

## **A Broken and Cracked Cup**

*Lenten Series: Our Cup of Life and Vessels We Hold*

Job 17:1-2, 11; Isaiah 61:1-2; Mark 14:3,8-9

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*"My spirit is broken, my days used up, my grave dug and waiting. See how these mockers close in on me? How long do I have to put up with their insolence? O God, pledge your support for me. Give it to me in writing, with your signature. You're the only one who can do it... My life's about over. All my plans are smashed, all my hopes are snuffed out... Job 17: 1-2,11 The Message*

*The Spirit of God is upon me, because the Holy One has anointed me and has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of God's favor... Isaiah 61:1-2*

*While Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.... Some were angry and they scolded her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me... She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."*

Mark 14:3,8-9

We continue our journey through the season of Lent. It is a season in the church year that invites us to reflect on our lives, to be honest with ourselves, to acknowledge our blind spots, to take actions to further God's justice and peace. A season to name where we need healing, and forgiveness. We focus on an openness to growth. In the Presbyterian household, there is not an emphasis on giving something up for Lent like chocolate or cookies. It is a season of prayer, contemplation, meditation.

The focus in our series this week is The Broken Cup, a chapter in Joyce Rupp's book *The Cup of our Life*. Our scripture passages reflect different aspects of brokenness.

### **Feeling Broken like Job**

Times we may feel broken and despairing like Job. The story of Job begins with a man with everything – he is a wealthy man living in a land called Uz with his large family and extensive flocks. He is blameless and upright. In the course of one day, Job receives word that people in his life that he loves are gone and his flocks are gone. He is suffering physically, his friends seem insincere in their concern and he is angry at God. Sometimes we may be in that place. We feel shattered, broken because of loss or grief or sadness or fear.

We may feel broken but that is not who we are. We are beloved.

## **God – binding up the brokenhearted**

The prophet Isaiah reminds the people that God, the Holy One, is a presence of hope and healing for the nations, for the Hebrew people, for all who are broken hearted.

To bind up the brokenhearted – to take broken pieces and bind them together. That is the Holy One who gives these words to the prophet Isaiah. Amazing that the prophet addresses the range of challenges humans face, from freedom from oppression to people who feel brokenhearted.

We may feel broken- hearted but that is not our identity. We are beloved.

## **Breaking open and offering love in life and in death**

The story of the women who brought a clay jar full of expensive ointment is powerful. This jar would have been costly and it was a sacrificial gift of love. She seems to be the only one who acknowledges that Jesus is going to die soon. Actions speak louder than words. She breaks open her jar so she can anoint his feet. A bold act.

We may need to break-open in order to receive and to pour out love.

Times brokenness means breaking open, sharing what we have, being present.

## **There are things that need to be broken**

Glass ceilings – Madeline Albright said, “Glass ceilings have been broken,  
but more have to be broken.”

Break the cycle of poverty,

Breaking cycles of addiction

Breaking cycles of hate and violence

And there is the brokenness that is our hearts are breaking, when we feel our lives, our world, is broken and cracked. Scenes from Ukraine and other places where people are dying because of war, of famine.

We are not broken people. Sometimes we may feel our lives are beyond repair or are not what they are supposed to be. Jesus saw people as beloved, as part of the kin-dom of God. Even if they felt broken and not acceptable, not valued, not seen, he saw them offered healing, hope and wholeness. So they could see their worth and beauty even with our cracks and flaws. We are born as beloved, whole, blessed. We forget, we get distracted, we fall asleep. Christ is waking us up. Christ is lifting the veil.

I wonder if that is part of being the church and sharing our spiritual lives. A community of faith of people who gather with our flaws, our cracks, our lost pieces. We are not a community of people who have fixed all their flaws or believe they have to hide their cracks or broken places.

## **When broken places are beautiful**

What do we do with those cracks in our cups, our lives? Hide them? Feel useless?

Japanese potters from as far back as the late 15th century decided to try something new with the broken pieces of pottery they had. The legend has it that wealthy man accidentally broke a tea bowl he loved. He sent it to be repaired, but he wasn't pleased with the results—it had been repaired with unsightly staples. Therefore, Japanese artisans set about to find a more beautiful way to repair his broken pottery.

The idea was to beautify the very signs of damage, to make the cracks and chips stand out in a new and stunning way. Instead of erasing the flaws, it acknowledged and highlighted them. It made beauty out of the broken. This method became known as **kintsugi**, a term that means, "golden rejoining."

The artist uses a gold-dusted epoxy to adhere the pieces back together, sometimes replacing large chips entirely with the lacquer. At other times, missing pieces are replaced with striking fragments of other pieces of pottery, creating a new, unique blend. (1)

Maybe that is a metaphor of the Holy One – the Potter is putting my broken pieces back together in a way beautiful, maybe even more beautiful than before. The places where I've been cracked, wounded, broken are being fortified with gold. Holy One uses my broken places to bring beauty into the world. The Potter who shapes the clay, makes beautiful creations and can put pieces together with golden dusty grace.

Jesus gathered people who felt broken or flawed or useless into a community of hope. Better than holy super glue, his loving presence creates a new community, bringing outcasts together. And in his kin-dom, in the church, in the presence of God, and with our neighbors, there is this awareness of the both the brokenness and beauty of each person, the Divine light in each person shining through.

We not born as broken people. We are beloved. We may feel shattered by life's circumstances like Job and decisions we have made. We may remember that the Holy One comes to bind up the brokenhearted. We can trust that there are times we need break open our cups, our lives so we pour out love.

A colleague who is a pastor and mom of a little one gave me another insight this week. She writes:

"Brokenness" is an important word in our house right now, because we are the parents of a small child. Annika is now approaching three, and seeking to verbalize her experiences of the world around her. One of her current fascinations is with things that are broken. She will stop what she is doing and travel the length of the house to bring me two halves of a purple crayon, showing them to me and saying, "Mommy, it's broken."

Why does she do this? I suspect that part of it is that she wants me to share in a little grief with her. Broken toys are sad things. In addition, however, she wants to know if broken things are fixable. And she is rapidly learning the truth that sometimes they are, and sometimes they are not. Some broken toys simply need new batteries; others will never work again. Some broken things are salvageable, like cookies. Others are maddening, like crayons. You can tape a broken crayon, but it will never be the same. It will always look and feel “broken.” (2)

What if people understood the church this way, as a place to bring the broken pieces? I like the image of God’s people bringing their broken pieces to one another, providing accountability for one another and grieving together the loss of the whole. I like the idea of us talking together, on the patio, in various groups, in the church kitchen, and in the annual meeting, about just how many things are broken in our world, our families, and in our own minds and hearts, and how we respond to both the fixable and the unfixable.

Our response to the fixable is one of hope and support. We celebrate that some broken things can be fixed, not in a “6 easy ways to give you a better life” kind of way, but in a way that bears witness to God’s creative power. We do this by being a place of accountability for addiction, hate, or selfishness, or simply in the ways we seek to reflect Christ’s love and light. Every time healing comes to something that is broken, we are grateful for God’s mercy.

In many ways, however, the strength of the church’s witness is not with the stuff that can be fixed, but the stuff that cannot. We are honest about the finality of some kinds of brokenness, and we grieve that together. We are also honest about our inability to fix even the fixable, and our need for God in all circumstances. And we articulate our trust in our God who does use broken pieces for something good. In life, in death, in eternal presence, we are not alone.

Like Annika, we use the concept of brokenness to learn and to grow in our understanding of ourselves and our world.

That quote by Leonard Cohen who adapted a quote from Ernest Hemingway rings true.

Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack in everything  
That’s how the light gets in. (“Anthem”)

Let’s take our cracked and broken cups. Hold each other in love when we feel broken. Let’s be open to the Divine who offers us that gold dust of grace and connection and fills in cracks in our lives and the world. And invites us to do the same. Amen.

1) “God Makes Beauty Out of Broken Pieces” by Heather Bock

<https://glimpsesofjesus.com/2018/01/17/god-makes-beauty-out-of-our-broken-places/>

2) “Sin vs. Brokenness,” by Rev. Kendra Mohn, Working Preacher

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/columnist/sin-vs-brokenness>