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*Genesis 33:1-17*

*Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother.*

*But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he said, ‘Who are these with you?’ Jacob said, ‘The children whom God has graciously given your servant.’ Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. Esau said, ‘What do you mean by all this company that I met?’ Jacob answered, ‘To find favor with my lord.’ But Esau said, ‘I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.’ Jacob said, ‘No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor. Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want.’ So he urged him, and he took it.*

*Then Esau said, ‘Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you.’ But Jacob said to him, ‘My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; and if they are overdriven for one day, all the flocks will die. Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.’*

*So Esau said, ‘Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me.’ But he said, ‘Why should my lord be so kind to me?’ So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house, and made booths for his cattle; therefore the place is called Succoth.*

*John 21:1-14*

*After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’ They said to him, ‘We will go with you.’ They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.*

*Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, ‘Children, you have no fish, have you?’ They answered him, ‘No.’ He said to them, ‘Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’ So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.*

*When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.’ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.*

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My beloveds, this week marks the one-year anniversary of my time with you as your pastor. I’m deeply grateful for the work that we’ve done together in Christ’s name. In that time, we’ve sung the faith and proclaimed the Word together week in and week out. We’ve had important conversations on justice, anti-racism, LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and neighborliness. We’ve prayed together at the football field, the hospital bed, the living room, the coffee shop, the beer brewery, the homeless shelter, and the restaurant (just to name a few). We’ve discussed both the blessings and the challenges of being an intergenerational congregation as we learn how to better minister to and with youth and young adults. We’ve gotten to know one another and leaned into this newest chapter in the life of this congregation.

And, in the midst of all that, I’m grateful. I’m grateful to call y’all my fellow colleagues-in-ministry for a time such as this. I’m grateful to be your pastor. I’m grateful to serve alongside you. As we bring our Stewardship Season to its conclusion, I’m grateful for the generosity of this congregation. I’m grateful to serve among a people whose expression of generosity is made manifest in myriad ways of practicing restoration in ways both great and small.

In true alliterative fashion, we began our time together talking about “Remembering.” And then we talked about “Reimagining.” And today, we will delve more deeply into our calling to be generous stewards of God's resources by exploring “Restoration.” The two stories we’ve read today, one from the Hebrew Scriptures and the other from the New Testament, are beautiful stories of restoration. That word is, of course, an umbrella term that can encompass many others - reconciliation, redemption, reconnection, renewal, or perhaps even resurrection.

You see, there are times when we hunger for restoration. There are times when we exist in such a fractured and fraught world that we come to worship exhausted by all the division and discord. I bet I’m not alone in feeling a particular kinship with our friend Jacob, whose life of trickery and deception had finally caught up with him. You see, he had spent years estranged from his brother, Esau, who had been tricked out of his birthright, a devastating act that affected not only Esau but the future generations that would come after him. Jacob had just emerged from wrestling overnight with an angel of God, walking away blessed but limping. And now, walking towards his brother, he was likely wrestling with what his brother’s response to their reunion would be. At worst, violence was erupt. At best, or so he thought, perhaps Jacob and his family would be offered a lifetime of slavery to pay a fraction of what was owed.

You see, there are times when we hunger for restoration. There are times when we exist in such a world that we wonder if restoration is a pipe dream, a foolish concept for the pollyanna’s among us. I bet I’m not alone in feeling a particular kinship with our friend Peter, who for years followed Jesus and proclaimed to be his most steadfast disciple, only to deny him thrice by that charcoal fire when it counted most. Jacob was walking on land when he was wrestling with how his brother would react. Peter, however, was swimming in the sea, with each stroke I wonder what kept him moving toward the very person he had wronged so deeply.

And know I want to share with you a curiosity that has been plaguing me this past week. I wonder what made Jacob and Peter move *toward* the very persons they had wronged. I don’t know about you, but when I’ve wronged someone, I usually try to move in the opposite direction. Because if I move *toward* the person I’ve wronged, it means I have to confront some things I'd rather let stay in the shadows. Because if I move *toward* the person I’ve wronged, it places me in an inherently *vulnerable* position that I’ve been taught to avoid my entire life. If I move *toward* the person I’ve wronged, it means I’m not in control, or - at the very least - that I have to give up the illusion that I was in control in the first place.

And yet, Jacob and Peter move forward - one by land and the other by water. They move *forward*. And that is what restoration is all about, my friends, about *moving forward* into a future promised to us by a God whose very nature is restoration. You see, there at times when we hunger for restoration. And in such moments, these passages remind us that “faithful stewardship heals us as individuals and helps us restore right relationship with one another.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

Because, friends, faithful stewardship is a coin with two sides, and these stories show us those two sides. On the one side is stewardship as being generous with our financial resources and the other side is stewardship as being generous with our time and our talents.

On the first side is the story of Jacob and Esau. Though have been estranged for many years, God has blessed them both. And in this moment of restoration, Jacob implores Esau to accept his resources as recompense for his past sins. And when confronted with this chance to continue to build his fortune, Esau says a remarkable thing: “I have enough.” Those three words are about as three countercultural words as you’ll find in the holy scriptures. “I have enough” is a phrase that is persona non grata in a world of the endless rat race to accumulate and hoard wealth. “I have enough” is a phrase that dismantles systemic poverty. “I have enough” is a phrase that feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, and cares for the widow and the immigrant. “I have enough” is a dangerous sentence in an economy built on acquiring wealth at the expense of my neighbor. “I have enough” is such a dangerous sentence because not everyone *has enough*. But such will no longer be the case when enough people have the courage of Esau to say “I have enough.”

And yet, Jacob refuses to take no for an answer. He insists on giving. He insists on being allowed the opportunity to give from his resources to do his part in restoring a relationship that had been so drastically and (seemingly) irrevocably severed. Jacob’s giving is not just a gift to his brother; it is a gift *for himself.* And that is the heart of this passage and the heart of why we take stewardship so seriously here at Guilford Park. Because giving is a gift to *all of us*. It is an act of restoration that builds community and fosters neighborliness.

And now, for the second side of the coin. If the story of Jacob and Esau reminds us of the importance of money in stewardship, the story of Peter and Jesus reminds us of the importance of the giving of our time and our talents as well. I was grateful when Rebecca Conway preached a few weeks ago and told us that money isn’t our only resource here at Guilford Park; but that the *people* of this church are equally part of our stewardship. Money is important, y’all. Without it, we can’t keep the lights on, we can’t pay our staff, we can’t run our operations, or maintain our worship services. But without the *people*, that money is as helpful as a ship without a rudder. If money is the “how,”we must never forget that the people - God’s people - are the “why.”

Maybe that’s what kept Peter swimming forward. Perhaps it was that he had forgotten by the charcoal fire that Jesus was his “why.” But this time, he swam toward a different charcoal fire, this one with his “why” right next to it, beckoning him to come and break bread with him once again. I confess to you this day that this is one of my favorite passages in all of scripture. To this day I keep a copy of this passage of John printed and displayed in my office. It’s a passage so very close to my heart because it reminds me that there never comes a time when God is done with us. There is never such a time as I, or any of God’s children, are beyond redemption. There is never such a time, my friends, that you have screwed up so miraculously as to remove you from qualification as a disciple. Yes, this church depends on the financial generosity of each and every one of you. Yes, this church needs generous giving in order to right the ship after several years of depleted giving due to an unprecedented global pandemic. But, more importantly, the future of this congregation depends on *you*. Your time. Your talents. Your discipleship. Your joy. Your passion. Your service. Your dedication.

Because all of those things are important ingredients in a recipe for restoration. Jacob and Esau shared their financial resources with one another. The resurrected Jesus called Peter and restored him to right relationship; not because Peter deserved it through any merit of his own, but simply because by God’s grace the waters of his baptism sealed him into the life of discipleship. A life that is not so easily revoked as to be deemed worthless because of our shortcomings, thanks be to God.

And so, today I hope that you and I keep moving forward - like Jacob did toward Esau, like Peter did toward the Resurrected Christ. I hope that you and keep moving forward like these persons did because they trusted that restoration would meet them in good faith. And make no mistake about it, my friends, that restoration is nothing of our making. It is a gift freely given by grace through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It’s a gift that requires generosity. It’s a gift that requires vulnerability. It’s a gift that requires practice, courage, and at times, mutual forbearance. And it is that gift that we are seeking here at Guilford Park Presbyterian Church. And every dollar you give, and every hour you serve, in an investment in that kingdom of heaven that we welcome in Christ’s name, here and now.

And so, I end this sermon in the same place I began it: in a place of sincere gratitude. Gratitude for the year behind us and the many years ahead of us. Gratitude for what God is doing in the neighborhood. Because restoration is impossible, dear neighbors, without gratitude. For it was gratitude that compelled Esau and Jacob to restore their relationship. It was gratitude, I’m sure, that compelled Peter to devote the rest of his life after today’s passage to obey Jesus’ commandment to feed his sheep. It is gratitude, my friends, for what God is doing in our midst that keeps us moving forward.

In the name of God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, may all of us, God’s beloved children, say: **Amen**.

1. This verbiage comes from the resources of *A Sanctified Art* in their Stewardship liturgical resources called “Our Money Story” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)