



Week 1 Preaching Resources: The Broken Cup

Scripture Passage: 2 Corinthians 4:5-11 (Communion Sunday)

Focus Statement: When things break, God can and will bring purpose and beauty out of the brokenness.

Note: The key image for this sermon is “kintsugi”. Check it out here: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kintsugi>

ME: Share about a time of brokenness in your life and how you came out of it. How has the experience of being broken and put back together shaped who you are now? It is important that preachers only share personal stories that already come to kintsugi fruition. Share what you have appropriately processed in therapy, etc. Preach from scars, not fresh wounds. Share only if you are giving something *to* the congregation rather than needing something *from* them. If you are not in a place to share about a time of brokenness, consider finding an example in history or pop culture.

WE: Name the sorts of things people are going through in the congregation without naming individual names and without breaking confidentiality. Acknowledge that we all go through times of brokenness, whether or not we are in one right now.

GOD: The idea and metaphor of kintsugi (see link above) can be connected to the idea of “treasure in clay jars” in this passage. The “treasure” here is Jesus, crucified and risen, and the ministry of proclaiming that good news. As human beings, we, like clay jars, are fragile and yet God chooses us as vessels to carry the good news of the gospel (verse 7).

The fragility and brokenness of our humanity are mirrored in Jesus’ suffering on the cross. In the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, we see that God works through what is broken. In our suffering, Jesus is with us. But Jesus was also raised from the dead, overcoming suffering. Just as Jesus is with us in our suffering, so do we get to participate in the new life of Jesus (verse 10). Verse 8-9 describe what this looks like – even though we are broken (“afflicted,” “perplexed,” “persecuted” and “struck down”), God put us back together and does not let our brokenness define us (“not crushed,” “not driven to despair,” “not forsaken,” “not destroyed”).

For the life of Jesus to be made visible in our bodies does not mean that we/our jars become fixed and smooth, like they were never broken. Holding the life and death of Jesus in our bodies at the same time means we have gold seams like in kintsugi. The “extraordinary power” (verse 7) of putting us back together, creating life from and within death, belongs to God. The clay jars of our lives, broken and repaired, are evidence of God’s work in and through us. We can trust that no matter what happens, God will never abandon us. This gives us hope that in the face of death and suffering, life is always at work (the light shines out of the darkness – verse 6).



Remember this passage is not just about being broken but not destroyed. It is about being made a part of God's plan for redemption. We are "kintsugi pieces" in God's art gallery or to put it plainly, the way God is working in us (bringing life from death) is a testimony or witness to others.

NOTE: We don't have to go looking for suffering or glorify suffering. Brokenness and suffering is part of life. It will happen whether we seek it or not. Jesus works in spite of and through our brokenness. For insights from the Buddhist tradition, check out Pema Chödrön's *When Things Fall Apart*.

YOU: Where are places that you need healing? Where do you need the gold poured in? At the beginning of this Lenten journey, identify where you are going to invite God's healing, God's gold, into your life. How can you open yourself up to the healing God is offering this Lenten season? How will you allow God to fill your cup and pour into you? Invite the congregation to make space this week to check in with themselves to acknowledge places of brokenness you might not have acknowledged or been aware you were carrying. We need to be aware in order to intentionally invite God in. (Pastoral note: Keep in mind that there are people in your congregation who might need additional help/support in seeking therapy – especially after this hard year.)

WE: Consider introducing and supporting your congregation in committing to spiritual disciplines this Lenten season. For example, the Examen is a powerful tool for identifying where God's healing is needed in our lives and where God is working on our lives (<https://www.umc.org/en/content/praying-the-examen-following-jesus-in-our-daily-lives>). Help the congregation to identify places of brokenness in your local community and consider how you can be vessels of God's grace there. This might tie into a Lenten mission.



Week 2 Preaching Resources: The Cup of Living Water

Scripture Passage: John 4:7-29, 39

Focus Statement: God affirms all we've been through and invites us into healthy relationship, wholeness, and sharing living water with others.

ME: Speak about a time when you have felt disconnected, undervalued, or marginalized in a place or situation. It is recommended *not* to share a story about marginalization in or by a congregation. You may choose to include, either here or later in the sermon, a piece about someone or something that changed that feeling for you (e.g., a kind word, gesture, reflection after the fact). For an example of a redemption story for the undervalued from pop culture, see Freaks & Geeks gym class: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZ8nJsHchos> (please only show clips during worship that you are licensed to share).

WE: Feeling connected and valued is an important part of human wellbeing and it is something that Jesus shows us he cares about by truly seeing us and empowering us to share the life that he has given us with others.

GOD: The Samaritan woman whom Jesus encounters at the well is in a vulnerable position in many ways. She has clearly been through a lot in that she has had five husbands and "the one she has now is not her husband." (Note: There is nothing in the text to suggest that this woman is promiscuous as she would have no control or say about her marriage arrangements.) Yet, she has been through a lot of change and, likely, loss. In the conversation with Jesus, she is vulnerable as a Samaritan speaking with a Jew (see v. 10). Lastly, the disciples' astonishment that Jesus was speaking with a woman demonstrates how women in general were viewed (or not viewed) as conversation partners at the time.

Despite these barriers, Jesus shows up as the woman goes about her daily routine and truly sees her for who she is:

- Jesus asks for a drink → This woman is capable and worthy of providing water to Jesus.
- The woman asks theological and social questions/statements (verse 9, 12, 20) → Jesus takes her seriously as a conversation partner, in defiance of norms around associating with Samaritans and women. He breaks down the boundaries and limits of her religious understanding to offer her something better.
- The woman is honest when Jesus asks her to call her husband, even if it makes her vulnerable. → Jesus sees the woman as a truth-teller. Notice, Jesus just sees and accepts the truth of the woman's life. There is no talk of sin in this passage.

It is as Jesus honors this woman, her questions, her religious and cultural background, her voice, and her life experience that the woman gradually begins to have an understanding of who Jesus is. She goes from seeing him as a Jew she should not be talking to (v. 9) to recognizing that he might be the Messiah (verse 29).



Even though the disciples are astonished that Jesus is speaking with a woman, she becomes a key witness to who Jesus is. She shares her testimony with her community, and many come to believe in Jesus because of her (v. 39). He empowers her – just as she is - to share the gifts she doesn't know she has.

You can bring in the image of kintsugi from last week, again. Jesus asks the woman for a drink. And then by the end, she is able to offer living water out of the broken cup that he has helped put back together.

YOU: Invite congregants to think about things that might be preventing them from receiving the cup of living water that Jesus offers. For example, like the woman, it might be questions about faith, or being so busy with the day-to-day that you don't notice when Jesus is encountering (through someone, something, in prayer) or what he's really offering you. Maybe there is a part of yourself or your history that you feel is unworthy and needs to be hidden. Offer some ways that congregants might see the woman at the well as a model for receiving living water (e.g. She asks her questions courageously, honestly. She pauses – first for a person in [perceived] need, then for a full conversation. She is honest about herself and her life. She defies social expectations.)

More than just receiving living water, this story is about sharing it with others. Offer or invite the congregation to think about ways they can own their stories in a way that those stories can be shared and help others to encounter God? How do we share the living water Jesus pours into our cup? Who do you know who is thirsty?

WE: How do we as a community claim the power we have (or don't know we have) to offer living water? Reflect back to the broken places you named in your community last week and consider how you might be able to offer living water. Remember that when Jesus offers living water, he sees and accepts the woman as she is. Jesus encounters her as a worthwhile serious conversation partner. How can your community follow Jesus' example when you encounter need and brokenness?



Week 3 Preaching Resources: The Cup You Choose

Scripture Passage: Psalm 16 (NRSV recommended)

Focus Statement: Every day we have the opportunity to choose to follow Jesus.

ME: Tell a story about your decision to follow Jesus or how you choose to follow God rather than another “god” (influence, perceived source of authority) in your life and what that means to you. Be careful about self-glorifying. If your story feels like bragging, consider asking permission from someone you admire to share a story of how they choose God, or an example from history, literature, or TV/movies.

WE: We all have a choice in who or what we follow in life. To live a Christian life involves choosing to follow Jesus. For some of us, that choice was/is easy, for others it was/is hard. The first time we made that choice may have been long ago or just recently. Or maybe we are considering this choice and wondering what it means, involves, or asks of us.

GOD: Some scholars believe that Psalm 16 could have been written by a Canaanite, someone who was already living in the land where God led the Israelites and who chose to follow the God of Israel, even though doing so would have been a departure from their background and culture.¹ For some people, their upbringing, culture, and background may make choosing God a sort of “default option,” whereas for others, it may choosing God may involve a choice for something new and different. Regardless, we all have the option to choose the “gods” we’ve made (for example, gods of vanity, pride, self-abnegation, consumerism, politics, etc.) or God who is the creator, redeemer, and sustainer.

The psalmist speaks of choosing God using the image of a cup (verse 5) by contrast with those who “choose another god” (verse 4). The “cup” here is a way of describing what a person’s life is going to be like, or their “lot in life.” In some places this involves punishment or suffering, and in others blessing and salvation (contrast for example, Psalm 11:6 and Isaiah 51:17 with Psalm 23:5 and here Psalm 16:5-6). When the psalmist says, “the Lord is my chosen cup,” the psalmist is not claiming the power to control what happens to them. Rather, the psalmist is choosing to follow God and confessing trust that in doing so, God will protect and take care of them in their lives.

We can think of this as being positioned to receive God’s grace. We do not earn grace, but in turning away from false gods and turning toward God, we are in a position and posture to receive what God offers. Even our ability to choose to turn toward God is made possible by grace (in Wesleyan theology, this is “prevenient grace.”) Choosing God is not a human achievement; it is a response to the gift and promises of God. You may want to look at Deuteronomy 30:15-20 and consider how Psalm 16 can be read as a response to it.

¹ Knight, George A (1982). Daily Bible Study Series: Psalms vol. 1. Westminster John Knox Press.



The psalmist describes what being positioned or attuned to God looks like for them:

- Confessing faith and trust in God (verses 2, 5, 10-11)
- Looking to God for instruction and help via prayer, Scripture, community (verses 1, 7, 11)
- Praise, rejoicing & gratitude (verses 6 - 11)

How can we position ourselves to be shaped into the vessels we were created to be? How can we choose living water? And share it?

YOU: Even if you've inherited the faith, how have you chosen to follow Jesus? How do you choose this each day? You may want to give some examples of what choosing God might look like in your congregants' daily lives (perhaps by contrast with choosing "other gods"). If you've introduced any spiritual disciplines/practices for Lent in previous weeks, this is a place to highlight them as a way of choosing or "positioning" ourselves for God's grace.

WE: Offer some examples of what choosing God in daily ways might look like in your context and for your community. You might name some ways your church, or churches in general, can sometimes lose sight of following God and get distracted by "other gods" (e.g., the past/tradition at expense of what God is doing now, attendance numbers, giving numbers).



Week 4 Preaching Resources: The Cup of Discipleship

Scripture Passage: Matthew 20:20-28

Focus Statement: Being followers of Jesus involves giving of our whole selves to build a community of mutual blessing.

ME: Tell a story about a time you witnessed people being God's hands and feet in the community, a story about someone in your congregation who is a humble servant (with their permission), or a time someone served you in a way that humbled you and showed you the face of Jesus.

WE: In many cultures, great emphasis is placed on being the first, the greatest, or the best – whether that's in terms of wealth, reputation, status, talent, etc. You may include examples that would resonate with people in your context. Yet Jesus emphasizes the importance of serving others and humility and essentially proclaims a reversal of this cultural message (see, e.g., Matthew 20:16). It can be difficult to listen and stay focused on Jesus' message when the voices of the world and our culture so loudly tell us the opposite.

GOD: In this passage, we see the mother of the sons of Zebedee (James and John) make a plea on behalf of her children that reveals her concern for their wellbeing and destiny. She wants to make sure they are successful and powerful in the way their culture (and also ours) defines success and power. So, she asks Jesus to declare that they will sit at the right and left hand in Jesus' kingdom, that they will be second in power and glory to Jesus.

Jesus responds with a statement and a question (verse 22) that show the kind of glory Jesus (and, therefore, his followers) will have is not the same as the kind of glory the world values. Remind people how last week's sermon talked about a person's "cup" being their "lot in life." Explore how, in verse 22, Jesus' "cup" will involve tremendous suffering, as well as glory (consider connecting with Matthew 26:39).

The word disciple means both to be a student of someone and to be an adherent or follower of someone. It involves both learning *and* relationship. To be a disciple of Jesus, therefore, means to share in the love and salvation of God *and* in Jesus' suffering and humility (servant leadership). In verse 22, Jesus is warning James and John that they may not realize what they are asking for – signing up to be a disciple means opening oneself to the same kind of persecution and suffering that Jesus himself will experience. To further explore the meaning of costly discipleship, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Discipleship* (often referred to as *The Cost of Discipleship*).



Even though Jesus says James and John will drink his cup, he does not promise they will be at his right and left hand but defers to God the Father. The rest of the disciples are angry with James and John (likely for trying to put themselves above the others). Jesus' teaching that follows challenges the world's (Gentiles') understanding of leadership, power, and greatness. If the disciples want to follow Jesus, they must lead by serving others, just as Jesus does.

One way to look at this is that being first, best, greatest (sitting at Jesus' right hand) is not the goal of discipleship at all. Rather, just as the Trinity is interdependent and mutual, we too are created as relational beings. Out of our interdependence, we are called to care for one another and serve one another, not as if we are better than others but in awareness that we need each other and belong to each other. That's the love of the Spirit connecting us, empowering us to serve each other.

YOU: Reframe the idea of "giving something up for Lent." Challenge your congregation to consider how Jesus might be calling them to set aside comfort for others' sake, or what their discipleship asks them to give up in order to serve the community as a whole. Sometimes "giving up something for Lent" can be an empty exercise or it can be a way to show how good and devout one is. What would it look like to "give up" the desire to be perceived as good and find a way to serve someone else?

WE: When we take communion, we are invited to share in Christ's cup and to be sent out into the world as Christ's one body. Community changes us, and by our participation, we change our community. Cast a vision of what it might look like for your church to truly be a servant church in your community. In what ways are you currently like the mother of James and John in this passage, desiring security, and greatness and in what ways are you more like Jesus, serving others even if and when that involves hardship?



Week 5 Preaching Resources: The Cup of Compassion

Scripture Passage: Matthew 25:31-46

Focus Statement: For Jesus, compassion and justice are inseparable.

“My understanding of justice is rooted in Hebrew scripture. The Hebrew word: *tzedek* translates as justice. It also translates as righteousness. True justice is the restoration of right relationship between God and humanity and right relationship among humanity.” -The Rev. Traci Blackmon

ME: Share a story of a time when you saw Jesus in someone else (not necessarily or only because they behaved “like Jesus” but simply because they were a fellow human being). A number of art pieces bring this perspective into sharp focus (for example, https://www.sculpturebytps.com/portfolio_page/homeless-jesus/; <https://kellylatimoreicons.com/pages/gallery>)

WE: We are called to see Jesus in other people and know that Jesus shows up to us in the faces of people we meet. Jesus is asking us to treat people like people.

GOD: This passage is not just about helping people. It is about the judgment of whole communities and systems. Jesus is talking about what it will be like at the time of judgment and what kind of kingdom his will be. Both the sheep and the goats ask the question, “When did we see you...?” The sheep embody God’s teaching while the goats just don’t do it.² The sheep have cared for Jesus without even realizing it by caring for those in need. The goats, on the other hand, jump to self-defense – “When did we see you and not take...and not take care of you?” If they had known Jesus was present in “the least of these”, they would have taken care of the needy! But that’s the whole point. Jesus is not asking people to care for one another so they can be rewarded and “do the right thing.” Jesus wants them to be compassionate to others simply because they are human beings. This is the way he wants his kingdom to operate.

We are held to account, and we get to choose our actions. That said, what Jesus asks of them – and us - is pretty straightforward – a drink of water, a meal, a visit. The “cup” this week is a more literal one than in previous weeks. One of the many things we focus on in Lent is our humanity, which includes how we are embodied creatures. What is important to Jesus in this passage is a very practical caring for the physical wellbeing of other people – not just as an act of charity here and there, but as a way of living, of being compassionate in all our encounters. For Jesus, orthodoxy (or “right belief”) means nothing without orthopraxy (“right practice”).

² Schroeder, David E (1995). Matthew: The King & His Kingdom: God's Rule and Reign in My Life. Christian Publications.



YOU: Name some of the systemic problems in your community (perhaps that lead to people being unfed, without clothing, or unwelcomed). Consider asking questions that prompt individuals in your congregation to think about their role in either perpetuating or addressing these problems or offer some ways they can move from doing nothing to doing something about them. You may also invite people to do an experiment where, for a day, they intentionally imagine every person they meet is Jesus. Does this change how they treat the person? How?

WE: Compassion is mercy in action. Move the congregation to action in a simple way. Encourage them to look for signs of Christ's presence in the people they meet, even ones they don't like.



Week 6 Preaching Resources: The Overflowing Cup

Note: If you plan to celebrate Palm or Passion Sunday, check out the “Fountain of Grace Palm and Passion Sunday Resource” document.

Scripture Passage: Psalm 23

Focus Statement: We can’t overflow with God’s grace if we are filled with ourselves.

ME: Share a story of a time when you were self-reliant and it wasn’t sufficient.

WE: It is a common experience to want to feel secure and, in many cultures, the message is sent that the way to achieve security is by relying on oneself. Name some of the ways people may feel pressure to be self-reliant and find security (e.g., savings and investments, life insurance, working a job they hate because it pays well). Further, when things go wrong, we often feel pressure to fix it by ourselves (you may choose to use a context and culture appropriate saying, one example being “Pull yourself up by the bootstraps.”)

GOD: The pronoun “I” is all over this psalm, yet every reference ties to gratitude and trust in God. The overflowing cup of blessings in verse 5 is a beautiful and commonly used image (think KJV: “My cup runneth over.”). For the psalmist, this overflowing cup only comes as part of a life that relies fully on God – for provision, rest, restoration of the soul, guidance in how to live, and protection from evil. The psalm does not portray a person who is blessed beyond measure as a result or reward of self-sufficiency; it portrays someone who is blessed beyond measure by relying on God.

You may want to have people imagine a cup and imagine filling it with all the things they do to feel secure. Now, imagine Jesus coming along with a jug of blessings. He tries to pour blessings into their cups but they are already filled with all the ways they try find security in themselves. To be open to receive God’s blessings, our cups must be empty of ourselves.

Jewish tradition says that this psalm was written while David was on the run from King Saul. The tradition says that when David was near death in the dry Judean wilderness, he was miraculously saved by God who “nourished him with a taste of the World to Come.”³ It is recited on days of rest to express trust in God and gratitude for all our nourishment. While this psalm is popular in the Christian tradition, it is often associated with dying and death as a funeral passage or something recited in the last moments of life. What would it look like not to save this psalm for the end of life but instead look to it now as a regular prayer or meditation to form us as people of trust and gratitude rather than people of self-reliance and anxiety?

³ https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3832324/jewish/Psalm-23-L-rd-Is-My-Shepherd.htm



YOU: How do we encourage and hold each other accountable to trust in the possibility rooted in God? Have people identify an area in their lives where they are trying to do it alone. Ask them, “How can you allow God into that aspect of your life?” Remind them of some ways they might do this (e.g., sometimes allowing God in means allowing other people in to help as agents of God’s love).

WE: Describe some of the ways your church might rely upon God and express trust and gratitude even more. Perhaps this involves thinking outside of the box and taking chances in how you minister to folks instead of “playing it safe” or worrying about institutional survival. Perhaps this involves shifting from a mindset of scarcity to one of abundance.

ⁱ Brueggemann, Walter (1984). *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*. Augsburg Press.