

November 2023: Cracked Broken Glorious

As I write this, I have just returned home from the Diocese of Derby Clergy Conference, a special time each year of worshiping, learning, and growing together. This year the theme of the conference was Kintsugi, the Japanese art of mending broken pottery with a gold, silver or platinum lacquer, so that the breaks remain clearly visible. In the Kintsugi tradition, breakage and repair are seen 'as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise.'*

This year, we were reflecting together about the brokenness we experience in so many, many ways, in ourselves, our churches, our communities, our world, and how we might respond in ways that are life-giving and enable the glory of God to be known and shared. In one session, we used the image of parched, cracked soil to help us reflect on our response to the 'cracks' that we perceive around us. So often our natural response to 'cracks' is to seek to hide them, to fill them in, to 'paper them over.' Yet, as our image of parched soil reminded us, often that is not possible without harming or destroying the delicate new growth of life that sprouts on the edge of a crack, or thrives within the depth of the crack itself. Or we may be unable to repair the crack because the edges crumble away if we touch them. The crack may even be the start of a whole new valley, with flowing river and brimming with flourishing life.

We looked at some of the many biblical passages where brokenness led to new understanding, new growth, new flourishing, and we reflected on what it is within ourselves that can lead us to want to ignore, hide, or rush to mend cracks rather than seeing them as opportunities. We listened to examples of vessels that had been repaired using the Kintsugi method, and admired their renewed beauty or usefulness, yet with their visible reminders of their journeys, just as Jesus' resurrection body bore the scars reminding his disciples of his journey through death to life. And we remembered afresh how life out of death is the foundational story of our faith.

We explored some of the writings of the Nigerian Bayo Akomolafe, including his profound comment that, 'You are not completed until you are wounded.' And we dared to imagine what it would be like if we didn't repair cracks. The New Testament tells us of the treasure of the gospel being held in earthenware jars, picking up on the same image from passages in the Old Testament. Maybe, we pondered, the unrepaired cracks in those earthenware vessels are ways by which the light and glory of God can shine into the earthenware vessel that is us? And maybe those unrepaired cracks are ways that allow God's love and God's glory to flow through us to others?

So this month, I'd like to encourage us all to take time to look attentively at the 'cracks' we have known and seen in our life's journey. And offer them to God in thanksgiving and prayer.

Yours in Christ,
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*from Wikipedia