

December 3, 2023

BROKEN BUT STILL GOOD

Isaiah 64: 1-9; Mark 13: 24-37

When my family and I moved to Canada almost 20 years ago, we brought with us those of our belongings that could fit into our suitcases; we brought mainly clothing and a few personal items - things that had more than monetary value to us.

Among the things that we brought were two mugs. Those mugs were given to us as a wedding present. They were made of clay, hand-crafted, and specially made to order. We cherished those mugs, and there was no way that we were going to leave them behind. One mug had Celena's name on it, and the other had my name. We decided that Celena would have the one with my name, and I would have the one with her name – we belong to each other.

When we arrived in Canada and unpacked, I discovered with great dismay that the one bearing Celena's name was broken into several pieces. I was sad and disappointed. I thought about having it replaced, but I decided not to, for it wouldn't be the same – it would be another mug, not the one that was specially crafted for our wedding. So I collected all the pieces, bought some crazy glue, and carefully and painstakingly glued each piece together. I am happy to say that after all those years that have since passed, I still have that mug. You can see the many places where it was broken; the cracks are still visible, but that is okay; what matters is that I still have that mug.

This mug reminds me of life, all our lives. Our life is a gift from God, handcrafted, special, unique, created in love and for love. In our reading from the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah writes: *“You O LORD, are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.”* (Isaiah 64: 8).

We are beautiful and valued, but like my mug, in many ways, we are broken. Every day and all around, we witness and experience brokenness.

There is physical brokenness as we deal with illnesses, life changes and physical limitations that profoundly alter our lives and limit our abilities.

There is emotional brokenness as we struggle with failures, fears, alienation, separations, rejections, loss, sadness, loneliness and changes, that leave us feeling afraid, hurt, angry, vulnerable and confused.

There is mental brokenness as the pressures and stresses of life take their toll, making us depressed and despondent. We sometimes wrestle with despair as we search in vain for solutions to our pressing problems and answers to our difficult questions. All the while struggling with a feeling of helplessness.

We endure the pain of brokenness as we watch relationships we held dear crumble, and hurt take the place of joy.

We see the brokenness in our world as we watch in horror and disbelief as persons choose violence as the preferred means to settle disputes and an acceptable way with which to treat those whom they consider to be different.

We see the brokenness in our world as the less powerful are harassed and humiliated by the more powerful, and are then made to feel threatened into silence.

We see the brokenness in our world as naked prejudice, bigotry, and intolerance become increasingly mainstream, open and bold. Something is broken when the crude, callous and cruel no longer shock and appall us.

Like my precious mug, our lives and our world, crafted by God in love and for love, get broken, and we sometimes wonder if the shattered pieces can be put back together.

I was not prepared to get rid of my broken mug; I was going to do whatever it took to put it back together. Neither is God prepared to give up on us because we are broken, God has done what God needed to do. God sent his son to fix what is broken, and he did that with the only thing that can repair and make new – namely, love. God sent Jesus to demonstrate his love and to invite us into that renewing love.

That is the story of Advent and of Christmas - Christ coming into our brokenness to reconcile and make new.

But unlike my mug, which was put back together because I acted upon it - it was all my doing; with us and God it is different. God doesn't just act upon us; God works with us. Jesus was born a human being like us so that he could journey with us through the brokenness and pain of life, and he invites us to journey with him to the place of renewal and reconciliation.

This season of Advent calls on us to commit ourselves to that journey with Christ: for our own renewal, for the renewal of those who are struggling with their brokenness, and for the renewal of our world.

So Christ calls on us to be watchful, to be on the lookout both for those things that destroy and for those things that renew.

We have to be on the lookout for those things that destroy because the forces of evil don't just act upon us; they work through us, and we need to be on the lookout for such.

Hatred, prejudice, and bigotry cannot flourish unless we provide a platform for them to flourish. Greed, exploitation, discrimination, and harassment cannot grow unless we provide the environment for them to do so. Hateful and insensitive words cannot hurt if we don't give them a voice.

We have to be on the lookout for those things that cause brokenness in our own lives and in the lives of others and stand ready to rebuke and reject them.

And we also have to be on the lookout for those times and opportunities for healing and renewal. God calls us to faith so that fear will not overwhelm us. We have to look out for those opportunities that will increase and strengthen our faith.

God calls us unto relationship and community so that we don't have to go through the promises and pain of life alone. But we have to embrace those relationships and opportunities for community when they are offered.

God extends grace to us so that we can reach for that which is beyond our own ability to achieve, and share in that which would otherwise be impossible. But we have to receive that grace through faith.

Advent calls us to watch and wait, to be on the lookout, for we know not when the moments of reckoning or grace will come, but they will come.

I look at my mug, and the cracks are still visible, but I don't value my mug any less; if anything, I treat it more gently because of what it has gone through.

At various times and in many ways, we experience brokenness in our lives, and the scars from our brokenness remain; not as signs that we are less valued, but as reminders that we are precious and cared for, as reminders that we are still the work of God's hand – broken but still good. The scars of our brokenness remind us that our redemption and renewal are not over and that we should watch and wait,

for we know not when God will visit us with grace, for God is always with us, calling us unto new life and love through Jesus our brother, friend and saviour.

So, during this season of Advent, and beyond, let us watch and wait for Emmanuel: God with us.

Thanks be to God.

Rev. Sydney Elias