



Broken: Good News for Tough Times Direction of Wholeness

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Romans 12:3-10
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For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each other."

Over the last six weeks of this sermon series, you may have been keeping watch on the vase that has been sitting on the middle of the communion table. It's been serving as somewhat of a visual timeline as we move through these themes: of brokenness to wholeness. What began as a pile of broken ceramic pieces on the first Sunday of the series, has been slowly rebuilt piece by piece over the Sundays that have followed. Except now we can see that, it is not back to the flawless vase it once was, but with visible cracks and chips that have been painted gold and with light streaming through the seams in which brokenness has happened. It has become an entirely new thing than what it was before.

And as we have been watching the vase come together, we have also been piecing together Paul's teachings in his letter to the Romans. Hearing in our own time, about how God repairs the brokenness in our own stories through grace and unwavering, inseparable love. We've heard how God overcomes brokenness in human relationships, by sending us Jesus to be a God that knows of that brokenness. Finally, this morning, our scripture tells us that the hope of our wholeness, of our restoration, is found when broken pieces come together, when broken people come together; we who are many, are one body in Christ, we belong to each other.

Yet this week, in the shadows of the violence in Charlottesville, it didn't quite feel like we belong to one another. To be truthful it felt as if we had experienced brokenness in a way we never imagined we could again. When I stood here at this table praying with you all on Sunday, to tell you the truth all I wanted to do was re-shatter this vase into the likeness of our brokenness we saw play out before our eyes last week. As the three of us wrote in

our Tuesday evotional: We saw the breadth and depth of the brokenness of our humanity. Our hearts broke, our anger rose, and our spirits trembled. God's heart was breaking too.

Now, I'm pretty sure that most of us would never guess that cable news would be a place where healing and reconciliation would take place. But last week, surprisingly, Fox News was a place where God was at work putting broken pieces together.

On Wednesday, Wendy Osefo, a left-wing policy expert and Gianni Caldwell a republican strategist were invited on the program "Fox and Friends" to talk about their opposing views on taking down Confederate monuments. They were set up in the way cable news often sets up guests: as talking heads at opposite ends of the political spectrum bickering over partisan talking points, ready to eviscerate each other on either side of a split television screen. On any other day it probably would have turned into a battle; but this interview was the morning after the President's third set of remarks, defending the actions of white supremacists. The moderator of the show asked her first question hoping to lead them to this inevitable political brawl; yet instead the discussion went in a different direction. Instead of yelling their opinions at each other, instead of hurling insults, they both cracked open and shared pain.

"This is not partisanship. This is human life," Osefo said "As a black woman [with] two black boys, my heart bleeds. These are not talking points here. This is personal. And we as a nation, as a country, have to do better." As she spoke you could see tears running down her opponent Caldwell's face; tears that he continued to shed as he responded with these words of his own: "I come today with a very heavy heart. The very moral fabric in which we have made progress when it comes to race relations in America has failed us." And as he spoke, his opponent placed her hand on her heart, as if to place her own hand on his, onto the places that were breaking within the both of them. On live television, on cable news, they forged a new direction for us all to follow. A pathway towards healing that meant sharing of ourselves, a turning toward a new direction toward our collective wholeness.

In his book, *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen says that from our "own woundedness, we can become a source of life for others." That by the grace of God, our scars become cracks in which a light shines through and into the darkness to give comfort and hope. That the light that is found in each of us, is not for us to hide, but to break open within ourselves so that it may be shared and shine for others to find their way. That even as we are many, as many as the broken pieces of pottery in your hand, that we belong to each other. When we direct our souls towards one another and for each other, we will be united as one, we will become something new together in Christ. What would it look like if we were to answer that invitation together this morning?

You all were handed a piece of broken pottery when you came into worship this morning. If you aren't already doing so I'd like for you to hold that in your hand. For the next five minutes we are going to experience that sharing work together. During this time you are invited to share with a neighbor nearby your responses to the questions that were asked during the prayer of confession. If possible, find someone that you did not come to church with. Michael will play music softly, after the music ends we will come back together. If you don't get enough time to share fully, I encourage you to exchange contact information and continue to meet outside of worship. So go now and share in both your journey with brokenness and wholeness.

5 minutes was spent in conversation in pairs.

Friends, may this time be a reminder that our brokenness can be redeemed by love, especially when we share it with each other. A reminder, too, that there still is much brokenness in our lives and in the world that longs for redemption, for resurrection. We need each other. The world still needs us to reach out and be willing to show God's spirit that envelops all of us, calling us to new ways of being, calling us to wholeness.

So may these pieces we hold be given back to God to do the holy work of healing. Instead of passing the offering plate only handing in our prayers on pink cards, and giving financial gifts this morning, we will also offer up to God our brokenness. During the hymn you are invited to release to God that which looks broken to experience healing and restoration. As we sing bring forward your piece of broken pottery as we sing and place it in the wooden tray on the table. This tray will be what we serve our communion bread on as a community. It will serve as a reminder that God's grace finds us as and brings us healing no matter how broken we feel we are. That while we come as many broken people, that God holds us together as one body bringing us new life. As you do hear these words by Jan Richardson as a blessing to that brokenness.

Do not despair.
You hold the memory
of what it was
to be whole.

It lives deep
in your bones.
It abides
in your heart
that has been torn
and mended

a hundred times.
It persists
in your lungs
that know the mystery
of what it means
to be full,
to be empty,
to be full again.

I am not asking you
to give up your grip
on the shards you clasp
so close to you

but to wonder
what it would be like
for those jagged edges
to meet each other
in some new pattern
that you have never imagined,
that you have never dared
to dream.

The photo below is the finished product of the tray.

