

Your Kintsugi Story
September 15, 2019
Luke 12:49-56

When Katie and I were moving, we spent well-over \$200 on packing supplies, everything from boxes to bubble wrap to plate and glass protectors. With everything we used for packing purposes, you would think that everything would have remained intact. Sure enough though, when we moved in here, we opened a box to find a small bowl had broken. So, we did what any good American does: we threw it away, said, "Oh well, there are still seven more," and moved on, not giving it another thought. In retrospect, I realize how privileged such an action is. Many cultures around the world don't throw away broken things, but fix them. For centuries the Japanese have even made the mending of broken pottery an art form called "kintsugi." "Kintsugi," or translated "golden joinery," is a means by which a person glues pieces of broken pottery back together with an adhesive that has been mixed with powdered gold, creating this intricate gold lines in the finished product. Such repair work is done for three reasons. First of all, not everyone has the privilege of throwing aside that which is broken and replacing it without giving it a second thought. So, if it can be fixed, it will be fixed and continue to be used. Secondly, there is a belief that brokenness is a part of life and that those lines tell a story of the journey that piece of pottery has gone through. Lastly, it's believed that the resulting product with gold lines all over it is actually more beautiful than the original. This last one is especially important, because it applies not only to today's story, but to what was discussed last week with being the eyes of God in the world and it applies to how we see ourselves for that matter. So, let's start with today's story, which happens to be one of the few stories where Jesus seems truly angry.

In today's reading, Jesus is rather aggressive with his wording, we would all agree, and there are a few different images he gives with his "angry rant." First, let's tackle the image of fire he uses. He talks about coming to kindle a fire he wishes were already kindled. When we think of fire, we don't think of peace/harmony. As a pyromaniac, I love fire, I think it's beautiful to watch and listen to when camping. I love lighting candles. However, I realize how dangerous fire can be. Fire is not a gentle element of nature; fires consume forests, homes, anything in its path. Fire can cause irreparable damage to objects, animals, and people, even kill them. Just this past week, a United Methodist church in Pittsburgh not too far from the seminary was so badly damaged by fire that the building was condemned. As mentioned last week with Sodom and Gomorrah, fire is shown to be a very powerful force. So, Jesus talking about kindling a fire is not a soft illustration by any means, especially if you couple it with the other imagery Jesus uses in his speech.

Jesus talks about bring division rather than unity. He specifically names turning fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, whole households against each other. This image sounds like the beginnings of a war or anarchy. Taking into account that family systems were what kept the society in that day and age going, there is only further enforcement of the idea that Jesus was going to cause the Israelite culture itself to come crashing down, leaving nothing in its wake. So, cultural destruction plus the image of fire makes it sound like Sodom and Gomorrah all over again, but that's not the case in either image.

The division that Jesus talks about here is not meant as a means of destruction but as a means of renewal. In that day and age, a father had responsibilities to teach his oldest son how to run the family when he died, and the oldest son had a responsibility to pay attention. Mothers had a responsibility to not only teach their daughters how to maintain the home but to keep them chaste for marriage, and daughters had a responsibility to learn from the mothers. Daughters-in-law had a responsibility to the families they entered to produce children, especially sons, for the continuity of the family tree. Every relationship Jesus mentions has obligations, responsibilities, things that take time and energy away from doing God's work in the world and being in connection with the Triune God. Should those relationships break, people would have greater freedom to do God's work in the world and to reconcile the relationship between God and humanity. This then leads to the purpose of the kindling of fire.

The fire imagery used isn't fire in regards to Sodom and Gomorrah, but fire in regards to that of the Pentecost. On Pentecost, we read the story of how the Spirit entered into the disciples and tongues of fire appeared over them as they began speaking in all the different dialects and languages of all the different cultures present in that space at that moment. That division of language made it possible for unity to be established between cultures that otherwise had little in common and also made it possible for the Word of God to be spread further and wider than it had been before. The "fire" that Jesus is talking about kindling is a fire of passion, a burning and passionate relationship with the one Jesus calls "Father."

In the end then, we have a world where humanity is in a relationship with God and doing God's work that has come out of a world where division, war, and momentary obligations rule. However this more beautiful new world can only happen if at first the world we are in is broken, almost as if God, the potter, is going to break His creation to put it back together in a more-pleasing way that still fulfills its original purpose, and Jesus is just the one holding the hammer over it to do the initial break. I mentioned last week that we need to be the eyes of God, to see the world as God sees it. This means seeing it not just as how it is, but as how it can be, to see the brokenness of this world as a means to more beautiful world in the end and to see God as the potter at work putting the world back together again so that it might serve its original purpose.

I realize however that this doesn't make it any easier. We see the brokenness of our world, and it reminds us of when we have been broken. We see the injustice endured by others, and we are reminded of when we have been treated unjustly. We see chaos in the world, and we're reminded of the chaos we have potentially endured in putting our lives back together after a messy break-up/divorce, death, major fight, mental/physical illness, or some other life-altering event. We see the wounds currently endured by the world, and our scars are reopened for the moment. However, these scars I speak of, they are more than reminders of when we have been broken, of when we have been in need of repair. They are a reminder that, though we may throw broken things away and deem them unable to be used, God does not cast us aside and deem us unable to be serve a purpose. Instead, they remind us that God continues to hold onto us, even when we're broken, because of God's continuing to see us as useful in the world. They are a reminder of God's presence in our healing, of God's helping us through those tough times, and just as kintsugi tells the story of a piece of pottery and how it got to be how it is, so also those scars tell the story of how we have become who we are in the moment. Lord only knows my soul has kintsugi lines all over it, but I wouldn't trade in my experiences for anything. I'm proud

of who I am, just as I'm sure you all have some pride for who you are. However, we would not be who we are today if it weren't for being broken and hurt a few times along the way. Once we see our scars and what gave us those scars as means to a more beautiful end, we can begin to see the wounds this world bears as a step towards a more beautiful world. So, in closing, I ask, what stories do your kintsugi lines tell?