

I love dishes. I collect dishes. I've inherited quite a few from grandmothers and other relatives as well. Queen Anne China, pink Fostoria, green depression glass, Waterford crystal, Irish Belleek porcelain. I have just a little bit of everything. If you've been in my office, you've maybe noticed my collection of special cups and saucers above the shelves in my office.

When I was first married, we entertained more, and I liked to pull out my good dishes. I remember washing the lead crystal wine glasses after one such party only to find that one of them had sustained a significant chip that night. I had that sick feeling in my stomach...kind of like when your brand-new car gets a ding in the door. My college Mustang got a significant dent in its fender by a runaway keg of beer (but that's another story entirely.)

I was standing at the sink drying my chipped crystal, and my dear friend saw the disappointment on my face ...but what she said to me has stuck for a long time. "True hospitality is letting the crystal get chipped." And she was right, the gathering of friends and family is always worth the crystal getting chipped. And in many ways, we each have our own chip, or crack or dent, much like our prized possessions. I think today's Gospel has a word to us about this as well.

I am glad to be with you this morning. I have been out on medical leave for the past five weeks, and in that time, I've experienced some of my own brokenness. And I know I'm not alone. L.R. Knost says "Everything breaks at some point." And I agree. A re-read of Henri Nouwen's book, "The Wounded Healer" this past week helped me to accept that fact. Over 40% of the American Public will experience clinical depression sometime in their life, many more experience debilitating grief, addictions, anxiety, eating disorders, and it's time we start talking about these things. Princes Harry, William, and Princess Kate have even gone public this week to talk about depression. I am grateful for them, Lady Gaga and all who are working to normalize the conversation about mental health. No one is exempt. Brokenness is a part of the human experience. Remember, the church doesn't exist for the perfect, it exists for those of us totally dependent on God's grace being sufficient for us...and the love and acceptance of each other. As I was reflecting on the Gospel for today, I found that, strangely enough, the story of Thomas' encounter with the risen Christ helps.

I'm a fan of this story. I love how matter-of-fact Thomas is. While the other disciples are all held up in the upper room due to their fear, Thomas is out and about despite his fear and grief. When he returns to the other disciples, they describe what must have sounded like a crazy story to Thomas, *Jesus came to them, breathing on them the Holy Spirit*. Thomas couldn't believe it. He can't believe such nonsense unless he sees and touches Jesus' wounds. It's that simple for Thomas. And who can blame him? Would you believe a story like this if you were Thomas? Probably not.

Then a week later, Jesus returns. Locked doors mean nothing to him. He breathes words of peace and then holds up his wounds for Thomas. He even invites Thomas to touch them if that's what Thomas needs. Apparently, seeing is enough. Thomas professes his faith then and there.

What means the most to me in that story is Jesus' invitation to Thomas to touch. Jesus identifies himself by his wounds, by his human frailty. We are talking about the Risen Christ who can walk through walls and locked doors. The same Christ who just a week before breathed out the Holy Spirit on a room full of people after leaving the tomb. Any of these miraculous actions could have identified Jesus. But, no, instead he holds up his hands and invites Thomas to touch his wounds, to explore his human brokenness.

Pain is not weakness. Grief is not weakness. Physical limitations are not weakness. Wounds are not weakness. I wish we'd all pay more attention to this passage. We have fooled ourselves into thinking that perfection is to be prized and that we should keep other things quiet. This mindset is causing us harm in our families and in our communities. If the risen Christ identified himself by his wounds, then why do we go to such extremes to hide our own?

We are enamored with perfection in western culture. We must look perfect, act perfect, be perfect. We shy away from any displays of imperfection. We are not so good at dealing with people's physical different abilities because they make us uncomfortable. I'm afraid we aren't any better with people's "hidden" different abilities either. How many of us are afraid, to be honest about our own struggles for fear of judgment? For fear of being judged as weak or in need?

Funny how we have done this to one another when we worship a God who conquered death but saw no reason to remove the marks of human frailty. The risen Christ was not made perfect, the marks of sin and death were clearly still visible, reminding us of our true nature. We are fragile and finite. We can bruise, bend, and break in countless ways for reasons sometimes beyond our understanding. Many things can wound us deeply. Why deny that? Why hide it?

I think Thomas gets kind of a bad rap as he is often remembered for his doubting when it is Thomas who understand the power of the resurrection. To be whole when one is broken. When he asks to see Jesus, he doesn't ask for the perfect, shiny, unbroken Jesus. He asks to touch the Jesus in the nail marks and put his hand into Jesus side where the spear struck him. Thomas gets the reality of the resurrection. While he sees the brokenness in Jesus, he experiences the wholeness of the risen Christ. Broken for you and me; and transformed to wholeness for us all.

I've shared with you today a photo of a particular kind of pottery; it's called Kintsugi pottery... It is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with a lacquer finish mixed with a powdered gold. They

believe that while the pottery is fixed, it is more beautiful for being broken. Let me say that again; it is believed that while the pottery is fixed, it is now more beautiful for being broken. I've given you a photograph to take along home with you...a reminder that your own brokenness can be healed when you give God all the pieces. Jesus is risen, but his scars are still present. It is the same for us. Jesus comes into the broken places of our lives and fills the chips and cracks with grace and love. And despite being made whole, we are more beautiful for being broken. Jesus is repairing and redeeming the world, piece by piece. Starting with you and me.

"Peace be with you," Jesus said. And where does this peace come from? From the broken Christ, the one who hung on the tree, whose has come back to us both broken and as risen. As we say these same words to one another each week in worship, let us reach out to each other mindful we all have our own brokenness we bear. "The peace of Christ Be with you." Breathe in that peace and know that God claims us as we are. Breathe out that peace knowing that we are the embodiment of Christ both wounded and whole.

I'm grateful to Thomas for his honesty, and I'm more grateful that Jesus saw fit to hold out his wounds as proof of his identity. If the Son of God, the risen Christ, can use his wounds as proof of his life, experience, and identity, shouldn't we be doing the same thing? Here we are. Here are our wounds. We are God's beloved, and in Christ, we are made whole. Peace be with you. Amen.



Greatness is not found in being unbroken, but in being a blessing even after being broken like bread, like a seed that dies yet rises again.