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Holy Vessels: "Restoration"

Psalm 80

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I grew up in a household, where my mother restored furniture. And thus, I have always thought of restoration through that lens. Strip off all the old paint, sand, stain and polyurethane. And that is exactly how restoration is presented within the context of the Church and in the Bible.

Yet, in these two sources, the Church and the Bible, we will also see restoration not just portrayed as cleansing and making new. But also, as using what is to make something even more beautiful. No cleansing or removal needed, but rather taking the given, and using it for a new purpose. Putting together what is in new ways, for different and greater purposes.

All the trash from the capital in Paraguay is put outside the city limits. These trash heaps have become home for the 2,500 people who try to live by gathering paper from the endless trash piles for 5 cents a pound. And thus, began the start of a town filled with trash known as Cateura.

Out of what appeared to be nothing, but extreme poverty and junk, came an orchestra. Oil drain pipes, bottle caps, buttons, spoons and keys were used to make clarinets and flutes. Oil drums and wooden pallets were used to make cellos, and xrays were destined to become drums.

It's like this: violins would have cost more than a house. So, after Favio Chavez had a vision of what could be with what was, he enlisted the help of a man who not only picked trash in Cateura, but who also turned what he found into something that others

were attracted to and wanted to buy. So, Favio went to Cola Gomez, the man who had never seen, nor heard a violin, to turn what was available in the junk pile into what would make marvelous music. Favio is known to say, "The world send us trash, and we send back music."

Jesus restored crucifixion. He turned that ugly arm of the Roman Empire into a place of reconciliation – the people with God and the people to one another. Jesus repurposed the cross so that which was once was a sign of violence and intimidation, became a sign post of peace, unconditional love and forgiveness. If there ever was a repurposing this what it!

Some of us this morning have moved to Cateura! We have taken up residence amidst junk – some of it is our junk, some of it is other people's junk. We are knee deep in trash. And we are there amidst it all, because we too want to do something with it. In some ways, we are like Favio Chavez – we have a vision, but we are not sure how we are going to make it happen. We know there is more to life than just existing amidst the trash, living in and surrounded by junk heaps and making of it merely 5 cents a pound. Yet, we don't know how to do more than comb through the trash, so we settle for just being trash pickers.

Yet, the truth is, we were not meant to be trash pickers, we are meant to be recyclers. So, let's talk about what it takes to bring about a restoration via recycling.

1. **We need to see it as more than just junk**, for the oil drum is not an oil drum, it is a cello, and the xray is not an xray, it is the head of a drum, and the cookie sheet becomes the base of our wonderful violin.

How are you doing when it comes to your junk pile? Do you just see it as a mess, an eye sore, something that not only

looks bad, but smells bad. As something that needs to be covered up, as opposed to utilized just as it is. Does the mess hold potential? The answer is always “yes” in the mind and heart of God.

What about the mess from your childhood, the mess you made as a young adult, the mess at your job, or in your own household? Is it waiting for refurbishing? Is it hoping for the time you and I will look at it with the eyes of God and see the potential it holds for us and others, if we make sure not to cover it up and bury it. But rather, bring it to the light of day and see in it what new purpose it can serve.

“The world sends us garbage, we send back music.” – Favio Chavez

- 2. We need to find someone who can help us turn the trash into treasure.** Favio Chavez had his Cola Gomez. Sometimes we can't envision, other than what we have known. That's when looking at Jesus comes in handy. That's when a look at the cross can turn our confusion into greater clarity. God never leaves us without someone. Because that is just the way God does things. We are never left to just figure it out for ourselves. God will always surround us with someone we need for what we really need to do. Sometimes we look far and wide, rather than right in front of us, not more than an arm's length away. Favio's answer didn't come from the government, or some large foundation or corporation. Favio's answer came from a man who had lots of practice turning junk into things others wanted.

The Consistory is going through a strategic planning process and at our last meeting we began looking at what is the church's mission and what values do we hold dear. One of

the questions we had for that night seemed out of place to me, especially as part of the mission section of the strategic plan. It was this question: “How can we, with limited resources, really make a difference?” The answer came back time and time again from every member of the Consistory – through the people we have, the membership of our church, and the partnerships we can form with the community around us. In other words, how can you do what you need to do with very little – use human resources. That’s how your mission will be carried on, even when you think you have too few resources. You will look around and see the people available to you, and then realize you have enough to do what you are called to do.

People are the answer, always have been, always will be. That’s how God told us to continue on – gather people together. Just look at Jesus, he was going to be here for just three years, and wanted to make the biggest impact he could, so what strategy did he use? Gather around him, 12 people, teach them everything he knew, fill them with the Holy Spirit, and tell them to carry on.

The task for all of us is to look around. The Christian walk was never meant to be a solo journey. Look around for those who know how to turn junk and messes into something good and useful. And on that rare occasion when you cannot find flesh and blood near, know Jesus is available to help point and empower you in the direction you should go. He had a lifetime of turning trash into treasure, messes into marvels, and junk into jewels.

Let’s look to them, because when they send us garbage, they help us send back music.

**3. We must realize that what appears to be the end is really just the beginning.** The problem with junkyards, and trash heaps and mountains of mess, is that when we look at them we may see only their final resting place. Yet, the clue when it comes to garbage is to see the pile as a mere stop along the way, not the end all and be all of that life. Rather, for all of us, the pile need not be the end of our lifespan. Rather, it can become just another location before restoration. Some of us have given up hope, and thus view our life and the substance of our mess as nothing more than trash to be thrown away, heave ho onto the pile. We no longer hold onto what it can become: an item of beauty, waiting to be restored, reconfigured and repurposed. Yet, until we believe that it can be, it stays right where it is, lifeless, just rotting away. Yet, if we believe that what looks bad, can be turned into something good, then we too have the possibility of going from the bottom of the heap to the chair of first violinist!

When the world sends us garbage, do we send back music? And if not, will we send back music? May our music be as loud and clear as the music that comes from Jesus' repurposed cross where many thought he had met his end. May we all in time and through blood and sweat (our and others): know the beauty, joy, and peace of restoration, reconfiguration, and repurposing.

