opened.
 Ears will be unstopped.
 The lame will leap,
 the tongue-tied will be loosed,
 the hot deserts will be cooled,
 the parched places watered.
 The ransomed will be rescued, the sorrowful turned to joy.
 The diseased will be healed, and the dead will be raised.

(break into singing) Hallelujah! May I have a hallelujah please? (sing again) Hallelujah! Oh yes!!! This is what God promises to do. This is what God has been doing throughout the ages. Our “Hallelujahs” are very appropriate.

Yes?!?! But?!?! We might say. Looking around we might wonder if God really is at work in the world restoring all things. Open the paper or turn on the news and we might wonder if God’s ancient promises will ever come true?

There's a sense in which the world today looks a lot like it did in Isaiah's day as described in chapter 34. Things seem rather bleak and uncertain, somewhat out of control, like a runaway train going downhill, and we are all on it.

Isaiah says to the people, "Trust God!" I say to you, "Trust God!"

Do you ever wonder if God really is at work in the world restoring all things as God promises? That's what John the Baptist was wondering – wondering if Jesus was the one as our reading from Matthew reveals. Listen to these words....

(read text from Matthew 11:2-11)

The world looked pretty dismal to John the Baptist. He's been arrested, beaten, and thrown in jail. He knows his fate for proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah and Savior of the world. The world leaders at the time, those who held power, didn't see a need for a Messiah or a Savior. They didn't see a need for Jesus. I wonder... I wonder... if our world leaders today realize how much we need a Messiah or a Savior. I wonder... if we see a need for Jesus in our lives today.

John the Baptist was wondering, wondering if Jesus was the one. He sends some of his disciples, to ask Jesus a question: "Are you the one who is to come, or should we wait for another?" John wants to know. Anyone in his situation would want to know. Things had not gone the way John had envisioned.

Has that ever happened to you? If Jesus is the one why have things gone so poorly in our lives and in the world?

Faithful followers in the Bible, including many of the prophets, often wondered if God really was making good on the promises. John wants to know, the disciples want to know, and we want to know – Jesus, are you the one?

When our situation or our experiences don't match up with God's message of restoration, it's natural to wonder, perhaps even doubt. Does God really care? Is God really at work in the world restoring all things?

Jesus says "Yes, God is!" It may not be what we expect but here's proof. I love Jesus' answer. He says, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them." (Once again, sing) Hallelujah!

These are images of God's restoration, Jesus is saying. These are things we can see and experience in our midst. Jesus is saying, "Take that! Take that back to John!" Take that back to all of those places where self-discipline has fallen by the wayside. Take that back to all of the messy rooms and cluttered sinks where lives are piled high with stuff that blocks our view of God at work in our lives – blocking our view of God restoring hope and faith and new life in the world.

God's promise of restoration is happening right here in our midst all around us. And God is counting on us to participate in that restoration business.

How? We might ask. How might we partner with God to help the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead raised, and the poor have good news brought to them? How might we participate?

It begins with these three considerations:

First, consider that God's restoration begins with us. Accept the fact that each one of us is a work in progress. God doesn't call the qualified, God qualifies the called. Jesus is God's gift to help us qualify, to help us clean up our lives everyday, to forgive us and help us forgive one another. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross qualifies us for God's restoration work in the world.

Second, consider that we are ambassadors for Christ. We are called (and qualified) to be about his work of restoration in the world. We have a job title. We are ambassadors for Christ. It's fitting then that we check in with HQ from time to time making sure that we are on the right mission.

They say, "Seeing is believing," right? So I invite you to see ourselves as a godly church on a mission to live godly lives, living self-discipline lives that are connected to Christ through:

- Prayer
- Worship
- Bible reading,
- Serving at and beyond Friedens,
- Encouraging one another in our spiritual growth,
- Giving of our financial resources as an act of faith using 10% as the guide.

Third consider that God's restoration happens as we engage in this life of faith together – walking together, working together, living together, on a mission together with Jesus as our guide. Every church shares the same mission – to produce disciples of Jesus.

Here at Friedens we gather to grow and go. Our mission isn't simply to gather. Our mission is to gather and grow and go to live the faith in the world as forgiven ambassadors for Christ – to help more and more people see and believe in Christ Jesus as the Messiah and Savior of the world.

God is in the global restoration business and we are too. Jesus has come to restore all things, with him, connected to him anything and everything is possible. Jesus *is* the one. He is the great restorer at work in our lives. Amen.