

Sunday, December 12, 2021
First Lesson: Isaiah 12: 2-6
Gospel Lesson: Luke 3: 7-18
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel
Sermon Series: Renovation

KJ Journal December 10, 2021

Hello God....it's me again....but I am sure you know this already. Lord, I just want to thank you for what you have been doing in the life of this beautiful community of First and for what you have been doing in my own family. For some reason, things feel better and I am not exactly sure why....it just is. The only way that I can describe it, is like the story that I shared at this past Wednesday night's class about our home.

For when Steve and I first purchased our home, it was a real fixer upper. The grass...well it was not

grass...it was weeds filled with grass stickers...it was just unsightly altogether. The interior of the home had holes in the walls and the ceilings. The home needed some TLC and lots of renovations.

However, I remember the vision that Steve poured into this home that was about to go into foreclosure; a vision of our children each having their own bedrooms; he painted a vision of installing a kitchen island that would serve as the central hub of our home, where everyone would gather and greet one another and converse; while munching on some tasty gourmet snacks.

He painted a vision of us opening up our home for ministry in every possible way; marriage counseling, planning retreats, fellowship and team building and more.

He painted a vision that was easy for me to envision and over time; in fact **in no time**; the vision became a reality. **In no time**, after putting in the work of course; our weeds turned into grass. **In no time**, our blended family began to grow in leaps and bounds; so much so that we have to intentionally schedule down time for our selves. **In no time**, our home went through many transitions; from serving as a respite for people traveling to and from their destinations; for being a mini dog run; that one time we dabbled into the doggy day care business. **In no time**, this mess of a home; this real fixer-upper.... ended up helping to fix us up.

Being in this home helped us to become better people; for it was as if the home beckoned us; it is as if this home chose us; to be literally right out front and center; as if to tell the world we are here.... for one literally cannot drive down 27th st without

noticing it; not because it is especially new or especially fancy; but the home has character; the home has potential....the home has a way of drawing out the inner stirrings and curiosity of all who passes it by.....

So although our renovations of our home is nowhere near complete...there is major evidence that a renovation is occurring everyday; as we continue to live out our lives in all of its fullness.

Perhaps this is how salvation is achieved....perhaps this is how personal renovation is achieved...where in no time, things just have a way of working itself out.....

I am grateful for this insight...

KJ.

Another excerpt from my personal journal as we continue to journal together in this Holy Renovation season.

- And so the theme that has emerged from my journal entry, is also a theme that I am seeing reveal itself in our First lesson of Isaiah and our Gospel lesson of Luke for our readings this week; not to mention it is a theme we discussed in our advent class this past Wednesday... and that is this idea that what makes renovation so overwhelming and at times undesirable...**is the mess of all of it**; that you and I are tasked to clean up or work through; so that a renovation can even be made possible!
- Reflecting on Stephen and my home, as you see in the pictures...it is a pretty home, with a lot of potential....but first and foremost, Stephen and I are not financially wealthy!

- In fact, the only way we could have even looked at this home, let alone live in it, was because it was going into foreclosure; not to mention it is located in Near South Lincoln.
- If this home would have been one block north in the country club area; there is no way we could have afforded the home.
- Even in that, the amount of repairs needed and the cost of utilities is something we had to really seriously consider; not to mention the financial struggles we have experienced in the restaurant business due to this pandemic have been enormous...
- So this is a long way of my giving thanks to the Almighty, for teaching us that even though there were times that it seemed like we had more month than money;
- And although there were too many times, we got too familiar with the concept of how to make a

dollar out of 15 cents; **God has been faithful to us....**

- **God has been good to us;**
- The universe has found a way to clothe our backs and the Lillies of the field at the same time...and for all of this and more...**I give thanks.**
- But first and foremost, I give thanks that we did not run away from **the potential mess** that this home presented to us,
- For if we would have, we would have missed out on the amazing message that sprung out of our mess.
- **The important message** that renovation typically starts with our mess.
- **The important message** that sometimes, you and I cannot really appreciate the mountain top unless we have spent some time in the valley of our mess.
- **The important message** that **there is something greater** to be learned;

- **There is something greater** to be achieved;
- **There is something greater** to be fulfilled;
- After you and I work through the mess of it all....
- **Just as in Genesis, the Spirit of God was hovering over the murk of the waters, which biblical scholars would name as this representing an initial condition of creation; a creation that was initially formless and void; (Genesis 1:2)...it was essentially a mess....**
- What God showed us back then.... **Is that renovation was possible;**
- For we were watching the first ever documented home improvement channel that would give HGTV a run for their money;
- For when God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light; this lets us know that a renovation is possible. (Gen. 1:3)
- When God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear

fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so”; you and I were shown that **a renovation was possible!** (Gen1:11)

- When God created humankind in God’s own image,
in the image of God, the Almighty created them; the Great I am created us.....you and I were shown that **a renovation is possible!** (Gen1:27)
- I suppose what I am naming in a nutshell, **what this sermon** is naming; **what our first lesson is naming** when the prophet of Isaiah is singing the hymn of praise to the children of Israel regarding the faithfulness of God even when we are a mess; **what our gospel is saying** when it is inviting us to consider the spiritual fruit we are bearing for the world to taste and see...is that **renovation is possible....in fact renovation is always possible!**

- **However as I bring our scriptural lessons more into focus, I think it's important to also name that renovation is not possible if we do not address the mess, just as salvation is not possible if we do not address the sin.**
- For our first lesson this morning reveals to us a level of accountability that will be required from us all in our free will actions;
- For we all have free will...
- In fact this is one of the sore points in our country right now for some; this idea of people's freedom being restricted or sanctioned;
- In our scriptures today, a literal interpretation and understanding of our chapter in Isaiah and to some degree our gospel of Luke; would name at first glance, that God would be the one to bring forth consequences; if we act outside of God's will.

- My perspective on this differs and this is where I have evolved to in my own faith journey and understanding;
- For my life lessons inform me that typically God does not have to prescribe wrath upon our actions, for the universe does just fine prescribing this on its own;
- **For I am a believer** that every action does indeed cause a reaction;
- **I am also a believer** in the adage that what goes around tends to come around;
- **My life lessons inform me** that we tend to reap what we sow;
- And **That two wrongs don't make a right**, even if we may feel vindicated in doing so.... **It still isn't right**;
- **I do believe that** you can most often tell a tree by the fruit it bears;

- **I tend to believe** that birds of a feather flock together... at least I think this is mostly true.. I'm still trying to figure if this is entirely true...
- **I do believe that** we usually get out of life what we put in....
- **I do believe that we** all do sin...
- **I do believe that we all** have some sort of mess we are tasked to work through...
- **I do not believe that** God is waiting to persecute us in these incidents of mishaps; for I'll say it again, the universe and the laws of attraction that inhabits it; has our comeuppance pretty well covered and prescribed on its own;
- However, I do believe that God's role in our scriptures and in our lives, is to plant a seed within us all; to have us consider another way;
- There is in my spiritual awareness, an embedded invitation to us all; to let us know that there is a way out of this mess we are in;

- Our loving God is pursuing each one of us in a very specific way; tailored to our own personality; hence why I spent some time on the process communication model at the beginning of this sermon series; so that we might have a broader scope of spiritual awareness during this Advent season; when the Spirit of the Lord and Wisdom makes her presence more fully known to us;
- For I have observed that even in the mess of things, as the Black church mothers would say in my church leadership training; that when trouble comes, **we must know that God is up to something!**
- For I stopped by to declare and proclaim like the prophet Isaiah; that the Spirit of Love is pursuing each of us in our own specific communication preferences ;to invite us onto this path of renovation; that will lead us to our complete salvation;

- To **the harmonizer**, who primarily feels their way through the world; I feel lead to name, that the Spirit of Love is leading you to a place of emotional healing and wholeness;
- **To the imaginer**, who primarily operates by way dreams; I want you to know that the Spirit of Love is leading you to a vision that reflects a world filled with infinite possibilities;
- **To the rebel**, who may be in a place where you have rejected the beauty of the world and the people around you, because of how messy the world has become in your eyes; the Spirit of Love wants me to tell you to hold on...**God is up to something!**
- **To the persister**, who is watching all of their taught morals and values diminish in this corrupt world of mayhem in every way and every side; the Spirit of the Lord would have me tell you that God values you; God values me..God values His creation; God

values her masterpiece; the Great Vast God who transcends above us all, greatly values the light within each and everyone of us...**so I know that God is up to something!**

- **To the promoter**; one of the most charismatic folks that will ever walk this Earth; who may feel at a lost right now, for even they cannot seem to charm their way out of this mess;
- **To the thinker** who is looking at the news in complete despair and disgust;
- Our scriptures today would have us consider this... that **God is up to something**;

- For we are too precious for God to give up on God's creation just yet!
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- **And so the something that God is up to...I stopped by to proclaim begins with us....it has always been us;**

- For in my eyes, God is allowing this world to slow down just enough; to invite us to take a look at our mess in the very beginning;
- *For In the beginning when God created[a] the heavens and the earth, 2 the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep..(it was a mess), while a wind from God[b] swept over the face of the waters. 3 Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light;*
- *Where God said, “Let us make humankind[c] in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,[d] and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”*
- *And so God created humankind[e] in his image, in the image of God he created them;[f] male and female he created them. (Genesis 3:)*

- Showing us that God is the One who knows how to clean up a mess;
- And sometimes how we address the mess, is that **we go back** to the beginning;
- **We go back** to our roots;
- **We go back** to our core;
- **We go as far back** to the origin of where we were just a seed;
- **We go back** to the place where we were just germinated from a mustard seed;
- **For a lot of us I would imagine, may feel we have already been reduced to that of a mustard seed because of all of this mess we are in;**
- **All of this** death;
- **All of this** violence;
- **All of this** hate speech, hateful actions and hateful rhetoric;
 - **It's just a mess...**
- And **a lot of us** have lost our passion for this work;

- **A lot of us** are tired from this work;
- **A lot of us** are scared to do this work;
- **Some of us are ready to throw in the towel from this work;**
- **Others have resorted to** the position of hunkering down and protecting what is most important to them; even if means **stepping away from this work;**
- **Wherever you may be spiritually and emotionally, the prophecy of Isaiah and the Gospel of Luke this morning is beckoning me; to name that these sentiments that I have named and implied are valid;**
- **All of these feelings** of potential lost, grief, anger, sadness, complacency and more.... are ok;
- However, let us not forget that within us all; we were all birthed essentially from what started out as tiny as a seed.... It would be an epic failure of me as the aspiring theologian that I am, not to compare

the seed we were born from **to that of a mustard seed;**

- And the Word of God in Matthew 17:20; tells us that all that is requires from us; to let us know how to move these mountains **is a mustard seed** of faith;
- The Lord said; *Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."*
- Which lets us know that renovation is possible...in fact if you showed up today or if you tuned in online or plan to tune in online;
- You showing up is activating that mustard seed..
- Which lets us know that renovation is not only possible...renovation is happening.... And guess what... it is happening now....

- You see this is how I know that First United Methodist Church of Lincoln NE **is going to be alright;**
- **For the words of one of your former pastor Ebb Munden in a sermon we discussed together in Crosstalk that he wrote in 1971;**
- **A new life, new culture of hope and purpose in this world and beyond; is a vision we must not abandon as we journey together as a community through this mess;**
- **And all we need is to keep that mustard seed of faith in this very sentiment;**
- **That is how this vision becomes our lived reality;**
- **So again I know we are going to be alright;**
- **No matter how messy it feels;**
- **No matter how weary it feels...**
- **No matter how concerning it may feel...**
- **I stopped by to say...we are going to be ALRIGHT!**

- For in a world that doesn't feel like what many are used to...we really have quite the mess on our hands don't we?
- But God says.....**all we have** to do is show up....
- All we have to do is present our mustard seed to God; and that means show up...even if you're a mess...just show up....
- And watch your seed grow...
- Watch it grow First Lincoln; into the greatest among herbs, and becoming like a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof....
- Letting us know that renovation is possible, letting us know that RENOVATION is here... in fact it is happening now!