



It's all broken and that is a good thing...

Yesterday I took down a favorite pottery goblet, stored away for years because of a great crack at the rim, and I painted that crack gold. The pieces that broke off are long gone so there was just this gap to “fix or feature,” as my former pottery teacher used to say. The gold now reimagines that cracked space as a celebrated characteristic of the goblet.

As I gently brushed the glistening, metallic sheen onto the break I thought about all the ways God brushes his shimmering, golden light onto our brokenness. One of the old prophets described us as clay jars, broken so that the light can get in or glow out.



We are all of us broken in one way or another. Age, illness, emotional or mental frailties, addiction, prejudice, fear, old wounds, there is so much that cracks us and exposes our tender spots. And today we find ourselves cracked open as a nation, as a people, and as a church. Political disruption, pandemic distress, economic upheaval, racial confrontations, extensive suffering and hardship have cracked open the veneer of life as usual and we find ourselves in a wilderness of change. It is a crisis moment. So, we, baptized to be God's expression of His love in the world, have an opportunity, in the midst of all this, to reimagine how to be church in this new world so desperate for love and healing and acceptance and restoration. And we can do this by featuring the cracks.

This week I read an inspiring book about just this chance to get back to being gospel people. The book is “The Church Cracked Open: Disruption, Decline and New Hope for Beloved Community.” In it Stephanie Spellers, Episcopal priest and assistant to the Bishop describes how this forced reimagining of church during the time of pandemic has cracked open many of the calcified ways we thought of church and invited us to begin to see how better to be the beloved community Jesus keeps calling us to be.

I thought about how we here at St. Mark's were already seeking to reach beyond our walls to fellowship with other congregations. We were reaching across racial and denominational lines to begin to affirm God's loving presence in us all and the blessing of other voices raised in praise together. Seeking to open a day care center for at risk children, and a welcoming place for refugees are two ways we are imagining. This pandemic cracked open our doors even more. For instance, our online worship has given folks who don't even live near us access to worship with us and to join in our beloved community. Or consider that folks who before sorted out between traditional and contemporary worship had to contend with worship outside the walls, with no singing and no responsive liturgy spoken or sung. And we adjusted and did what was needed to make worship and our faith life together work.

And we can do more. In this wilderness of unfamiliar terrain, we have a golden opportunity to see new ways of being the people sent out to love others as Jesus loves us all. As we have had to reimagine how to do worship, communion, music, and just being together, so now is our chance to reimagine ways to be more welcoming to those not represented in our worship to date. We can work together to continue to imagine church beyond the walls of the building and out into a community where Jesus is calling us to come along.

This cracking open of the church is a blessing. And Spellers invites us to consider these nine ways to let go of what has held us back from fully being a beloved community:

- + LOVE the face and voice of God in others.
- + CELEBRATE the cultures, gifts, and lives of rejected groups.
- + CARE and carry each other's burdens.
- + EMBRACE uncomfortable spaces and experiences.
- + SURRENDER overcontrolling behaviors.
- + RISK making the first move, sharing our own stories, and being wrong.
- + LISTEN with love to the stories of people who do not share your privilege.

Some of this is already happening. Our staff and many of our teams are already moving out through the cracks to be church in wider ways. As you seek to discover just where you can be community in all this check with Pastor Matt or Deacon Katie or Cantor David or even me. But those three have been most active in painting our cracks golden so that all can see and join.

Stephanie Spellers closes her book with a poem fragment called “The Cross and the Crown” by Mark Bozzuti-Jones (also an Episcopal priest)

The Cross and the Crown

By Mark Bozzuti-Jones

Let our jars be cracked open

Let our lives be poured out

Let our lives witness to those virtues, and vows, and gospel truth

Knowing that all we do and think and say and pray matter

Crack a little further

Every single day

And let in the light

The right

The repentance

Join hearts

In the wisdom

and love and life

prepared for cracked hearts

from all eternity.

As ever I am blessed to be on this journey with you.

Shalom,

Pastor Linda