

Finding Peace In The Pieces
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18
Ash Wednesday
February 14, 2018
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Sometimes, I think we come to this service, that ushers us into Lent, as a “downer.”

Our earthly thinking puts us into an emotion that says that fasting and regret and 40 days of staying in that mind-set is well, a “bummer.”

Tonight, though, I’d like us to consider a more uplifted attitude that can challenge and motivate us to develop, through these 40 days, into ALL THE DAYS of the rest of our lives, that vision that God has for each of us: to live as a people, filled with life and grace as part of the “household of God.”

This could be the start of something!

Listen to these words from Scripture:

Matthew 6:1-6 and 16-18 Common English Bible

Listen to Jesus’ words:

Concerning Giving

6 “Be careful that you don’t practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. **2** “Whenever you give to the poor, don’t blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may get praise from people. I assure you, that’s the only reward they’ll get. **3** But when you give to the poor, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing **4** so that you may give to the poor in secret. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

Concerning prayer

5 “When you pray, don’t be like hypocrites. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people will see them. I assure you, that’s the only reward they’ll get. **6** But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

Concerning fasting

¹⁶ “And when you fast, don’t put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They distort their faces so people will know they are fasting. I assure you that they have their reward. ¹⁷ When you fast, brush your hair and wash your face. ¹⁸ Then you won’t look like you are fasting to people, but only to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Stay with me.

It may sound “out there,” but this could turn out to be a stand-out service in our faith walk!

This shouldn’t be a “depressing” service if we look upon it as an opportunity to learn and grow this Lent.

We come, as children of God who are broken and need to embrace the strength we receive from God AND from each other in our Family of Faith.

Brokenness.

The world we live in points out brokenness a lot.

Admit it! We don’t come to church because WE’RE PERFECT!

That would be like going to the doctor when you’re healthy, right?

We humans, since Adam and Eve, are broken.

We sin. We fall short. Our shortcomings glare at us daily; sometimes hourly or more!

But, let me clear this up: we’re already saints because we have faith in Jesus Christ who was **COMPLETELY BROKEN FOR US.**

Our brokenness, or rather our “willingness to **be** broken” CAN BE an opportunity to come with the viewpoint that we can, starting tonight, learn and grow.

And that our brokenness isn’t a negative but rather the first step into a closer, more valuable relationship with God than anything earthly could provide.

When the commercials tell us we need the products to make us look better; and drug companies push pills to make us feel good; and technology gives us machines that could make us more efficient...

I'm starting to ask:
Do we always have to be better?
What's wrong with being less than perfect?
Is it okay to just be broken?

Well, hear this: Yes. It is.
In fact being Christian allows us to be broken.

There's a song called "21 Guns" by Green Day.
The lyrics kind of retch out the struggles of being human and feeling broken.
Here's a few of the words:

*"When you're at the end of the road.
And you've lost all sense of control.
And your thoughts have taken their toll.
When your mind breaks the spirit of your soul.*

*Your faith walks on broken glass.
And the hangover doesn't pass.
Nothing's ever built to last.
You're in ruins."*

"Your faith walks on broken glass."
Isn't that true, sometimes, of our lives and our faith?

Dear Ones, our Christian journey isn't walked on a marble floor in an expensive mansion.

That's **not** how Jesus lived his life.
The journey is on dirt roads, uneven floors with obstacles.
It is real. And it is very often broken.

Tonight's Scripture verses lead us into three, commonly practiced, disciplines of Lent: prayer, giving and fasting.

These disciplines for the Lent journey allow us to be broken.
With the right motive, they allow us to confess our shortcomings and our brokenness REPEATEDLY **and still** be assured of God's love and grace in our lives.

I'm going out on FAITH this year to tell you that I've never really liked the "traditional" Ash Wednesday services that force people to be reminded of their failures.

Duh! We know them already.

While I pray I can encourage us (regularly) to keep trying to be better we don't need to be reminded!

What we do need (me included) is to have a reminder that it's okay to fail and fall short BECAUSE WE ARE assured that despite those sins and shortcomings **God loves US.**

So let's take our brokenness and apply the disciplines (prayer, giving and fasting) and **admit** that each one connects with a BIG TEMPTATION (that we all face) AND CONFRONT them. And then, step out of our brokenness into more wholeness with God.

- First, **Prayer**: confronts our temptation to power. And since we can't pray when we *think* WE'RE in control....
 - Let's not just "say a few prayers" but choose a practice of praying that guides us into a life lived in union with God all the time.
- The discipline **of Giving**: confronts our temptation to accumulate wealth for having more.
 - Let's choose a habit of giving that will lead us into a greater appreciation and ability with ALL that we have.
- and **Fasting**: confronts our temptation to allow our bodily appetites – and I'm not talking just about food, but addictions of all sorts that control us.
 - Instead, let's choose a fast that can take us deeper into God's grace.

Jesus confronted temptation often... so can we!

During Lent we can confront our brokenness and focus intentionally on confronting our human temptations and learn, like Jesus, to overcome them and live in humility, simplicity and discipline.

Sounds like I'm asking us to become even MORE broken, doesn't it?

Well, perhaps.

But, let's look at this optimistically to say that Ash Wednesday is an **opportunity** to pause in our walk of faith and BE broken; be changed for the long haul!

Traditionally, the ashes we're wearing are last year's burned palm branches.

Jesus' followers laid down palm branches for his entry into Jerusalem.

Complex isn't it?

That something of CELEBRATION becomes the symbol of our brokenness?

Reminds us of our contradictory selves.

We try, we fall short.

We are broken.

But God (how pleasing are those words) BUT GOD'S grace redeems us.

Always.

And these ashes, the signs of that grace, remind us to find peace through God's grace; we're forgiven and redeemed.

Always.

That's why, earlier, I said, instead of the old phrase

"From dust you came and to dust you shall return"

I said,

"Find peace in the broken pieces; and let yourself be loved by God."

We are broken at one time or another.

And God puts the pieces back together.

Let's use LENT, and the disciplines of Matthew's gospel teaching, to be okay with being broken.

Because through those broken pieces we're reminded that we are loved by God.

God bless our pieces as we begin Lent.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.