

"BROKEN THINGS"

(Matthew 26:26-30)

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[NEED PROPS: 2 WHOLE MUGS; RUBBER HAMMER TO BREAK ONE]

[Cornerstone U.M.C., 8-7-22]

--I--

1. **[11am ONLY]** Read Text (NRSV): Matthew 26:26-30 and pray.
2. Mugs are a great invention **[SHOW MUG]**... very versatile and great for keeping hot coffee or hot chocolate in when it's cold outside.

A--And if you're not storing liquid in it to drink, you can use it as a pen/pencil holder on your desk, or to keep all kinds of trinkets inside. You can even bang a mug on a table when you want to get someone's attention.

B--So, it's very useful in the condition it's in now. But suppose I changed its condition?
**[BREAK MUG WITH HAMMER, THEN SHOW BROKEN MUG
 PIECES TO CONGR., WRAPPED IN CLOTH TOWEL/RAG...]**

C--Now let me ask how useful it is? It probably *can't* be used in many of the ways that I mentioned earlier:

1--It can't hold liquid or pens/pencils anymore,...

2--...and you can't even get someone's attention with it very well (unless you through the pieces at them!).

3. So, there's a catch -- a prerequisite -- to the usefulness of this mug as I've just described it: it has to be in *one piece*.

A--In fact, we often think that the *only thing TO DO* with this mug in it's current shape is to throw it away because after all, *when something is broken, we tend to think of it as useless* and without value.

B--And yet, is it *always* the case? ...that something broken is useless & without value?

C--I remember when I was a little boy growing up, my sister and I used to have a porcelain set of Easter Bunnies that sat on the table during Easter season. One day I was playing with one of these & promptly broke off the arms & legs. While Mama and Daddy weren't happy at the time, they nonetheless glued them back on, and today my family still puts them out on the kitchen table every Easter as a "good luck" charm

D--Now, the porcelain bunnies were nice by themselves, but *what made them so special was their BROKENNESS!*

E--I want us to think about that in relation to our lives today -- to the brokenness that we often experience in and through life.

--II--

4. And what I'd like us to consider is the one simple truth that **BROKEN things can become BLESSED things when we give them to Jesus** [REPEAT].

A--You know, you and I naturally shrink back from the pain and hurt of being broken.

1--Part of this may be the fact that the things that "break" us come unexpectedly -- they catch us by surprise, push us off-balance, & leave us stunned & in shock.

2--Sometimes it's *other people* that break and wound us through insensitive words that are said or that we perceive, or through actions that are done.

3--Sometimes we break *ourselves* by doing things we *know* are wrong, yet we fail to exercise self-discipline and self-control.

4--Often, we're "broken" by life itself when it deals us some tragedy, disaster, accident, or illness that seems so unfair - many people have been "broken" physically & emotionally over the last two years by the COVID pandemic.

B--Yet, *however* we're broken, and *whatever* it is that breaks us, today's scripture to us is a reminder that our brokenness does *not* make us *useless*.

5. In fact, the Bible attests over and over that brokenness is one of the *keys to fruitfulness* and blessing in God's kingdom.

A--It's been said that "*God uses for His glory those people and things that are the most perfectly broken.*" ¹

B--I mean, it sounds crazy at first. But, in fact, scripture bears it out over and over, ² and today's scripture from Matthew 26:26-30 is a great example.

[**9am ONLY**... Let me read it: "26 *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples & said, "Take and eat. This is my body."* 27 *He took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from this, all of you.* 28 *This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many so that their sins may be forgiven.* 29 *I tell you, I won't drink wine again until that day when I drink it in a new way with you in my Father's kingdom."* 30 *Then, after singing songs of praise, they went to the Mount of Olives.*"]

1--Here we have the story of the disciples gathered together in the Upper Room in Jerusalem for what we today call Jesus' "Last Supper."

2--And in Vs. 26, we're told that Jesus "*Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples*" as a metaphor for HIS body broken for us on the cross ³

C--Now, I want us to remember that after Jesus' *physical* death on the cross came the power, victory, and blessing of his *resurrection*.

1--Now catch that... Jesus would have never experienced the power and victory of his *resurrection* if he had not FIRST experienced his own *brokenness* on the cross -- i.e, the *blessing* came only *through* or *after* the BREAKING.

2--You know, today we usually want to explore blessing *without* the brokenness. ⁴

3--But it doesn't work that way. No, what we learn here is that it's often not *until* we become BROKEN that we discover the true POWER and blessing of God.

4--In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Paul says,...

"[God's] grace is sufficient for us, for [HIS] power is made perfect in [OUR] weakness [e.g., our 'brokenness'].... Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak [e.g., 'broken'], then I am strong."

6. Now, let me be clear: God is never the AUTHOR of our brokenness. But He does desire to *use* our situations of brokenness as *springboards* for our own growth and maturing.

A--Another way of saying this is that brokenness can cause us to be BETTER, or it can cause us to be BITTER -- the choice is up to us.

B--Christian missionary Watchman Nee once put it this way:

"Our spirit is released according to the degree of our brokenness. The one who has accepted the most discipline is the one who can best serve. ...The more we desire to save ourselves, in that very thing we become spiritually useless. ...[But] the more broken [we are], the more sensitive [we are to the Kingdom]." ⁵

C--Perhaps that's why, during the Civil War, an unknown Confederate soldier could write these words:

*"I asked God for strength that I might achieve,
I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked for health, that I might do greater things,
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy,
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of [people],
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life,
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for but everything I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am among all [people], most richly blessed."* ⁶

7. At one of my former appointments, I experienced a series of personal and professional crises, leaving me feeling depressed, defeated and like a total failure.

A--But what I didn't know at the time was that God was using those experiences to help prepare me for even greater ministry, so that the *next* appointment was one of my longest and most fruitful times of ministry yet.

B--God used my *brokenness*, you see, to become a source of *blessing*. to me & others.

--III--

8. Today, you may think that your life is like this mug -- all broken up over something -- your marriage; your health; your job, children, family, finances; some tragedy; etc.

A--You may have something going on right now which feels to you like someone's taking a hammer and slamming it down upon you.

B--Well, I believe God wants you and me to know that in the midst of our brokenness -- in the midst of our fears about life, the present, and the future -- Christ offers to us HIS brokenness to remind us of the *power* of brokenness.

C--As he did for his disciples (and as he did for me), he wants to take our *brokenness* and turn it into a *blessing*.

1--But for that to happen, WE must be willing to give Him all the pieces -- to admit that we need His help.

2--As with the disciples after the crucifixion, we must be willing to allow Christ's resurrection to enable us to overcome our own broken condition.

3--*We* must be willing to let *our* weakness become *Christ's* strength.

9. And when we do that, we'll find that ***our broken things can become blessed things in the hands of Christ.***

10. [HOLY COMMUNION -- ***Following reception of elements, our Prayer Ministers are available to the left and right if you would like someone to pray with you for any need you might have that you are broken up about***
[ONLINE audience please leave your prayer request on the "Prayer Wall" page on our church website that you'll see the link to at the bottom of your screen right now (<https://www.cornerstonenewnan.org/prayer-wall/>)]]

11. [Suggested 11am closing song: UMH#375, There Is A Balm In Gilead]

ENDNOTES:

¹ From the Devotional booklet "*Our Daily Bread*," January 27, 1994.

- ² For example: --Genesis 9 reminds us that Noah's rainbow occurred only *after* the flood.
--Genesis 32:22-32 tells us that before God could clothe Jacob with *spiritual* strength, his *natural* strength had to be BROKEN through a life-and-death struggle at Peniel.
--In Judges 7:19-25, we're reminded that it wasn't until Gideon's 300 soldiers BROKE their pitchers on the ground that his small army gained victory.
--Psalm 51:17 tells us that "*the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*"
-When Mary of Bethany BROKE a beautiful alabaster box of ointment over Jesus' head in Matthew 26:6-13, a lovely perfume filled the house. When Jesus broke 5 barley loaves and 2 small fish in John 6:1-14, the food multiplied and became sufficient to feed 5000 people.

³ See also Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, and I Corinthians 11:24.

⁴ The once-culturally-popular book "*Prayer of Jabez*" was an example -- it asked for God to "*bless me*" and to "*enlarge my territory*," but never acknowledged that that may *only* be possible *after* experiencing brokenness.

⁵ Watchman Nee, *The Release of the Holy Spirit* (1976), p. 22, cited at <https://www.biblesnet.com/Watchman%20Nee%20The%20Release%20Of%20Spirit.pdf>

⁶ Cited in Max Cleland, *Strong at the Broken Places*; Chosen Books, 1980.