

Restoration

Friends and neighbors, I invite you to wonder with me this morning along the same line that inspired our wondering in our Connecting With The Word text study group this past Wednesday:

- When have you experienced restoration – that is: repair, full mending, being made whole or complete?
- And what relationship or endeavor in your life needs restoration?

I hope that we will each find our way to deeper trust in God's power of restoration at work in our lives.

With eyes open or closed, I invite us to be together in prayer. Holy Loving Spirit, we are grateful for the freedom to be gathered today for worship – on our live stream and on this land loved by First Nations and others across time and where we are now building our community. We pray that you would guide us in ways of awe and wonder as we contemplate all that your love can restore. We pray in the name of our great teacher, Jesus. Amen.

I wonder if you can recall the last time you uttered the phrase, "It takes a village!" While the origin of the phrase, "It takes a village to raise a child" is not precisely known, we understand it to have originated in the realities of traditional African and Naïve American communal cultures.

I can testify that it takes a village to knit together a worship service – from the moment a theme sparks in my spirit as I read and reread potential focus texts for a Sunday, to drawing on the work of musicians and lyricists (past and present) to create the flow of the service, to our choir preparing an anthem, to many preparing to greet, read aloud, accompany us musically and feed us afterward, to us assembling to practice quiet contemplation, sharing of our joys and concerns, and rededication of our whole selves to the love of God.

Somewhere in the middle of the process, our phenomenal Church Office Coordinator, Megan, sends me seven potential bulletin cover images (each week) from which I choose one that seems to resonate most fully with the theme of the service.

Landing on the image for today's focus on restoration sent me into pleasant reminiscence. I have been reflecting on lyrics from singer songwriter Elaine Dempsey. I met Elaine a couple of times when I volunteered weekly at a listening room called the Bugle Boy in La Grange, Texas across 2007 and 2008 (during the four years I was living in that town). Until my call to our shared ministry here in the St. Croix Valley in early 2021, the Bugle Boy was the most spiritually charged and uplifting space of community I had ever experienced.

Elaine Dempsey wrote a song entitled "Good as Gold," inspired by the Japanese art form called *kintsugi*, which is featured on today's bulletin cover. Translating to 'golden joinery,' *kintsugi* is a technique of repairing cracked pottery with gold. It is based in the Japanese philosophy of *wabi-sabi*, which values seeing beauty in the flawed and imperfect. Elaine wrote and sings:

*"I am flawed; I stand here a battered soul
And I am awed by the brokenness of this world
How can I make a difference in my fractured existence
I am flawed and I'm as good as gold."*

How beautiful, indeed, that we can shine forth beauty from the very spaces where we have experienced tears – a tear from loss, a tear from poor judgment, a tear from self-harm or inflicting pain on another, or pain being inflicted on us. Our readings for today guide us in the way of *kintsugi* (golden joinery) where there has been rending. Before we look to our readings for today, it feels fitting on this sabbatical leave-taking day to remind ourselves of the north star to which Jesus turned in his faith journey and to which we return again and again in our own.

The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) share many stories in common including a brief passage that narrates Jesus engaged in mutually appreciative, rigorous dialogue with respected religious scholars. Jesus built upon the greatest commandment of their shared Jewish faith (that of loving God with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength). He brought love of self and neighbor into the mix along with devotion to the mysterious presence we call God. Jesus was remembered as saying, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

The passion with which Jesus beckoned us to engage in love with all our heart, soul and mind also infused his work of restoration through teaching, healing, and simple presence. I imagine Jesus returned regularly to his three-fold encouragement, wondering aloud with people:

- How will you restore your relationship – your sense of belonging – with God?
- How will you restore relationship – your sense of belonging – with your neighbor?
- How will you restore your relationship – your sense of belonging – with yourself?

Let’s turn now to our readings for today for encouragement along our journeys toward restoration.

Psalm 8 has long been a personal favorite. It happened to land in our three-year cycle of readings (called the lectionary) for today. In the 3-room Lutheran school in which I was raised, our first through fourth grade class learned a sung rendition of Psalm 8 when I was 6 years old. My grandma Liza loved it, so I sang it to her at every visit until she died and at her memorial service when I was 26 years old.

The psalmist bursts forth with joyful, awe-filled appreciation for all of creation, which he attributes to a sovereign, majestic creator God. As our Connecting With The Word group discussed the passage, we found this to be the most impactful verse: *“You have made us responsible for the works of your hands, putting all things at our feet...”* The works of God’s hands includes each of us and each of our neighbors. We share responsibility for one another’s well-being. Restoration is shared work. Restoration of connection with a loving God. Restoration of loving relationships with each neighbor. Restoration within each of us of a loving relationship with ourself.

Poet and sage Jan Richardson offers a deep pattern or process by which restorative healing (golden joinery) can happen in our lives. Let’s hear again a few lessons from her blessing, *“The Healing That Comes.”*

Lesson one: We can begin down the path of restoration when we are seen by one another. She said: *“I know how long you have been waiting for your story to take a different turn, how far you have gone in search of what will mend you and make you whole.”* May we, congregation, see one another in that way.

Lesson two: Vulnerability (ooh! - that sacred discomfort that is so key to the faith experience) – that vulnerability can be a catalyst for healing. She said: *“I know the medicine that lives in a story that has been broken open.”* May we be alongside each other in breaking open our stories.

Lesson three: We can only begin healing when we share our real selves with the love of God and with one another. She said: *“I know the healing that comes in ceasing to hide ourselves away with fingers clutched around the fragments we think are none but ours.”* May we share the unveiling of our fragments with one another.

And, finally, lesson four: Restoration happens when we welcome one another into being part of our story and carrying it with us. She said: “*See how they fit together, these shards we have been carrying—how in their meeting they make a way we could not find alone.*” May we help one another find our way toward restoration.

I invite the ushers to join me in passing out these items at this time. This is my business card, and we’re going to pass one out to each person. I love how Megan helped me fit us onto the business card. It has our values. You’ll see on the front a snippet of our business – “*working with God toward love and justice.*” I hand it to you so that you will have it in hand this summer. Place it in your billfold, your money clip for when you want to share. When you are sharing with someone about the love you have found in this congregation, let them know. Invite them to find, especially a space of belonging. I wanted to zero in (on the back of the business card) on that one of our values.

- Nurture spiritual growth
- Invest in children and youth
- Commit to social justice and inclusivity
- Offer a space of belonging
- Balance innovation and tradition

Friends, the space of belonging is us. The space is the ever expanding safe harbor. The space is a circle of beloved people, where we work out our journeys toward restoration of belonging with God, with one another, and with ourselves.

I would like to close this reflection with a modern-day twist on Psalm 8. Michael Passons sang in a Christian band called Avalon in the 1990.

They recorded a hit song in 1997 called “Testify to Love.” Michael was fired from a music ministry position in 2008 because of his identity as a gay man.

In May of 2026, Passons teamed up with a country music artist, Ty Herndon, (who had been one of the first mainstream male country artists to come out publicly as gay) and former Avalon bandmate Melissa Greene to re-record the song “Testify to Love.” If you’ve been nearby me in the past week, you’ve possibly heard me either gushing about or humming this tune. And in coming days, I encourage you to listen to Michael, Ty and Melissa sing this anthem from the fullness of their hearts. Let’s hear Psalm 8 in a new way with just these open lyrics and chorus:

*“All the colors of the rainbow, all the voices of the wind
every dream that reaches out, that reaches out to find where love begins
every word of every story, every star in every sky
every corner of creation lives to testify!*

*For as long as I shall live, I will testify to love
be a witness in the silences when words are not enough
with every breath I take, will give thanks to god above
for as long as I shall live, I will testify to love”*

St. Croix United Church, I think you are fantastic, so loving, and so brave. I will miss you while I am away on sabbatical this summer. I look forward to hearing word of the good trouble into which you throw yourselves – with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind, and all your strength. And I will be overjoyed to return to accompanying you as we continue forward for years to come – testifying to God’s love because that Love is counting on us. Amen.

Rev. Clare Gromoll

St. Croix United Church (Bayport, MN)

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Psalm 8, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13, “The Healing That Comes”