

renovate 1. to make new or as if new again, repair. 2. To reinvigorate; revive. (from the Latin *renovatus, renovare*)

There was a time when we began to recognize the need to do something about this sanctuary. Mark and the choir could easily see the plaster was falling. Many looked at the red carpet on which we walked and could see how worn it was. The tile on the floor under the pews and in the area where the choir is looked old and needed to be replaced. Many saw the need for fresh paint. As the committees did their work, the members decided the sanctuary was one of the first things that needed attention. They chose to use the money that was being promised to renovate this sanctuary. They wanted to make it new. They wanted to repair it, to reinvigorate it, to revive it.

Someone said something like this. "You realize there is asbestos tile on the floor under the pews. Shouldn't we take it up?"

Someone else probably said, "You know it will take a lot longer if we remove the asbestos tile."

"No matter, that tile may not be good for us. Let's take it up."

After discussion and prayer and a lot of talk and thinking, everyone agreed. We will begin with the sanctuary and we will take up the asbestos tile. As the project began, the building was sealed. Special people were employed. Special equipment was brought in. They wore special suits to protect themselves. The floor was taken up...every piece of tile. It was removed and disposed of properly. The sanctuary was made clean from the dust of the tile. The air was tested. The sanctuary was unsealed and the work began doing everything to this place that we now see and some things we cannot see. Now we can breathe deeply and sing, "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee."

Today is the third Sunday in Lent. During Lent people often ask me questions like, "Where is the good news in repentance? Jesus speaks of repentance. It means a change of mind literally. It means a change of behavior and a change of our way of doing things. Today's lesson has Jesus calling his hearers to repentance. Where is the good news in repentance? Where is the good news in a season of change? Not Lent again...not repentance again?"

I have concluded we are probably sitting in the best illustration possible to address this question about change. As we sit here, we love the colors and the carpet, the attention to detail. We appreciate the hard work of these who have made this sanctuary look like this! We are experiencing the renovation for which we longed back in the beginning. We are grateful the asbestos tile is gone. We are glad for the smells and sights of this beautiful place.

What would it be if we were sitting inside our own souls? What would it be if we could see the grudges and unresolved anger? What would it be if we could see the issues and emotions that need to be resolved, that need special attention? I suspect we are like this sanctuary before the renovation. We think we do not need asbestos removed from our hearts and lives and souls. We think we are not such bad people. We do not need to change anything. We may say we do, but not take it seriously.

Apparently there are some who go to Jesus after they have learned about the atrocities in Galilee. Pilate, the governor, and his soldiers have suppressed an uprising. People have been killed and their bodies nailed on crosses on the roads of Galilee. The blood of these Galileans have mixed with the people's own sacrificial lambs. Jesus reminds his hearers of the eighteen people who are killed when the tower of Siloam fell. It was popular for many to believe that tragedies like these come because of sin. Even today, it has been a popular notion for some to believe that sin is the cause of calamity. Jerry Falwell believed that Katrina came ashore because of the sin in New Orleans. To that idea, Jesus says no. **"No, I tell you."** (Luke 13:3,5) Are any of these people worse sinners than the rest of us? Jesus says no. He says a loud "NO." And he adds, **"but unless you repent you will all perish as they did."** (Luke 13:3,5)

Why do any of us believe we can live Jesus' life, follow Jesus' way, be Jesus' disciples without repentance? Read Luke and we hear Jesus say clearly.

**"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord' and not do what I say?"** (6:46, *New Jerusalem Bible*)

**"This generation? They are like children shouting to one another while they sit in the market place 'We played the pipes for you, and you wouldn't dance we sang dirges and you wouldn't cry.'" (7:32, *New Jerusalem Bible*)**

The woman of the city at the meal of the Pharisee? Jesus recognizes the grace of God because she is so remorseful for her sin. Her sin is forgiven. Her faith saves her. (7:36-50)

When asked who is your mother and your brothers? Jesus says, **"...those who hear the word of God and put it into practice."** (8:21, *New Jerusalem Bible*)

Aren't we the people who say we are saved by grace through faith? Yes, we are.

God's grace teaches us to listen to Jesus carefully.

God's grace teaches us to recognize our need.

God's grace teaches us to understand and apply what Jesus is saying.

No hope without changing our ways.

No new life without changing our priorities.

No renewal without changing the way we think and act and live.

No renovation without removing the asbestos.

We have by God's grace the ability to change our minds. We can consider Jesus is right. We can ask for God's forgiveness. We can begin working on addressing the asbestos in our lives that needs to be removed.

We are like the fig tree. We have been granted a reprieve. We have the ability to renovate this sanctuary with the help of some amazing people. We have the ability to renovate our lives. Where is the good news in this? It is in the ability to renovate.

**God of all truth and wisdom, You see us as we are. You know our need before we ask. Enable us to hear what You are saying to us in this sanctuary and in this reading from Luke's gospel. Enable us to see your good news in repentance. Where there is asbestos in our hearts and lives, help us to have it removed. Teach us to believe and to ask forgiveness and to do what we must to make things right with You and with one another and with ourselves. Lord, heal us as a church. Let us be renovated by the truth and grace of your Holy Spirit. Fill us with your mercy and compassion so we may share all that you give us with our neighbors in Jesus' name...Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...**