

**“Restore”**  
**Shannon Smythe**  
**November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020**  
**Westminster Presbyterian Church**  
**Rehoboth Beach, Delaware**

If you have ever been on a tour of the Holy Lands (side note: I have not, but would love to go some day—maybe we can dream together in the future about how we might plan one for a group in our congregation), you likely had a special stop on your tour at the Church of the Primacy of St. Peter, which is a Franciscan church in Tabgha, located just a few feet from the lapping shoreline of the Sea of Galilee. If you are watching this on the video recording, I’m including a picture so you can see it. It looks simply beautiful. Imagine being there on a bright sunny day, first walking around and exploring the exterior of the church before going inside, and, in doing so, coming across a plaque on the outer wall of the chapel. The plaque you pause to read is there to mark our gospel story’s breakfast feast with Jesus, Peter, and the others. But the plaque itself provides a summary of John 14:12. You step closer to read the plaque, which says: “The deeds and miracles of Jesus are not actions of the past. Jesus is waiting for those who are still prepared to take risks at His word because they trust His power utterly.”

The plaque and chapel are there, on the edge of the Sea of Galilee, to mark the traditional spot where Peter is restored by the Risen Jesus to the discipleship he had denied on the night of Jesus’ death. But Peter is not simply restored to his role as disciple; he is called by Jesus to reimagine discipleship in an entirely different way than he had up to this point. What the plaque drives home for us is that **the acts of God in the world count on the witness of our incarnated lives**. Peter, and me and you, by extension, are together being called to **take the incarnation seriously for our discipleship**. The combination of our humanity and the inbreathing of the Spirit of God on each of us means that we do indeed embody the presence of God in the absence of Jesus. Now, of course, this does not mean that we are God. But it does mean that God relies on us, disciples of Jesus, to witness in the world God loves, with the entirety of our beings—the stewardship of our money and economic resources are most definitely included as integral parts of our witness in the world.

Throughout our Stewardship series this fall we have practiced remembering, releasing, and reimagining. Now, we conclude our series by focusing on restoration. Ultimately, practicing faithful stewardship heals us as individuals and helps us to be restored to right relationship with one another.

Our journey together these past few weeks began, if you recall, with Jesus and the disciples sitting together at table. There, they remembered stories and held out hope for the new economy to come—they were waiting in anticipation of a new way of being in the world—a vision for how to be in community with neighbors differently. Now, we come full circle back around to another gathering around a meal. Again, the disciples are confused and trying to find

a way forward. This time, the instructions the disciples get from the Risen Jesus are crystal clear: **feed my sheep.**

This is a new call—a new dimension of discipleship. It is not based on the old way. Just as old money stories that we may be carrying with us no longer serve us—the foundation they provided must be thoroughly transformed—restored to what God would have for us—and made new through God’s just and equitable economy. The choice is this: to continue to live into the old stories: stories of fear parading as strength and control, stories of not enough, stories of more resources for some and less resources for others, stories of domination rather than sharing and dividing equally—or to allow God’s Spirit to help us form and live into new stories. The choice is to turn aside from the fear that locks us into money stories that do not lead to our true flourishing nor to the flourishing of those around us or to be courageous enough to transform our money stories in light of the new economic patterns of God’s way that we might be restored to right relationships with all of our neighbors.

In light of this, I believe that the question we must ask of our text this morning is this: **What is it that Jesus provides Peter, that gives him the assurance and semblance of safety that he needs to be able to vulnerably risk in new ways for Jesus?**

There is an E. E. Cummings quote that goes something like this: “The beautiful answer is preceded by an even more beautiful question.” If our beautiful answer is the restoration of broken relationships between us and our neighbors and the restoration of dignity to those disenfranchised by systems of economic power, then let us turn to today’s gospel story, asking after the even more beautiful question that precedes it: **what does Jesus give to Peter and us that gives us the courage to release previous narratives of inequitable relationships and charitable transactions that do not follow in God’s way?**

Following Jesus’s death, the disciples return to their first and original day jobs: fishing. And so, for this beleaguered group of fishermen, the ordinariness of life takes over. Disillusionment seeps in. There’s a touch of dry humor about it all. Notice how Peter declares rather matter-of-factly: “Well then. I guess I will go fishing.” Almost reminds me of Eeyore in the Winnie the Pooh stories. Peter turns back to the life he once knew. The other disciples decide to join him. They board the boats, heading out into the sea. They are attempting to return to the way things were, ignoring that Jesus had given them a greater mission. And it is at the point of disillusionment and resignation that we can see the tender grace of the Risen Jesus coming to restore them as his disciples once again, but now issuing them a new call to discipleship—from fishing for people to feeding Jesus’ sheep. What the disciples had thought about discipleship before needs a rebirth—a restoration.

Out on the boats, back once again doing such a familiar activity—they use fishing to distract themselves from the greater mission they had been called to. Failing to move forward after Jesus’ death, these career fishermen fail to catch anything the whole night. Failing in fishing brings back the failed mission they felt on Friday night when Jesus was crucified. Confusion sets in and they realize they can’t go back, and they don’t know the way forward. Not until daylight

does Jesus appear: his appearance brings revelation and restoration. Without introducing more confusion to these already confused disciples, Jesus begins with the obvious: “you didn’t catch anything, did you?” Equally obvious, the disciples respond: “You got that right.” Jesus again states what should be painfully evident to them: “Did you try the other side of the boat?” Now, they catch an abundance of fish. And here it is! When the Beloved Disciple cries out: “It is the Lord!” we realize that it is in Jesus’ demonstration of abundance, a sign of grace upon grace, that the moment of recognizing Jesus and being restored to joining Jesus once again in God’s mission happens.

And so we return to our beautiful question: What does Jesus give to Peter and us that gives us the courage to release previous narratives of inequitable relationships and charitable transactions that do not follow in God’s way? Church, the risen Christ gives us God’s abundance—God’s grace upon grace. Peter has to “haul” the net ashore. He both drags and draws it—all details emphasizing the size of the catch, the wonderful provision of Jesus for these weary and resigned disciples. Church: hear this: God’s money story is a story of abundance. There is more than enough for all in God’s economy. Jesus is here and ready to care for us, to reveal himself to us so that we might truly move into our call to feed Jesus’ sheep.

So, hear this promise: as we respond in faithful stewardship of our money and resources to establish opportunities for all people to experience God’s abundance grace, Jesus will provide abundantly for our needs. Jesus will provide for us! For you see, the Risen Jesus is here waiting to invite us to “come and eat”—he is offering us the abundance of God’s embodied grace, which not only tastes like an abundance of grilled fish for breakfast after a long, tiring night at sea, but also moves us from despair about being abandoned to a restoration of relationship with him and with our neighbors.

My prayer for us today, as we conclude this stewardship series, is that we would, together, walk boldly towards the restoration God has for us—that we would remember God’s faithfulness, release previous, scarcity and control-centered narratives, so as to reimagine new ways of being the hands and feet of Jesus in our communities. We will need to be courageous to really embrace this restoration. What will this restoration look like? It will look like courageous vulnerability to confess our broken relationships to money. It will look like courageous vulnerability to trust in God’s abundance for us and for our neighbors. And it will look like courageous vulnerability to take concrete actions to work for God’s new economy in our neighborhoods. May we embrace the restoration to God’s abundant grace that Jesus offers us. Remember—as the plaque on the Church of the Primacy of St. Peter reads: Jesus is waiting for those who are still prepared to take risks at His word because they trust His power utterly. May we trust and risk and so experience restoration. Amen.