

Brokenness

We didn't have enough glue, so the lovely vase with green tints that had come from an aunt at the wedding had to be thrown out. It was dropped, you see. Funny how when you wish to avoid blame you lapse into the passive voice. It was dropped. Not I dropped it, which I did. I dropped it and it broke. It broke into more pieces than we could count. And it was swept up and consigned to the depths of the wheelie bin for onward passage. What else do you do with something that is broken?

Well don't tell that to the patient who is in the orthopaedic ward in the local hospital. Her broken leg she is hoping against hope doesn't mean she is to be thrown out, - and so are we all. She, and her family, and her friends, are looking for renewal and restoration, for healing and mending, for a return to normality. Broken things are not always for binning. Some are worth retaining.

But what about when a trust that is broken? The newspapers revel in stories of people who allegedly tell lies in court. Stories of cover-ups, which reveal that the vows taken on the marriage day are nothing but a sham, and a hollow sham, at that. Promises broken, trust broken, hope broken. What do you do with that kind of brokenness? Bin it or help it to heal?

The medieval cathedral was slowly and painstakingly being erected. No expense was to be spared. The greatest craftsmen around were employed. The best of stone-masons, wood carvers, carpenters, glaziers, and all the rest of them. And they were only given the best of materials to work with. One day a rather lost and lonely man came wandering by. Looking for a job he offered to sweep up, and especially to sweep up the shards of glass that lay discarded on the floor. After a few days, he asked if he could work on a very small window tucked away in a dark corner behind the altar. Behind a slip-shod wooden screen, he worked away after he had swept up the rubbish. On the day the cathedral was dedicated people gasped in amazement at the new cathedral, at the carving and the intricacies but in particular at the most beautiful window of all, tucked away in a dark corner behind the altar, catching what little light there was. Taking up what others had thrown away, taking up only what was broken, and what others thought of no use, the stranger had transformed them into a thing of beauty and light and hope.

When you are no longer walking upon this fair earth, how would you like to be remembered? Some are so moved at the contribution to society some folk make they put a plaque up on the wall of the house to say: 'She lived here from this date to that date'. Others build themselves a mausoleum which will catch the eye of the passing traffic and so impress strangers with their obvious importance, if not wealth, which they discovered after all they couldn't take with them. Others have buildings named after them, streets, scholarship funds. Jesus, on the other hand, on the night before he died took bread and broke it and said this is how I want you to remember me. Not just in bread, but in bread broken.

The saviour of the world who knew very well what he was doing took not the great and strong and mighty things this world appreciates and prizes above all else. Instead, he took something quite ordinary and common and he broke it and said remember me every time you break bread.

It has always puzzled me that scene and those words. Why did Jesus not take something uplifting, encouraging, something that would make us look up, look outwards, look beyond ourselves. Why bread that was broken?

And in a similar vein why does the Psalmist say a broken and a contrite heart O God thou wilt not despise. What about the stiff upper lip? And where has all the gumption gone? Why did the Psalmist not tell folk to pull themselves together and present their best side to God? Only your best will do for God. Generations of good Scots have been brought up on that philosophy. You had to put on your Sunday best to go to church, and if you didn't have any Sunday best

And that sadly sent out a very strong and clear message that those who don't have a Sunday best should think twice about coming. Now clothes are no longer, thankfully the issue. The issue now is the church is perceived as the bastion not just of decency and respectability but of strength. And if you don't have the best in that department then perhaps you should think twice about the church again.

I often wish we could be more honest and *sincere* with each other, without wax as the Latin phrase *sine cera* says. It was what we were talking to the children about, if you remember. Or rather, and instead, I wish we could admit that there is rather a lot of wax about us. For there is much in us that is broken, has been broken, is in danger of breaking again. In us as individuals, in our relationships, in our families, in our communities. For many of us, and if my suspicions are correct, more than we would at first imagine, for many of us all we have to offer to God is our brokenness. I often used to think it would be good, as I looked at my congregation on a Sunday morning, if I could say, 'hands up all who are suffering from, or have suffered from depression or this illness or that illness.' This not in an attempt to expose them but rather to let them see how many others are going through exactly what they are struggling to cope with. I never did have the courage.

So often it is our broken promises, our broken dreams, the ideals we once aspired to which loom the largest. They have all been knocked out of us by the hurly-burly of the world, and the desperate need to survive. Faith has lost its shine.

That is why the Psalmist said that God does not despise a broken and a contrite heart. Because he knows who we are. And he knows I suspect that life for all of us is not one straight unwavering line. Rather it is a series of broken lines that derail us from time to time. From which we have to pick ourselves up, and recover as best we can.

Then we come here and discover that Jesus invites us to share in this fellowship meal by means of something that is broken. But that is the only way that Jesus can speak to us. If we are so perfectly formed and fashioned, if we are surrounded by such a hard veneer how can the spirit of God ever enter our soul? Conversely, he enters it only all too easily we are full of cracks and broken bits.

The healthy have no need of the doctor, but the broken in heart, in inspiration, in mind, in body and in soul, they need healing and helping. And people like you and me, we believe that we find that healing, and that wholeness, in our relationship with the God who does not despise a broken heart; and whose son asks us to remember that

when we see bread that is broken, he is here beside us and I for one will settle for that and accept that in the brokenness of things, of me and mine, I can find God and see God.

Amen