

“Between Redemption and Restoration”  
A Sermon Preached at  
Grace-Trinity Community Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota  
October 14, 2007 - the 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
and Based on Luke 17:11-19  
by the Rev. Scott O. Stapleton

Between redemption and restoration lies thanksgiving. Redemption is the beginning of our faith journey. It is the moment when we are rescued from our troubles. We cry to the Lord—“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us”—and Jesus does! He says, “Go and show yourselves to the priests,” and as we go, we are made clean! We do not know how this thing has come about! We certainly did nothing. But neither did Jesus, or so it appears. He spoke no magic words; he said no earnest prayer. He just told us to go to church: “Go and show yourselves to the priests,” he said. Was that it? Was that the moment we had all been waiting for? When did this miracle happen? We don’t know. All we know is that it did happen. We were cured / healed / delivered from our distress / relieved of our burdens. The miracle took place and we were present, but we missed it.

Restoration, well, that’s something else altogether. You can’t be in the dark when you’re restored. It’s just not possible. You rejoin the human race and everyone’s faces light up. Your face lights up. They’re so glad to see you; you’re so glad to see them. Tears spill over. They can’t be helped. You were so down, so unlike your old self. You used to laugh. You used to have brightness in your eyes. And then...it happened, the thing that laid hold of you. We were so worried about you. You were brought so low. But now! Look at you! You’re back. You’re just like who you were—even better! We always knew you’d come back. Well, that’s not exactly true. We did worry you might not make it. Those were dark times for us all. But we always hoped that you would. We prayed for you. We kept vigils in our hearts. And now you’re back. Tell us, how did it happen?

And you can’t say. The redemption part is completely beyond you. But the restoration part, you want to shout it from the roof tops. THANK YOU, SWEET JESUS! And thank you, my dear friends, for never giving up hope. I do believe it kept me going even though I couldn’t acknowledge it at the time. Hope is a powerful thing.

Yes, we agree wholeheartedly. Say, weren’t there ten of you? Where are they? Weren’t they delivered the same time you were?

Yes, they were. We were all caught up in whatever that was; we were all saved. But, to tell you the truth, I have no idea where they are. I would have thought they’d come down here, straight away, just like I did, eager to see all of you and shout to the world the story of their good fortune—THANK YOU, JESUS! But, I agree, they’re not here. I don’t know where they are. Do you suppose they went to the pub, to celebrate their good fortune? You know, I’ll bet anything they went home. I’ll bet each one of them went home, snuck in the back door, tore off their clothes, jumped in the shower, and

scrubbed and scrubbed 'til their skin shone pink. Then, I bet, they pulled out their best underwear, and a top and bottoms as well, got dressed, and then strode out the front door as pleased with themselves as they could be. That other stuff? That way down low stuff? It never happened. I'll bet you that's what they're telling themselves! I see it now. They're not going to come down here and shout, THANK YOU, JESUS! They're going to act like it was all a bad dream—a dream that happened to somebody else. Yes, they're back too, but it's a dirty shame. You'd think something as powerful as their own redemption would have an effect. But no, with some people we're not going to see a change. We're going to see what they want us to see. Which is too bad. I think they've got more to them than they're aware of.

I do believe the difference is giving thanks. When you give thanks you acknowledge what happened. You may not be able to explain it, but that's okay. It's like the sun that rises on the evil and on the good, and the rain that falls on the righteous and the unrighteous [Matt. 5:45]. You don't know why they happen, either, but they do. So when you give thanks for them, you admit to yourself and to everyone else, not to mention the God who daily lavishes this grace upon us, that you had nothing to do with it. You were not responsible for your own redemption, no more so than you are for the sun and the rain that falls on us all, the good and the bad. It's a humbling admission. We'd like to have something to do with our good fortune, to at least be aware of how it came about. But we're not aware. We were barely present at our own re-creation.

But we're present now. We're giving thanks. And who are all these people? I don't believe I've seen them before.

Yes, you have. They're your neighbors, the people you passed on the street, the ones who sat two pews behind you in church before your own calamity struck. They were having problems of their own, and many of them still are, but you couldn't see them then. You were...preoccupied. But now you can see them. I suppose it's your own journey through the wilderness and your deliverance from it that now gives you this insight, yes?

Yes, that and the humility to say as much. You're right. You're brought low, and you think, This can't be happening to me! I don't deserve this. And you cling to that fantasy. It's the one thing that's keeping you sane, you think, never mind that it's absurd, this idea that you are supposed to be spared the sorrows and misfortune everybody else in the world must experience. What vanity! But then, somehow—this has got to be a gift from God—you realize that your misfortune is not an insult to you so much as it is an insight into what others are experiencing. It's an opportunity to be cherished or scorned. You don't know how or why it occurs, it just does. And it's there for the taking. So you take it. Or not. But if you do, you feel awfully glad. For now, you're restored. You were cut off, blithely adrift on your own Titanic. Then disaster struck and you had this great gift of climbing into the lifeboat that is humanity. It is so much better than the pretense that was top deck.

Thank you, sweet Jesus.

Amen.