

Scripture
Psalm 147:1-11

Broken Beauty

If you listen to the news media, politicians, or even friends, and family right now everyone is pointing out these are “unprecedented times.” In some ways this is true, and in some ways this time is like many others. Do you think Noah said that on the ark? Or Daniel in the lion’s den? What about the disciples in the days between Easter and Pentecost? Or Julian of Norwich, or Martin Luther, or Martin Luther King Jr. or....?

God is a God of unprecedented times: a God who rebuilds what has been destroyed, who gathers what has been scattered, who knows us better than we know ourselves. There are times in our lives, moments in history, when things get unimaginably hard and we don’t know what to do. And still, divine beauty breaks through. Out of great struggles come stories and images of great resiliency and hope. Today’s psalm is a great example of that.

We might think of beauty as a luxury but beauty is essential. Our spirits need things of beauty to survive. I’m not talking about beautiful things, expensive things the wealthy fill their homes with. I am talking about the beauty that comes even out of the places of deep suffering, beauty found even in the midst of oppression. True beauty is intertwined with compassion and justice, hope and resiliency.

Beauty is found in spiritual resilience. Farley writes “The relentless assaults of hunger, ugliness, humiliation, lack of resource, random violence, and loss can gnaw away at the human spirit, leaving it dull and resigned. But the haunting beauty of spirituals emerge from life situations of utter degradation.” Pretty things may be more available to those with financial resource. But beauty is a spiritual matter and as such is no respecter of social status.”

Beauty is found in the broken places of life like Leonard Cohen writes “And even though it all went wrong, I’ll stand before the Lord of song With nothing on my tongue but hallelujah.”

Or one of my favourites as most of you know “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.

Cohen writes like a psalmist Spiritual resiliency, gritty determination. His words and our lives are like the Japanese art of Kintsugi where broken pottery pieces are put back together with **gold** — built on the idea that in embracing flaws and imperfections, you can create an even stronger, more beautiful piece of **art**.

Look at the beauty that shines forth. We are all broken and God heals the broken hearted and heals our wounds. So many of us still believe because it has been deeply ingrained in us that we can only go to God when we got it all together. God will accept us when we are dressed up properly, our heart is pure and we have our lives in order. Somehow if we dress up our lives with a pretty bow we will fool God and if we form this illusion God will be nearer to us. We want to hide our imperfections, we want to conceal our brokenness. But that is not how God sees it.

We have been talking about the contemplative life for a couple weeks now and this is a reminder that the contemplative journey is not about lies. The world is broken. The contemplative life is about a passion for what is real. And the truth is everything around us is really badly broken.

We don't have to look far to see that. I had a dream that when Covid hit that we would start to see life a new way. I had hoped that once we got over our own isolations we would see our connectedness to one another. Maybe that is what is happening but this week I have had my heart ripped open again as I watch us continue to polarize. I believe, I understand, I even preach black lives matter. I understand, I believe, I know there is deep systemic racism in North America, in Canada and throughout the entire world. You can go back a couple of weeks and hear me bear my heart about this - a sermon that kept me up for nights because I feared back lash and because I was revealing secrets about my family and I heard nothing as if it was common knowledge or it just doesn't matter. So let me first say I believe those who are abusing their authority need to be called to account but lets speak against the air we breathe, the blood running through our veins that is systemic that we are a part of in ways we need to be educated about because we do not even know. But when I hear police are being denied meals in local restaurants, or being slandered and spit on because they wear a uniform that most of them dawned with a sense of compassion and justice for all I think - oh we are such a broken people. We live in such a broken world, and right now without very deep resources that everything taking place could do us in.

Farley goes on to suggest there are many things around us that are heartbreakingly broken and beauty is this insistence that everything is really badly broken including your heart and yet God fills it with Gold.

So here is something I have come to know and believe. When our hearts get the courage to accept the brokenness in our world, and our own hearts. When we acknowledge the brokenness, that is when the healing begins. We can only see true beauty through the cracks of brokenness. Your heart has to be able to take in the truth. We think if we take in the truth we won't make it out. Our churches think this, our politicians think this, our world thinks this but actually when we expand to accept truth suddenly we are able to see beauty and sacredness everywhere. Suddenly we are able to break through polarizations and labels and see through the walls we have built. We can't truly recognize it if we lie to ourselves and one another.

Nature is proof of this resilience. Have you seen the beauty of the new life that sparks up after a forest fire? I love it when I see a flower poke through a crack in a sidewalk or in the middle of a dry dessert ground.

So I want to encourage you to take some time this week to see beauty in broken places. Anguish or anger makes beauty seem irrelevant or even a selfish distraction. It may feel like now is not the time to be looking for it. In fact in recent months and years we may have become blind to the light shining through the cracks. Farley writes of a beauty I have glimpsed and I am longing to live into. She expresses “I am not opposed to momentary reprieves, but beauty is more than a respite for a worn-out or self-indulgent soul. It is our recognition that something exists other than the projections and passions of our ego minds.

When the world disrobes itself and shows itself naked in its shattering beauty it is almost too much to bear. We have to practice simply to endure the sheer force of the beauty of the world. It requires a spiritual energy to open, like a petal, to beauty and this energy must be cultivated.”

Take time this week to discover the beauty in the broken places of your lives and of our world. Don't try to ignore the brokenness look closely at it and wade through the muck to discover the Lillies in the swamp. May we each become closer to knowing and experiencing true beauty in our lives.

Amen.