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**“Master Restorers”
Trinity-Anjou Pastoral Charge
Sunday, February 12, 2017**

Read Sherman

Scriptures: Matthew 5:38-48; 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be a witness, O God, to your Way of love, justice and faithful walking with us. Amen.

Do we have any folks here today who love antique furniture? I have to admit I love the *look* of ultra-modern homes with sleek, minimalist, angular design and everything in them chosen to create an effect. But as nice as such interior spaces look in glossy magazines, I often wonder what it would be like to live in a show-place like that? No, for me, I'll take an old over-stuffed couch, a coffee table you can put your feet up onto, a kitchen or dining room table that may show the marks of their history over the eye-catching new stuff, for such marks simply give evidence of the life that has been lived in and around these pieces, witness perhaps to generations of use, and they have withstood the test of time.

Of course, old things can get worn out if they are not repaired or even restored from time to time. Witness our own city's roads, bridges, water and sewer systems. After years of deferred maintenance, these essential parts of our infrastructure have become a danger to all of us who depend upon them. Despite the pain we are now going through, pain in both our wallets as taxpayers and dealing with construction traffic, in my view it is about time that the restoring get underway to preserve our quality of life. And in a city with so many beautiful old buildings, its critical as well to restore our heritage structures whenever possible - not just to tear down. No doubt for such delicate work, in old-world crafts such as stone masonry and the like, only the best master restorers will do.

The best master restorers. Able to bring the luster back to old worn things that others might be tempted to give up on or throw away. I wonder if that might not be an image to guide us today? In a culture that venerates youth and throws away anything that is old, perhaps we are called to celebrate our seniors who pass on to us the love, values, the stories and passions they cherished so that we who come after may build upon it. In a culture that venerates money, perhaps we are called to look beyond the glittery surface of a new car, new house, more things, to value relationships with family, friends, with strangers who need our help, with the earth and with the Source of all that is. In a culture that values security, perhaps we are called to spend time with those whose lives are insecure, because of physical or mental illness, or addiction, or oppression, that in doing so we become less self-centered, more human, and humane. In a culture that says church, faith, religion, is a waste of time, or a thing of the past, or even a threat, perhaps we are called to share with others why we couldn't live without ours.

It's just so easy nowadays to go with the flow of what our culture says, what we see on TV, what our friends do and say, but ultimately, what we make of our lives and the values we live by are a choice. What, or who, is

guiding you in the choices you are making? Whether you prefer the shiny and new in your life, or perhaps the more comfortable hand-me-downs that have seen use before, how solid are the bridges, pipes and highways that make your life about more than just surviving, but thriving?

If I read Paul right, he is writing to the Corinthian church he founded to remind them of some pretty simple infrastructure basics. First, he says, attend to your foundation. Anyone who owns a house old or new will understand the wisdom of that point. If you have a weak or cracked foundation, it'll make the whole house vulnerable to collapse. In Montreal perhaps we've learned that lesson now. Deferring maintenance now just means a disaster can happen in the future. What's broken in our lives, relationships, our world, that needs our attention now? Are our foundations in good repair? And if not, what are we prepared to do about it?

That's where the master builders, or restorers, come in. In the church's case, Paul names the ultimate foundation to build a life on as being Jesus Christ. Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or other early church leaders are like skilled master builders who help lay a foundation, but the builders should not be confused for the incarnate one who reveals the fullness of God's love, mercy and justice to whom they give witness. And perhaps here is where the church has so often failed to live up to its mission in the past. We have allowed ourselves as leaders to get caught up in the small stuff of life - who has power, who's in control, who's right and who's wrong, how big is our building, how much money do we have in the bank - rather than simply getting on about the business of being God's in-spirited people, loving one another and caring sacrificially for the other, especially the last and least. We forget who is our foundation - Christ - and what being God's temple means - we live for God and for others before we live for ourselves.

Foolish wisdom, isn't it? It goes against the Me-First, my Country first, my religion first mentality that just now is enjoying renewed power around the world. It's the same foolishness we read responsively earlier from Matthew, part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Here, Jesus speaks powerful, subversive words to the poor and thrown away of his society. Turn the other cheek. Give your cloak as well as your coat. Go the second mile. Love your enemy. Far from teaching the poor and oppressed to just accept their powerlessness, Jesus gives tools of resistance to those who barely are seen as human by those in power over them. Is this the foundation we can stake our lives on? Is this the way God wants us to live?

What do you think? With a foundation like that, based on humility, forgiveness, love for the stranger, even your enemy, doesn't it give us a new and challenging reason to be who we are as church, or even a purpose as families, groups of friends, as individuals? What signs could we look for that living this way was having an impact? The hungry fed? The naked clothed? New friends made despite being of different skin colour, religion or ability? The broken ones becoming whole again. It is already happening, folks; I see the signs all around us.

Yes, we may not have the numbers we once did. Our buildings may or may not be wired and plumbed and fit out perfectly for ministry in this new age that is coming into being. But whether we have a poured foundation, or one made of fieldstone, or if we've got wood just sitting right on the ground, as long as Jesus is at work through us, we'll have the services of the greatest master restorer there ever was to keep us going.

And maybe, just maybe, he'll send us out to try *our* hand at restoring what is old, tattered, broken in ourselves, in the community that surrounds us, and in this world with all its sleek, minimalist, angular, glossy places. Thank God we don't have to be all glossy and perfect as we do - for Christ, our Master Restorer will be with us, ready to work with us, maybe even to work in us an extreme makeover - so that we and this world will be restored. And let us all say, Amen.

Play the song: "Master Restorer" by Christ Tabernacle Choir