

“Houses of Love & Big Tables”
C Pentecost 2 – Mark 3:20-35
June 6, 2021; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
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Mark 3:20-35 (NRSV)

²⁰ and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” ²³ And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ **If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.** ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

²⁸ “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have

forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” — ³⁰ for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

The True Kindred of Jesus

³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters^[a] are outside, asking for you.” ³³ And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

EVER BEEN BROKEN?

Ever been broken? By life? By love? By circumstances beyond your control? Ever felt like relationships or communities were so divided against themselves they could not stand? Like Jesus talks about?)

Ever felt pretty sure there was no healing the breach, mending the tears, sewing the pieces back together, or perhaps, sowing the seeds in enough places and seasons to ensure they would sprout later when the elements allowed?

JESUS’ SEEMING TO DIVIDE....BUT....

“If a house is divided according to loyalties, it cannot survive,” says Jesus.

In fact, Jesus says a *lot* of not-very-soothing things in today's Scripture! We thought "Look busy, Jesus is coming!" was a little anxiety-producing last month, but this week's episode, early in Jesus' earthly ministry, where he's sparring with the scribes and swarming crowds and even his own family, is downright unnerving!

Why such pointed words, and what was he really trying to convey?

Jesus had just recently been baptized in the river by John, and was launching full into his ministry. Announcing the Kingdom of God was coming, and in fact, already here! People were experiencing healing, liberation, renewal in Jesus' presence. They were starting to feel hope! Even in a very oppressive time and place. Even under the terrible thumb of tyranny.

But, it didn't take long for Jesus to see and experience himself how very *broken* things were. The systems—governmental and household, religious and personal—were all badly broken. People's hearts and lives were broken—by all they suffered with disease, starvation, even imprisonment when they weren't able to pay their taxes or work off their debts.

Jesus, with God's help, wanted to bring healing of body and soul; deliverance and freedom from the demons internal and external that plagued, but the resistance was fierce. He *was* beginning to usher in God's realm in their midst, but boy, did he get a lot of pushback!

Prime players in that pushback was the religious establishment. Did they not *want* God's Kingdom to come? I bet they *did*, but they were blinded by the brokenness. They just couldn't see past their own spite and nastiness and skepticism, so they questioned and criticized Jesus' efforts and message and ministry at every turn.

They just couldn't see beyond the brokenness. Couldn't believe that the Reign of God was coming to displace another reign that kept them all down and in despair. Because they couldn't imagine restoration and repair like Jesus imagined it, they just repudiated everything he said and did. Clung to their categories and loyalties—their tendencies to divide everyone into camps and to assign labels, and missed the message of the Gospel altogether!

BROKEN BREAD AND BROKEN PLATES

One day, not so very long ago, I had a Day. One of *those* days. Those days that don't go as planned. Not all bad, by any means, but lots of surprises, forgetfulness and trying to fit too many things into too little time and space!

We had just learned of a beloved church member's stage four terminal cancer, and were reeling in that news. Along with it came several other concerns about dear one's family members' health and grief—2-legged and 4.

I was scrambling to finish writing a couple sermons so we could get them recorded before my trip and the

Maloney's trip. That's when I discovered my computer was at 24% power all day, and the charger was NOT charging! We'd *already* discovered that we'd forgotten a little thing called a microphone when recording the communion piece for these Communion Sundays, so were making plans to re-record due to that goof.

When I got to the recording studio, arms full of many supplies and malfunctioning computer equipment, we realized that none of those bags contained the bread! Text to Clarke to bring that over.

Then, we heard an awful crash! Oh my! The carefully-packed bag with the chalice and plate—made of pottery of course!—had done an amazing gymnastic feat and rolled off the chair and onto the floor. “Rolled” might be a too-gentle term!

The horrible sound we'd heard was the sound of breaking things. ALL the things. The plate had a split almost down the middle. The chalice was missing a couple chunks off its base. Noticeable chunks.

Ach! Now we had no bread to break and broken serving dishes! I wonder if Jesus ever had those kind of days when he was telling us to “do this often, in remembrance of me.”

We patched things together as best we could, carried on amidst the broken pieces, and made plans for repair in the future, as well as being honest about the imperfections in our midst—on the camera and off. And, a song drifted into our heads.....

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in
That's how the light gets in

Thank you, Leonard Cohen.

KINTSUGI GOLDEN JOINERY

And with that song, came another image—that of Japanese pottery that has been repaired! Mended, fixed and made reusable again. But not just super-glued. Repaired with **gold**! Rebuilt with a precious resource from the earth that is meant to show, not hide, the cracks. To highlight the broken places and bring beauty to the places of damage or destruction.

Kintsugi is the ancient art of fixing broken pottery with gold. Dating back to the 1400s, it was thought to be the invention of Japanese shōgun Ashikaga Yoshimasa, who charged his craftsmen with finding a more thoughtful, aesthetically pleasing way of fixing a broken tea bowl, rather than the traditional method of using ugly metal staples.

Using precious metals, including gold, Japanese craftsmen started to bond together pieces of pottery by *drawing attention to*, rather than away from, the breaks, which in turn had the effect of making the break the most important part of the piece itself.”

It's also called, "golden joinery"—as that's an exact translation, and has become a metaphor across the world for the spiritual journey and well-being.

Retreats are held where not only pottery, but clothing and other personal items are brought, and people gather in circles to stitch and mend and glue and weave broken, torn or battered things back together again.

It's also more than personal, and can be a powerful metaphor for all the broken places we find ourselves in, and among. All the places inside us *and* our communities and countries that need repair, restoration, healing, rejoining—not to be divided against ourselves so that we cannot stand or thrive.

As one spiritual writer reflects: "This beautiful concept from Japanese history is now considered an important art form, but also one that teaches us to embrace the beauty in our imperfections. Kintsugi reminds us that something can break and yet still be beautiful, and that, once repaired, it is stronger at the broken places. This is an incredible metaphor for healing and recovery from adversity. It teaches us healing and resilience.

First taken care of and then honoured, the broken object accepts its past and paradoxically becomes more robust, more beautiful and more precious than before it was broken. In an age when we are all too focused on perfection and strength, kintsugi teaches us that imperfection and fragility are two things to be celebrated."

"There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." ~ Leonard Cohen

A metaphor for life and community

Listen to that again through the ears of community.

Jesus isn't seeking to break apart anything or anyone further—certainly not congregations or families, with his puzzling words. He is saying what is already true — when we are too broken or divided, in ourselves and in our circles, we cannot welcome the Reign of God into our midst.

Jesus redraws the lines. ALL who do the will of God are siblings. and mother to him. Kinship structures in that time needed some reformation. The Circle and Table needed to be drawn wider and bigger—like they do for us today. Jesus challenges their vision as too small.

Their worldview and close-up view lacks imagination. Their tendency, and ours, to draw lines in the sand and put everyone into categories is only hurting the household foundation further. Labels do not stick with Jesus!

A black seminarian named Dante Stewart is coming to the fore these days with profound teaching and insight for us all. He sounds quite a bit like Jesus on that day, when he says:

Christian faith is not just about proclaiming the faith in a world that is blinded. It is also about embodying a dependable presence in a world that is **broken**. Our faith is not about winning, controlling, or proving. Our faith is about liberating, healing, and loving.

Let us Come to the Table. Bringing all of our brokenness, whether inside or in our world and systems. Let us find mending, healing, repair of the most beautiful kind. As Jesus bids us: The Table is spread, and it is open to all. Come, and eat. Come and drink. The Table is set, and its bigger and wider than you can ever imagine! Come as you are, for you are enough. Amen.