

Easter 2B
Peace, Seattle
April 12, 2015
John 20:19-31

PRACTICING KINTSUGI

It's a familiar story. One we hear every year on the first Sunday after Easter. How on the evening of the resurrection Jesus steals his way into the midst of his frightened followers as they cower behind locked doors, and in the encounter that follows, transforms their fear into faith.

Most of them, that is. Thomas misses out on what happens that night, and when the others try to tell him, he refuses to believe. The proof he wants he eventually gets, but our focus isn't on him today.

After the emotionally charged encounter Mary Magdalene has with Jesus outside the tomb on Easter morning, this gospel serves, first, as a kind of REALITY CHECK. In case we were wondering, Christ's resurrection isn't going to bring instant changes into the lives of his disciple community.

John suggests that the disciples' fear is about them thinking they could be next in line for arrest and crucifixion; and that may be entirely true. Yet, I can't help but wonder if at least some of their fear doesn't have as its object Jesus himself.

After hearing Mary's report: I HAVE SEEN THE LORD, I can imagine those who denied and deserted Jesus having to confront their inner demons.

- HOW CAN I FACE HIM—I WHO RAN FROM HIM WHEN HE NEEDED ME MOST?
- WHAT WILL I SAY? WHAT WILL I DO? WHAT WILL HE DO, IF HE SHOWS UP?

But if there are any doubts about what Jesus will say or do if or when they see him again, they are swept aside with the first words that escape his lips:

PEACE BE WITH YOU, he says.

No judgment. No accusation. No trying to talk them out of their fear or telling them to "SUCK IT UP." None of that. Instead, he offers them SHALOM and shows them his wounds.

Here is the gospel in a nutshell, acted out in the most profound way:

In his eyes, no matter how long your catalog of failures, you are accepted; you are loved. Period.

And if you or I have any doubts about that, all we have to do is look at his wounded hands, feet and side.

Death's defeat does not mean that all the woundings inflicted on us in this life will magically disappear. What it means—what he shows us—is that they no longer hold us captive.

In fact, Jesus shows us, through the power of resurrection the scars themselves are transformed from emblems of defeat and disfigurement to emblems of God's commitment to make what is broken whole.

In my Pastor's Pen article this month I wrote about the centuries-old Japanese method for fixing broken pottery called kintsugi or "golden joinery".¹

Instead of trying to disguise or discard cracked or broken pottery, this technique accentuates the fractures and breaks. The plate or bowl is treated with a special lacquer in its broken places then dusted with powdered gold, silver, or platinum.

The result is stunning—beautiful seams mark the places where cracks once threatened, giving it a truly unique appearance. Often enough the repaired piece ends up being more beautiful than the original.

And what's more intriguing is this: the newly reformed whole piece contains both the remembrance of that which was before and that which is now.² Amazing.

The art of kintsugi challenges the norms of our throwaway society, writes Lelanda Lee.³ The things we own, the technology we use, the cars we drive—even our relationships—seemed to be based on planned obsolescence. They're designed to fail and be discarded so we can move on to the next new thing.

Rather than embracing the possibilities of mending, restoring or repairing, we discard what is broken. Our trash bins and landfills are filled with objects which might have been mended, but weren't, because it wasn't "worth the money or time" to do the mending.

As a society, writes Lee, we find it easier and cheaper to warehouse broken people in facilities and prisons than help rehabilitate them. There are family members who we've left behind, because the broken relationships required more effort and pain than we were willing to take on. We fail to see what the broken might look like if we put the resources into mending it.

As I was learning about the art of *kintsugi*, I couldn't help but notice that this tradition seems to have emerged in Japan around the same time as Brother Martin's teaching on the radical grace of God for us, which is made manifest and accessible to us in Jesus.

Today in this gospel our risen Lord practices the art of kintsugi on his disciples, and he begins by demonstrating it on himself.⁴

There is no need to hide his wounds, for it is in & through them that our healing is to be found.

This is what the prophet Isaiah testifies when, in his 4th servant song he says:

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases...
he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.⁵

Instead of hiding his wounds, our risen Lord displays them to his friends, as if to say, "these wounds, which were emblems of death, are that no longer. They are symbols of forgiveness and the new life to which I call you."

¹ You can find my article [HERE](#). Follow this link for visual examples: <http://www.mymodernmet.com/profiles/blogs/kintsugi-kintsukuroi>

² See Lelanda Lee's blogpost for insightful comments on *kintsugi*: What a Cup of Tea <http://whatacupoftea.blogspot.com/2012/06/mending-our-brokenness.html>

³ Ibid. Several of her insights are incorporated in the two paragraphs which follow.

⁴ Another example that came to mind as I was preparing this sermon was the photo series that have emerged in recent years of breast cancer and mastectomy survivors.

⁵ Isaiah 53:4-5 NRSV

“In my eyes, no matter what your failings, I accept you. I love you. You are mine.”

“The world breaks every one,” wrote Hemingway, “and afterward, many are strong at the broken places.”⁶ The resurrection makes all who put their trust in the God of Jesus strong in the broken places.

Ultimately, God’s call to each one of us, is a call to wholeness. Not a call to flawlessness or to perfection, but to a way of living that mends what is broken by staking its claim on God’s promise to practice the art of kintsugi on us all.

This is the message, this is what it means to live the Easter life.

Amen.

⁶ *Farewell to Arms*.