



ST BART'S

A Sermon by

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Loving What is Broken; The Holy Work of Repair

Sermon preached at the eleven o'clock service, October 24, 2021

The Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 31:7-9; Hebrews 7:23-28; Mark 10:46-52

Come, Holy Spirit, and kindle the fire that is in us.

Take our lips and speak through them.

Take our hearts and see through them.

Take our souls and set them on fire. Amen

We are living in a broken piece of history, a shattered time, and we're all trying to comprehend how we might be restored to wholeness and health as individuals and as a society. We're trying to put all the pieces back together again. But make no mistake; even before COVID, we were living in a fractured reality. It is the human condition, really. Perhaps our highest calling, as people of faith, is to be committed to "loving what is broken and engaging in the holy work of repair."ⁱ

Every single day, we bind up our wounds in order to face the next day. We are the brave survivors of childhood traumas and other destructive episodes from our youth. We live through lies, heartbreak, betrayal, threats, bullying, violence, and unnumbered failures. No one slips through this life unscathed, untouched, unmolested by life's random cruelties. We are knocked down, but we keep getting back up again.

This morning's gospel lesson features the healing of a blind man, Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus. Please note that he's not a nameless, random person in *The Gospel According to Mark*. He has a name. He has a family. He has a story.

He sits beside the main road which goes from Jericho to Jerusalem, and he begs in order to survive. We don't know what has caused his blindness; it was a common affliction in ancient times. But we can imagine how he spends his days, under a hot desert sun, waiting for the people who pass by to throw him scraps of food or a coin or two. And even though he doesn't see, he can still hear the traveler's stories as they pass by him.

So, Bartimaeus knows that the one who's being proclaimed as the Messiah is fast approaching. Everyone knows that a true Messiah, a true King of David, will have healing powers. King Solomon certainly did. So Bartimaeus knows he just might have a chance of being made whole again. Sure, it's embarrassing to make a spectacle of yourself—to call attention to your affliction—but, really, what is there to lose? His pride? That's not much more than a faded memory to him. By naming Jesus the "Son of David," Bartimaeus is proclaiming him the King of the Jews, a dangerous political label. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." "Son of David, have mercy on me!" The plea is left hanging in the air.

I met the artist and theologian Makoto Fujimura several years ago when I invited him to deliver the Tocher Lectures in the Episcopal Diocese of Kansas. Fujimura is a student of *kintsugi*, which, translated literally from the Japanese, means, "golden repair."

Kintsugi, explains Julie Polter, "is the Japanese art of mending broken ceramics with lacquer mixed with precious metals (in order to) restore a bowl or cup to wholeness and function while highlighting, rather than masking, the

fractures.”ⁱⁱ She writes, “Objects repaired by *kintsugi* masters are often stunningly beautiful, veined with gold, silver, or platinum, that trace a history of traumatic destruction and sublime redemption. But behind each Instagram-ready bowl is a practice and tradition that doesn’t begin with the gold, but with the broken shards.

“*Kintsugi* masters sometimes hand down a set of fragments through generations, contemplating the pieces, their beauty, their patina from use for decades before beginning the repair, which might itself take years. Fujimura says, ‘I actually think there is a virtue in being able to see the brokenness and the fractures, as painful as they may be.’ The lesson he draws from Japanese aesthetic values, his own experience of trauma, and the gospel itself is that, ‘we must first learn to behold even those painful broken fragments as beautiful’ rather than rush to fix everything or hide the damage.”ⁱⁱⁱ

“This is not a cosmetic, Western notion of beauty,” he clarifies, “but beauty accentuated by care of nature and our communities, beauty based on sacrifice which I believe the Japanese aesthetic has refined. We begin with the brokenness. We begin with the shards, the memories of a time when there was wholeness and functionality.”^{iv}

Then, it takes a tremendous amount of time. It is a painstaking process. “The pigments are pulverized minerals and precious metals applied in multiple layers, in what (Fujimura) describes as ‘a slow process that fights against efficiency.’”^v

“Prayer and contemplation are woven into the work. The tiny mineral particles refract light, often creating subtle prismatic effects. It is a style of art made for the type of long, unforced gaze that slowly reveals evermore depth. Deceptively simple and quietly extravagant.”^{vi}

Loving what is broken requires time. The healing process takes patience. We can’t simply see where the broken places are and slather them with epoxy. That “quick fix” mentality doesn’t often work on porcelain—or in life. Some breaks may be relatively clean and easier to repair, but with others, there are fractures which run under the broken places, unseen fissures and fault lines running beneath the surface. Healing these complex breaks requires deep attention and patience; it requires love and mercy and prayer.

In the art of *kintsugi*, the materials used in the repair process are more precious than the materials used in creating the original object. Gold, silver, platinum. These materials are not inexpensive and they are not easily obtained. Healing is costly. What is the true value of human empathy or compassion offered by a friend or a therapist or pastoral counselor? What is the value of mercy or grace? How can we properly value the love which heals the wound and mends the tear? Let us call it priceless. Let us proclaim it as what it genuinely is: truly holy and deeply sacred.

None of these healing processes are pursued to obfuscate the damage done. There can be no real hiding of the loss. You cannot paper over trauma. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu discovered at the end of apartheid in South Africa, one cannot achieve authentic reconciliation without first giving voice to the truths of the damage done.

For Makoto Fujimura, the good news always comes with scars. This is a part of his art, and it is also a fundamental part of his faith, as well as our own. I think the most surprising thing about Thomas’s encounter with the risen Lord is that when Christ returns, the wounds from the crucifixion are still visible in his hands and in his feet. The New Creation is not simply going to be a return to the perfection of the Garden of Eden. The new Creation flows out of these sacred wounds and finds its regenerative power from within them.

Just previous to today’s lesson in *The Gospel According to Mark*, James and John made an unusual request of Jesus. They said, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And Jesus responded, “What is it you want me to do for you?” And they told him that they wanted to be given seats of honor and privilege and to sit in glory at his left and at his right hands. Jesus refused their request saying, first, they didn’t have a clue about what they are asking for, and, second, it was not within his power to grant.

But compare and contrast, if you will, this request with the humble plea of blind Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus is quite literally begging Jesus, crying out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” And scripture says those around

Jesus sternly ordered him to be quiet. Be quiet! Get out of here! Stop bothering us, and don't bother the master! But he shouts out all the louder, "Son of David, have mercy upon me."

Can't you hear the desperation in his voice? Haven't you ever been that desperate for healing?

- the cancer which keeps reappearing?
- the angry breakup which was never resolved?
- the dying parent you pray for?
- the sick child with whom you would gladly exchange places if it would make any difference at all?

Bartimaeus cries out in desperation for mercy, and Jesus asks him the same question he asked James and John. "What do you want me to do for you?" But unlike James or John, this blind beggar doesn't presume to ask the Son of David for a seat of honor or anything so superficial. He only wants to regain his sight.

You see, Bartimaeus knows he is blind. Sadly, James and John do not. If they were not so completely, absurdly blind, they wouldn't be asking for seats of honor or arguing about who is the greatest among them. Instead, they might be begging for mercy, praying to be healed of their profound spiritual blindness.

Jesus grants Bartimaeus his request and tells him, "Go, your faith has made you well." But the interesting thing about Bartimaeus is that he *doesn't* go. He *doesn't* leave. Instead, he *follows*. Bartimaeus becomes a disciple of Jesus and follows him on the way to Jerusalem and on the journey that will lead him to the cross and beyond.

In the art of *kintsugi*, the materials used in the repair process are more precious than the materials used in the original object. Gold, silver, platinum. These materials are not inexpensive and they are not easily found. Healing is costly. It requires the rarest and most precious materials to heal human brokenness, up to, and including, Christ himself! It requires time, love, patience, and faith, and it is the work to which each and every one of us has been summoned.

Kintsugi: golden repair.

Amen.

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ⁱ Julie Polter, *Sojourners*, "God is in The Making; Artist Makoto Fujimura on Loving What is Broken and The Holy Work of Repair," February 21, 2021, p. 24

ⁱⁱ Ibid, p. 24

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, p. 25

^{iv} Ibid, p. 25

^v Ibid, p. 27

^{vi} Ibid, p. 26