

The First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
“Rooted and Grounded in Love: Restoration Kingdom”  
Rev. Dr. John Judson  
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1 Kings 17:1-7  
James 5:13-20

Their family was appalled. They took one look at the house Paul and Doris were planning to buy and they were appalled. The front porch was sagging. The roof was in need of repair. The interior was a mess. The weeds outside in the lawn were about three feet tall. The garage was crumbling. In was terrible. The family tried to show them other, nicer properties. The family tried to talk them out of it, but Cindy’s grandparents Paul and Doris Seiler would have none of it. Doris loved the house and, as they say, that was that. But what the family seemed to be forgetting was two things. The first thing was that Doris could see beyond what was in front of her. She could see possibilities. She could see things as they could be. For her this aging home was already beautiful. The second thing that the family was forgetting was that Paul could make Doris’ visions a reality. He was a craftsman who could fix anything from furniture, to cabinets to porches. Anything Doris saw he could create. This home would be their next restoration project.

Do you have that image in your mind; an image of those who can take what is old and broken and restore it? Good, hang on to that for a couple of minutes while we turn to the end of James’ letter. This portion of the letter is one where people often get stuck. They get stuck for two reasons. The first is that James’ view is prescientific. He writes about healing someone who is sick. Instead of calling the doctors you ought to call the elders. Instead of taking appropriate medication you are supposed to be anointed with oil. Instead of going to the hospital we are supposed to pray and that prayer will heal. Please don’t get me wrong. I believe in prayer, but I also believe in genetics, germs, viruses, vaccinations, medications and appropriate surgeries. The second place where people get stuck is on what would appear to be a mechanistic view of prayer. In other words if we pray hard enough we will get what we want; healing, rain or anything else. If that were so the West Coast would be awash in water right now. We get stuck and when we do we often ignore the end of the letter.

What I would like us to do this morning then is to see the proverbial forest rather than the trees. And here are the trees: suffering-pray, cheerful-praise, sick-pray, sick-anoint, sick-raise up, confess-healed, and wander-brought back. While all of these doublets may seem a bit pre-scientific and perhaps overly optimistic about prayer, they show us one thing with great clarity. And that is that God is a God of restoration. God is a God of healing. God is a God of wholeness. God is a God of celebration and cheerfulness. This is the forest in James, a forest of restoration and healing. God desires that we be mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually and relationally whole. This is why God gives us people who have the gifts to be physicians, nurses, therapists, pastors, elders and friends. This is why God gives us communities of love, prayer and forgiveness. This is why God sent God’s only son into the world, not so we could go to heaven but so that we might be restored and made whole. It is, if you will, the point of this table; a reminder that Jesus gave his life to defeat the powers of this world that tear us down and

make us less than what God designed us to be. In other words, God has made each of us, God's next restoration projects.

There is however, one hitch in this image, this picture of us as God's restoration project. That hitch is that we need to admit that we need to be restored; that we are in some ways broken, a bit shabby, and in need of being renewed. I say this is a hitch because we live in a place and a time where admitting that we are less than perfect; admitting that we are less than whole and self-sufficient and in need of restoration in anyway, marks us as somehow, weak. I don't need an annual physical, I'm fine. I may feel depressed but I don't need to talk to anyone. I am afraid, but I don't want my friends and church praying for me. Now, I will be happy to pray for others, care for others, listen to others when they are in need...but I will never open myself up, perhaps even to God as needing restoration because when I do I am lost. I know that this is the way the world works because it was what I was taught about ministry. Ministers, I have been told on far too many occasions, are not supposed to have friends in the church. We are not supposed to let people know that we need their prayers and love because we are supposed to be the spiritual healers and not fellow travelers in need of restoration. We are not supposed to model the wrong kind of behavior.

The reality of being human is that we are all broken. We are all like the house Paul and Doris built, in need of restoration; clergy, church staff, elders, members, visitors. We are all there. But as I said a moment ago this is why God gives us those with the gifts to help us heal; gives us loving, praying and forgiving communities; gives us one another. So here is my challenge to us all, that as we come to the table this morning to ask ourselves, how am I allowing God to help heal me through the gifts of others, including this church community?