

Beauty in brokenness

9 July 2023

BIBLE READINGS

Psalm 13 (responsively)

How long, Lord? Will you forget me for ever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

How long must I wrestle with my thoughts

and day after day have sorrow in my heart? ...

Look on me and answer, Lord my God.

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death ...

But I trust in your unfailing love;

my heart rejoices in your salvation.

I will sing the Lord's praise,

for God has been good to me.

Matthew 11:28-30

At that time, Jesus said ... 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

2 Corinthians 4:1-7, 16-18

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we do not hide anything; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

MESSAGE Beauty in brokenness

What does it mean to be human? ... perhaps it means that we have intelligence and can think logically ... but then I look at how we treat the environment and I wonder how intelligent we really are.

Perhaps being human is about how we are social beings and how we are drawn to live in community ... but then I see how we treat people who are different to us – whether it's Indigenous people, refugees, gender diverse people - and I wonder how welcoming we really are as a species.

But perhaps one of the signs of being human is how we care for one another. There is a legendary

archeological story of finding a 15,000 year old woman's skeleton that has a healed femur bone, the big bone that runs from your knee to your hip socket. As the story goes, it suggests this person was cared for, quite possibly was carried around and looked after for several weeks while the bone healed.

Taking this a step further, perhaps being human is recognising that we are in fact frail and vulnerable creatures who are nevertheless loved and cared for and valued.



When we think about mental health and the variety and extent of mental illness in our society, it's obvious that we are indeed frail and vulnerable, but unfortunately that doesn't always mean that we are lovingly cared for and accepted. If you need someone to talk to, please contact your GP or one of these organisations ...

Lifeline 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au

Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636 www.beyondblue.org.au

Headspace (03) 9027 0100 <https://headspace.org.au>

QLife 1800 184 527 <https://qlife.org.au>

Turning Point 1800 250 015 www.turningpoint.org.au

Listen to one person's experience of mental illness in this poem entitled Depression ...

Dark

 Low

 Alone

 Cold

Unworthy

 Unnoticed

 Sad

 Anxious

Despairing

 Flat

 Grey

 Dull

No hope

 No point

Help please

Someone, please

And now hear the cry for better understanding in this prayer ...

We pray for all with invisible illnesses.

A broken leg we can see,

a fever we can feel,

but when the illness is deep inside,
whether inside the body or the mind,
it is invisible to us all.

We see only symptoms:
uncharacteristic behaviours,
lack of energy,
looking drawn or tired,
being irritable or rude.

Lord, we pray for those suffering from invisible illnesses.

May we learn not to judge others based on what we see.

One of the important insights from OT theology about humanity is that each person is a whole – that we cannot separate body, mind and spirit. This means that the health of each part of us affects the rest of us.

So in the psalm we read – and in many other psalms – the writer is feeling anxious and forgotten by God. These feelings carry over into their body that feels like it is facing death.

We sometimes say that we have a gut feeling about something – perhaps about a decision we have to make or anxiety about the future – butterflies in your tummy – or we have a gut-wrenching experience ... we have this strong sense that seems to come from our gut of all places.

Scientists have discovered strong connections between the brain and our gastrointestinal or enteric nervous system. The distress we feel in our stomach can be the cause or the product of anxiety, stress, or depression. Who knew?

Just this morning I read an article on the ABC website that suggests that chronic lower back pain probably has as much to do with our mental health as it does our posture.

This suggests of course that if we want a healthy mind we need a healthy body – and vice versa - so things like the food we eat, the amount of exercise and sleep we get, our connection with nature all make a difference. More on this next week.



There is also a lesson to be learned from our NT reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. As we heard last week, Paul faced many dangers and opposition from people outside the church. He

also faced criticism and opposition from people within the church – especially at Corinth - who disagree with his message that we must walk in the footsteps of Christ ... even when this means suffering.

As always Paul is focused on remaining faithful to Christ, faithful to the gospel message and faithful to his calling. As we heard last week, Paul is anxious and worried – every day – for the health and vitality of the church communities that he founded. What should he say to the members of the Corinthian church who are so critical of him? How can he encourage them to stay true to the gospel?

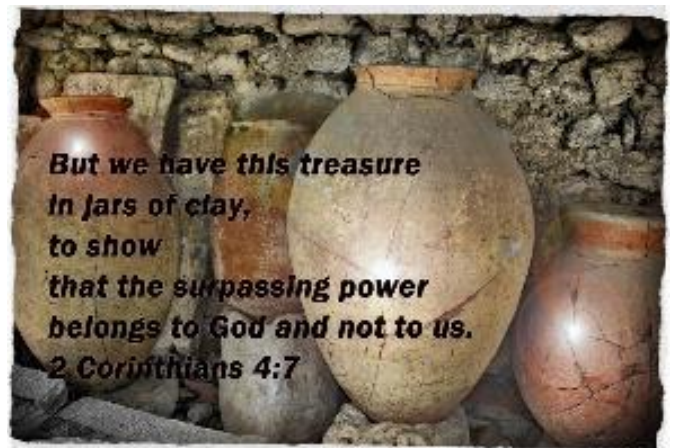
In his first letter to them, Paul reminded them of the centrality of Christ and his death on the cross ... which appears to be a weak and foolish message to some of the Corinthians ... who seemed to prefer a message of glory and triumph.

In the passage we heard this morning from his second letter, Paul suggests that the gospel message is actually all about the glory of Christ and the power of God ... it's a message about God's light shining in the darkness and pointing us towards God's glory that is seen in the face of Christ. Yet this message is often veiled and hidden, and hard to see.

Why? Because the message is carried and proclaimed by people like Paul – a fallible and fragile human being. So the message of the gospel is like treasure – highly valuable – but it's being carried around in jars of clay – common and fragile vessels that are easily damaged or broken.

So how does the light shine out of such common and fragile vessels?

Through the cracks and imperfections of the clay jars – through the cracks and imperfections of our humanity.



Let me introduce you to the Japanese art of *kintsugi*, which literally means golden repair. A Japanese Emperor back in the 15th century was heartbroken when his favourite porcelain tea cup was broken. He sent it back to China to be repaired but was unhappy with the result. He encouraged his local artisans to come up with an alternative repair method which they did – using lacquer and gold powder. The repaired ceramic was beautiful.

And so was born a new artform and the philosophy of wabi-sabi ... where beauty is seen in flaws and

imperfections.

The practice of kintsugi does not try to hide these imperfections but rather to highlight them. The object is considered more beautiful because it has been broken. Hence kintsugi becomes a metaphor

for embracing our flaws and imperfections. It suggests that we won't realise our full potential and beauty unless we go through tough times.

When we are broken – as may happen through difficult events or through experiences of mental illness – God can help repair the brokenness in our lives and make us more beautiful ... so that the light of the gospel shines through more brightly and more clearly.

So often we have viewed mental illness as something to be hidden away and as a sign that the person is less than whole. But what if the cracks in our lives caused by mental illness can be seen as potential - or even as beautiful? ... unique flaws that allow God's light to shine through more brightly? Perhaps we can think more kindly and gently about ourselves – and about others.

And how about the gold filler? Perhaps that is the many professional helps available, but also the respect, support and encouragement of a community who cares, who listens and who includes people facing mental health challenges.

The book of Genesis tells us that humans are made in the image of God.

While we might equate this to intelligence or logic or the moral capacity to judge right from wrong, perhaps this image of God also includes our frailties and imperfections – the parts of our lives that allow God's grace and love and beauty to shine through all the more clearly.



SONG TiS 690 Beauty for brokenness

BENEDICTION (by Brooke Prentis from Common Grace)

May our footsteps, on these ancient lands,
remind us of creation and connectedness, in our search for truth.

**May the gumtree, from its roots to its branches,
remind us to dig deep and reach high, in our action for justice.**

May the eagle, who soars in the sky,
remind us of your power, in our call for love.

**May the holy three - Creator Spirit, Lord God, Papa Jesus -
remind us of the central place of community.**

Be with us as we go out in truth, justice, love and faith.