

Joy Admire the Brokenness

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Preacher: Pastor Cathy Hall Stengel

- [0 : 00] Good morning. Welcome to my dining room table where we are going to light some Advent candles.
- We started a few weeks ago and we lit the candle of hope. Then we lit the candle of love. And now we light the candle of joy. On Sunday, I talked a little bit about where is joy in the midst of this strange and complicated time that we are living in.
- There, now they're all three with us. Hope, love, and joy. I talked about how joy is different from happy and that there are things that make us happy in the moment, but aren't necessarily times of joy.
- I can feel happy to see something I like, something that makes me laugh, something that I enjoy.
- [1 : 30] But having joy, even in the midst of a difficult time, is a different kind of thing. And I think that many people don't feel a sense of joy.
- On Sunday, I talked about the song, I've got that joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart. And why? Because I've got the love of Jesus in my heart.
- And there's a happy part in there, too. So, I thought I would look up in our United Methodist Hymnal and see, well, what kind of hymns do we have?
- These are the hymns that are under the category joy. Christ the Lord is risen today, an Easter hymn.
- Come we that love the Lord for the beauty of the earth, which is often a fall harvest song. Go tell it on the mountain.
- [2 : 36] Of course, that's a song for after Christmas when we're invited to go tell everybody that Jesus has been born. Good Christian friends rejoice.
- He rose. That's an Easter hymn. He touched me. A powerful message at any time. In the cross of Christ I glory.
- A very meaningful and I think a good way to think of some of the joy that we can find even in the midst of talking about the crucifixion.
- In the garden. A very moving and touching hymn that's often sung at funerals and memorial services.
- And yet, it is in the garden that we encounter the deep joy of being with God. Yezus, joy of our desiring.
- [3 : 37] Joy to the world. Joyful, joyful, we adore thee. O come, O come, Emmanuel. The spirit song.
- Sing with all the saints of glory. There's a song in the air. This is my father's world. Those are just some.
- I didn't read all of them because there are some that I'm not familiar with and maybe you aren't either. We can see in that list that under the category of joy, our United Methodist hymnal crosses through the Christian year.

All of it. Even the hard places. Finding joy in what? Joy in the sense that our faith and God are with us in the dark of the night, in the light of the day, during COVID, during critical illnesses and surgery, during times of loneliness and isolation.

I wanted to share something with you. I talked on Sunday about something called the art of kintsugi, which is a Japanese art of repairing broken pottery.

[5 : 08] The idea is that the glue that the Japanese would use to glue pottery together is then dusted with gold or silver or platinum to make this broken piece of pottery not only usable but beautiful in a different way.

I have this bowl. I have this bowl. Maybe you can't see because I don't have any gold or silver or platinum dust to put on it.

This bowl, which is a bowl from a place in the Finger Lakes that creates pottery where they take these special Bristol leaves and fire them into the pottery.

And in this particular bowl, which is important to me, there is a break. It broke. This whole side fell off when it broke.

And so we glued it back together. And some people might have thrown it away. Some people might glue it back together, but just use it as something decorative.

[6 : 33] I keep it and I use it. Most of the time, people don't even notice that it's broken.

I also have in my house a plate. And on this plate are broken pieces of pottery.

And there is a broken piece of something that has hung on the wall of our home for years and years and years.

And it's made out of some resin. It's not even wood, which is probably why it broke. So why do I keep it?

Why do I keep this plate of broken objects on my living room table? I think it goes back to that same idea of the Japanese art of Kintsugi.

[7 : 42] The idea that even in our brokenness, that there is a sense of God keeping us and holding us.

And that these broken pieces are part of our lives. And it's just a symbol.

And what was broken was just a thing, even if it was important. And these two things, and among the others, are symbols of the fact that there is brokenness in each and every one of our lives.

And we don't always feel like everything gets glued back together and dusted with gold and made beautiful. We don't always feel that way.

And so sometimes broken just feels like broken and doesn't have joy. And that's okay.

[8 : 49] That's a part of grieving and loving and feeling hurt by the world or by others or by death or so many different things.

So why hold the brokenness? And where is the joy? The joy in my pieces of pottery is that the story keeps going no matter that these things were broken.

The importance of what those pieces represent, the piece of the hanging or the piece of pottery that was whole.

Those were important. And the story they represent is important. One of my colleagues tells a story about a communion set that was so very important to her.

And she was taking it with her to an event where she was going to use it to offer communion to those gathered. And something happened with a bag or box that it was in.

[10 : 01] And it broke. And it wasn't anybody's fault. But there it was broken. And someone offered to come and to clean it up.

And she said, let's just gather all the pieces and put them back in the box or the bag, whatever she had them in.

And when she went home, disappointed that this special communion set, this cup and this plate were broken, she asked herself, what do I want to do with them?

Do I want to try to glue all those pieces back together? And she decided not to do that. Do I want to throw them away and just hold the memory of what they were?

She might have thrown away some of the pieces, the small ones. But what she found that she did along the way in her ministry was that when the time was right, she would have a different cup and plate for communion.

[11 : 08] But she would lay the broken pieces in front of those on the table. And her message, and I'm sure I won't get this completely right, was something to the effect that God sent Jesus to a broken world.

God sent Jesus to bring hope and healing and comfort to a broken world. God sent Jesus to a broken world, the celebration of communion where we lift bread and we break it and we break off pieces of it outside of COVID times to offer the body of Christ broken for you.

God sent Jesus to all the body of Christ broken for you. how apt it is to have some of these symbols, some of these pieces of what has been broken in our lives, in our hearts, on the table. On the table. Not tucked away, not in the dark, not in the trash. But the reality is, is that what God asks us to do is to bring our brokenness, bring our brokenness to the table, to the act of receiving communion, to the fellowship in faith with our brothers and sisters. We don't have to say a word. We just bring it with us. Because it is with us, that brokenness. And as we lean into the gift of the body and the blood of Christ, which are given for us, yes, for the forgiveness of our sins, but also for the acknowledgement that Jesus came in the brokenness, that Jesus' love is in the brokenness, that God's creation around us is in the brokenness. And so there is joy. There is joy in knowing that while I may not know your brokenness, your brokenness, your brokenness, and you may not know mine, what we have in common is the joy, the deep joy, not the happy on our face joy, but the deep joy of knowing that the light and life of Jesus Christ, the creative energy, the leading, surrounding, teaching presence of God, by the Holy Spirit, are present with us day in and day out. That gives me joy. That joy might feel more like comfort than joy to the world. That joy might be in a sense that somewhere in there God knows the broken.

God knows the pieces. God knows our hopes that it could be all knit together again like my bowl and made beautiful. We are beautiful to God in our broken pieces, in our pieces glued together to make a new hole, not the same one, but a new hole. That is where I go to in the dark of the night. We've talked throughout this time about symbols and things that we can look at in our everyday world that can help us to remember Christmas lights, lights in windows, lights on trees to represent the hope of the world.

The light of a single candle, even just one, the light of a single candle, real or battery in a window in our home to remind us that the love of God is a light in the darkness. The love of God is a flame and a candle that will not go out or burn out.

[16 : 00] The light and the life of Christ, which brings us love, will shine in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it. So today as we think about joy, I want to invite you to consider music.

I asked some of our staff last week, what were some of the hymns or songs that were speaking to them most powerfully in this very different season of Advent. And for myself, it's always O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

And it is often some of the beautiful Christmas carols and songs. I've been touched this year by In the Bleak Midwinter because in the bleakness comes the joy of this infant who came to save the world.

I've also been so moved by the song Breath of Heaven that we heard in worship just a week ago.

There are so many pieces of music. I wonder what is it that touches your heart? Where is it that you are reminded or that you hear your own voice longing for the presence of God in our Christmas music, Christmas carols, praise songs, whatever kind of music you might listen to? It might be Joy to the World.

[17 : 49] It might be O Little Town of Bethlehem. It might be O Come Thou Long Expected Jesus.

When you hear or play the one that means the most to you, I invite you in the midst of how music moves us to be reminded that the joy in the brokenness will never ever leave us. And that just in one week's time, we will once again celebrate and honor the birth of Jesus. And O Lord, we need Jesus this year. We need good news. We need hope and love and joy. And we need to be reminded that we have it. We do.

You do. I do and you do. Let's help each other remember as we go through this week. I invite you to pray with me. O Lord, help me and all of those who hear my voice to look deeply for the joy, to look deeply for the assurance that brings that joy that we believe that you are present.

no matter the dark of the night, no matter the brilliance of the day, no matter the cold, the snow, or sunny warmth through a window, you are present.

And we give thanks for that deep and profound joy. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen. I'll see you next week.

[19 : 54] And until then, look for the lights of hope, the candle of love, and the music of joy.

Take care.