

“Broken”

As we prepare to take communion today I'd like us to focus on two Scripture passages. The first is Psalm 34, verse 18: “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.” The second is 1 Corinthians 11:23-24: “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, Take, eat, this is My body which is broken for you: do this in remembrance of Me.”

The first of these Scriptures, from Psalm 34, says God is near to those who have a broken heart. He helps and saves people who are “crushed in spirit”. ***God is a God who wants to heal our brokenness.***

Life is full of brokenness – broken dreams, broken promises, broken families, broken friendships, broken bodies, broken hearts. The Bible tells us that God cares about us in our brokenness. He wants to help us. He wants to mend and restore the broken pieces of our life.

Jesus, when He walked this earth, healed broken people. He restored sick bodies, He calmed tormented minds, He forgave people's failures and sins, He even raised the dead! The good news of the gospel is that we have a God who draws near when our hearts are broken and our lives are fractured by one thing or another.

I can imagine what I've just said is a turn off to some people. “Sounds like you're saying religion is for weaklings. Christianity and the church are for losers, people who don't have enough within themselves to succeed in life.” Here's this self-confident man of the world – or woman of the world - this “go-getter” who figures, “I'm doing fine. I've got a good education. I have a good job, a nice family. I try to help people where I can. I'm a pretty good person. Now you're telling me I have to grovel before God, and think of myself as a weak and needy person. No thank you.”

No, Christian faith is not just for weaklings and losers. God wants us to succeed in life, to love ourselves properly and to have a healthy self-confidence, because in Christ we are God's children – “King's kids”!

But the reality is that sometimes in life we get broken. We lose our job; we lose our marriage; our health begins to fail, a trusted friend disappoints us; a family member gets into trouble or does something foolish; we ourselves do something stupid or fall into some sin or addiction; a cherished loved one dies. And we discover (or rediscover) that we're not as good or wise or strong as we assumed.

Often we need to be broken before we seek God, or want God to take over our life. King David was a great king – the greatest king in the history of Israel. But his life went haywire when he lusted after Bathsheba and committed adultery with her. One sin led to another. And finally, confronted by the prophet Nathan, David owned up to the fact that he had messed up his life. He wrote Psalm 51, a great Psalm in which he recognizes that what God really wants is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart. In Psalm 51:17 David says, “For you do not desire sacrifice,

or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” Religious ritual and animal sacrifices aren’t enough – we need to have a broken spirit and recognize that we need God’s help. Psalm 34:18 reminds us, “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves those with a crushed spirit. *God wants to heal our brokenness!*”

There is so much brokenness in the world today. I don’t have to convince you of that, do I? Read the newspaper. Watch the evening news. Go online for the latest headlines. Shootings. Accidents. Republicans and Democrats at war with each other.

A friend from a previous church lost his wife (a beautiful Christian) this past spring. Every so often he vents his sorrow on Facebook. In a recent posting he wrote, “No one knows the tears still inside me. People think it’s all past. They think I’m all better. Every once in a while I think, I hope, I pray that things will be better too. But then I remember. And the pain floods back, and the bottom falls out, and I fall and I fall. And I know once again that things aren’t all better. My loved one (he mentioned her name) is gone, and I cry alone. How much longer, God? How long does this last?”

In my many years of work as a pastor and marriage and family therapist I have worked with many people who are broken in one way or other. Life is hard, and life has a way of wearing us out and tearing us down, so that we need help, and we need hope

But *pastors* can be broken people too! I remember a husband and wife couple in a former church I served sharing with me about the time they saw their pastor, a former pastor of the church I was serving, sitting on his back porch steps crying. As I recall, it was a family issue involving one of his children. My friends seemed surprised that this pastor could be in that state of mind. Well! I will never forget being awakened with a very early morning phone call from one of our sons. He was in deep distress, in tears. He said his wife just told him she wanted a divorce. It hit him blindsided. He didn’t see it coming. They had two young boys. His world began to come apart. He lost a beautiful large home in suburban Philadelphia. He lost their cushy combined income. He lost all he had worked for in the years they were married. This son who at times could act a bit cocky, was crushed. Nancy and I were broken.

Some of us here, in our personal lives, perhaps in our family, are feeling the pain of brokenness. This brings us to the other verse that I want to highlight as we take communion. It reflects Jesus’ words at the Last Supper, as He broke the bread and shared the cup of wine with His disciples during His last earthly meal - “This is My body which is broken for you” (1 Corinthians 11:24).

The words here are from the New King James Version of the Bible. Most other translations simply say, “This is my body, for you” or “given for you”. The word “broken” is not in all of the ancient Greek manuscripts. But I prefer the rendering, “This is My body which is *broken for you*”. Jesus’ body *was* scarred and broken for us in His sacrificial death on the cross for our salvation. Jesus’ flesh was torn by the spikes driven into His hands and feet. His side was pierced by a soldier’s sword. “This is my body, which is broken for you” (1 Corinthians 11:24).

All of this fulfilled that marvelous prophecy in Isaiah: “He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hides their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases, yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed” (Isaiah 53:3-5).

The table of the Lord, Holy Communion, can be a place where we find healing for our brokenness.

Where can broken people go for help? Some try to find solace *in alcohol* – at home or at the local bar. Some try to soothe their pain by overeating or overworking, or with drugs or sex or some other escape. Some talk about their brokenness with a friend – and that’s good, except even the best of friends can only do so much.

What better place to go than to the Lord – and to the Lord’s Table.

“This is My body, which is broken for you” (1 Corinthians 11:24). Come to the Lord’s Table. There is comfort for our sorrows...forgiveness for our failures...healing for our diseases, strength for our weakness...hope for all our tomorrows! ***Come!***

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