

“Out of Brokenness Comes Life”
Ezekiel 37:1-14, I Corinthians 11:23-26
World Communion Sunday
October 7, 2007

“... *the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’” (I Corinthians 11:23-24)*

The disciples should have seen it coming.

A quick look at their past and they would have known it to be so.

It was a basic truth that had been laced throughout their history.

Out of brokenness comes life.

Perhaps you remember the story of Joseph. Take one father who played favorites, ten jealous brothers, an arrogant little tattletale, plus a fancy coat with long, colorful sleeves and you have a sure-fire recipe for disaster. Joseph the dreamer was thrown into a pit. Jacob his father was thrown into turmoil. The dynamics of that one irrational, impetuous act left a family in shambles. Relationships appeared forever broken. Or so it seemed. Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt. With God’s hand upon him he rose out of that desperate situation to become Pharaoh’s second in command. A famine then settled over the land of the promise causing Jacob’s family to move to Egypt to escape starvation. And it was there reconciliation occurred and the story of God’s covenant people was able to continue.

Out of brokenness comes life.

What about David? The story begins with a spring night, an army marching to war, and an aging king confined to his home. It continues with a beautiful young woman bathing in an outdoor garden. What happened next was not so much about sex as it was about power. David was once again in control. Yet the dynamics of that one impulsive act left a family and a nation shattered. The integrity of the throne was compromised. The future of God’s covenant people was left hanging by a thread. Or so it would seem. True, the prophet Nathan judged, but he also blessed. The first child of that union died, but the second, a son, grew to be king—the wisest one of them all! From that son the line

continued. From that son the promise endured. And from that son came another, the promised one that would be the rise and fall of many.

Out of brokenness comes life.

Or let's look at it from a different angle. Think back to this morning's first lesson. The hand of the Lord grabbed Ezekiel by the scruff of the neck and carried him off to a valley full of bones: bones that were dry, bones that were bleached whiter than white by the hot mideastern sun, bones that were dead as dead can be. Then the Lord asked the prophet, "Mortal, can these bones live?" Ezekiel may not have been a man of science, but he knew enough to know dead when he saw dead. New life could never come from this valley of scattered, broken, dry bones. Or so it seemed. It was then that the word of the Lord came down, and that word—as it has always been—was life. At that very moment there began a rattling and a clacking among the bones as they began to come together. Foot bones to anklebones, hipbones to back bones, neck bones to head bones. Then sinews, muscle, and flesh began to wrap themselves around "dem bones." Finally the Spirit of God blew into them the breath of life, and those old dead, dry, broken bones became a vast multitude of the living. Then the Lord God said to Ezekiel, "So shall it be with the people of Israel, my people now who sit in exile, whose way has been lost, whose life seems dead."

Out of brokenness comes life.

Brokenness has always been a part of the biblical story, you see. It is a concept that has been woven throughout the entire saga of God's people. Time after time, in story after story, we discover that it was out of brokenness that new life appeared, that promises found their fulfillment, and that the steadfast presence of God remolded, remade, and renewed every situation. Whether it was outside of that first garden, along those deserted pathways of the wilderness, or even among the razed walls of the once mighty Jerusalem, God's people have always experienced one great truth.

Out of brokenness comes life.

Yet that idea seemed to stun the twelve. Despite all that the history of their people taught them, they were caught completely off guard. They responded with disbelief, fear, denial, and betrayal. In that upper room, as they sat around that table with Jesus, the disciples seemed totally dumbfounded that he would talk in that way. “This is my body, broken for you. This is my blood, poured out for you and for many.” They were astounded by his words. Perhaps our reaction would have been much the same. At the time it is happening, brokenness never seems to make any sense. The lessons of history are usually far from our minds. Besides, ours is a throwaway society, one that more often than not sees the broken as nothing but refuse and waste. We live in a world that understands brokenness to be a sign of weakness and uselessness. Yet the claim of biblical faith has always been just the opposite. For the past two thousand years, Christians have affirmed that brokenness is a sign of strength, that it is the epitome of usefulness, and that the fullest measure of God’s love can be found in the broken body of Jesus. It is from that battered and beaten form hanging on Calvary’s cross that new and abundant life springs.

Out of brokenness comes life.

That is why this meal has always been so important. Sooner or later life breaks all of us. Broken relationships, shattered dreams, and crushed spirits are an all-too frequent part of human existence. At one time or another, all of us have known that kind of pain. At one time or another, all of us have experienced that great emptiness of heart. This meal invites us to bring that all of pain and brokenness to the table. This meal allows us to come exactly as we are. This meal assures us that there is no brokenness we have experienced that Christ does not already know. Because that is so, it is at this table we find healing. It is at this table we find hope. It is at this table we find an acceptance that we can find nowhere else. And as we come forward to this special place, we are made strong in our broken places. For we have a faith that has always proclaimed that:

Out of brokenness comes life.

Look closely and you can see him. Dirty. Hungry. Ashamed. How he would gladly fill his empty belly with the pods he was throwing to the pigs. The son known only

as “the prodigal” thinks of the angry words that he had spoken to his father, the hurt he had caused by leaving, and the inheritance that he had squandered away. He wished he could go home. He knew he had to go home. But what, he wondered, would happen if he did? After all that had taken place, after everything that had transpired, would it even be possible for him to show his face?

Out of brokenness comes life.

Look again and see the one who is weeping. He was supposed to have been “the rock.” Knowing what he knew, he was supposed to have been that solid foundation upon which everything to come would be built. He had boasted that he would be the one to go with him all the way, that he would follow him even to death if that was what it took. Yet when the crucial moment came, the one known as Peter denied him—not just once, but three times. How could he now live with himself? How could he show his face? How in the world was he ever going to be able to go on?

Out of brokenness comes life.

Take another look and see the lonely form of one who has confined himself to the university tower. He had done everything the church told him to do; yet still he did not feel any closer than he had been before. He had prayed. He had confessed. He had mortified his flesh. He had even made the pilgrimage to the eternal city of Rome. But still he did not feel any closer to God than he had before. What was wrong with him? What was wrong with God? As that young priest named Luther paced back and forth in that candlelit room, he wondered if he would ever stand in the presence, if he would ever know the joy of salvation. Disheartened, discouraged, and distraught, he could do nothing else but fall upon his knees and cry.

Out of brokenness comes life.

Take one more look and see the slumping figure of a man on the deck of a ship. Head in hands he wondered what had gone wrong. A failed mission. A failed romance. A failed faith. He had gone to Georgia to convert the Indians, but now he wondered if anyone would be able to convert him? That Anglican priest by the name of Wesley had

been a dismal failure. His great dreams had been left in shambles on the cobblestone streets of Savannah. His heart felt cold. His life seemed empty. What would be next?

Out of brokenness comes life.

Of course you don't have to have a "name" to be broken. Brokenness is not limited to the famous. In our midst today there is that family that has been shattered by cancer, that longtime worker who has been humbled by unemployment, those children that have been devastated by their parent's divorce. In our fellowship there are some who long for companionship and other whose relationships are shaky at best. Life looks so dim. There doesn't seem to be all that much of a future. The brick wall of frustration, fear, and doubt casts its pall onto every single part of their lives. What is left? Is this the end? Can they go on? While these are questions that are very personal and very present, let me remind you that these are questions that have always been asked. Let me also remind you that these are questions that have always been answered by the words that have been tested and found true by generation after generation of faithful men and women:

Out of brokenness comes life.

I hope that you hear that. I pray that you understand. Life breaks all of us. We are and have always been a shattered people. Brokenness is part and parcel of what it means to be human. There is no escape. Yet despite everything that speaks to the contrary, our is a faith that has always proclaimed that brokenness never has been and never will be the end of the story. Where we might see an ending God sees a beginning. For when we walk through that valley of shadows, when the fear of evil threatens to undo us, when the presence of our enemies stands in our way, God prepares a table before us. And at that table we find life.

This is that table. Today is World Communion Sunday. By day's end Christians from around the globe will have gathered at this table to share this simple meal. How sad it will be if the uniqueness of this moment is reduced to a debate over its nature, if the mechanics of this meal overtakes its purpose. The power of this moment, you see, rests

not in the discussion of how the body was broken, but why the body was broken. And the good news is that it was broken for you. And because that is true, we can join with those who have gone before us and those who will come after us and joyously proclaim (help me out here):

Out of brokenness comes life,