

**Sermon**  
**St. Mary Nanoose Bay**  
**March 19, 2017 - LENT #3**  
**John 4:5-42**  
**“Broken” / Woman at the Well**

Continuing our theme for Lent of exploring the shape of the Liturgy, this week’s focus is “BROKEN.” We say the fraction after the bread and wine are consecrated with words such as “We break this bread, Communion in Christ’s body once broken.” With the action of the priest breaking the bread, we symbolize the brokenness of Jesus. Jesus lived, suffered, died and was resurrected. This is the way we generally view this part of the liturgy. But at the same time, we acknowledge *our own* path, our own brokenness. But with the understanding that we are not alone in this brokenness and that this brokenness is not a bad thing. Brokenness may be a difficult thing, but as one wise person put it, if we’re prepared, “Our hearts are not broken; they are broken open.” In other words, our brokenness opens us to God. Brokenness can be a sacred thing.

Our culture resists this idea with a passion. We strive for perfection. In the way we look and in the way we want our lives to look. We pursue this perfection at our peril. We ignore the signs that our relationships may be falling apart or that our health is failing or that our connection with God is weak at best. We pretend all is well. And we work hard to cover up our vulnerability and pain. We think vulnerability and pain are negative; signs of weakness and failure. So

we pretend. And there are a million ways to avoid the truth; and most are culturally accepted. Like addictions – drinking, drugs, shopping, technology, over-work and so on. We want to be happy, and to be *seen* as being happy.

Consider the woman at the well from the gospel reading we just heard. Jesus knows without her telling him that she's been in pursuit of the 'perfect guy.' "You have had 5 husbands," he tells her, "and the one you have now is not your husband." In what ways are we like this woman, trying strategies of our own find the perfect home, the perfect job, the perfect mate, the perfect family, the perfect vacation. When we focused in our own happiness, we are not available to others, and our human efforts will have human results.

But Jesus tells us that our thirst will never be quenched by the pursuit of happiness or perfection. As we heard in last week's Gospel reading there are two births: the one of this world, and the spiritual one. In today's reading we hear this theme again – there are 2 kinds of water. The kind that we have to drink every day to keep our bodies hydrated; and the kind of water Jesus offers - the kind that keeps us connected with God regardless of the events in our lives. When we acknowledge the second kind of thirst, we know that our own pursuits will always fall short. We need the living water. We need to acknowledge our thirst; our need for God.

Two years ago, while I was still in seminary, I had the most amazing dream. It was one of those vivid ones from which you wake not knowing whether it "really happened" or not. Here's the dream:

*I am standing around in a group of people. We are looking at a hole and someone exclaims, "That's a Christ-shaped hole!" It's not externally recognizable but I know without a doubt that what the person said is absolutely true. We all lean in to look. A voice warns, "Do not fill this hole up." We see cherry blossoms and an aching blue sky and I feel that combination of excitement and peace I knew as a child. The voice continues, "Just be aware and keep that awareness – live with the hole; the ache; the longing. Allow it to be part of you." At closer look I can now see that the hole is actually shaped like a keyhole. "Keep yourselves open so that God can turn the key," the voice directs.*

I woke up with that certain knowing this hole and this longing exists both for us as church; and also as individuals.

Our culture is obsessed with filling holes. If we feel lonely, sad, despairing, jealous or fearful, we try and cover up the feeling or deny its existence. We keep busy and we keep our eye out for the perfect strategy that will make everything better, hopefully instantly.

Can we acknowledge our feelings and needs without rushing to change them?

The author Sharon Thornton asks, "Can we sit at the foot of the cross, and sit with our own pain without needing to change a thing until we fully realize the deep need we have for God? For God's transforming love? For forgiveness?"

We are called like Jesus to sit quietly with God. Not to dream up ways to be super human and invulnerable to pain and suffering. But to be vulnerable. To know our weakness and offer it up to God. And to allow God to lead us in ways that may seem crazy. Ways that lead from the heart and not from our own desires for success and power.

When we sit at the foot of the cross with our brokenness, with our regrets, failures, addictions, we sit at the edge of the hole in the centre of our lives; individually and as a community. But we know this hole is not empty; we know our suffering will be resurrected. Out of our vulnerability and pain, we will be given new life. You've known this in your own lives. Out of terrible pain and loneliness, comes new life if we know how to wait for it. And as the community of St. Mary's, you've experienced the pain of brokenness and seen new life emerge. Not in the way you may have expected, but in the way the Holy Spirit knows best. Everything broken is resurrected.

Jesus knows the pain of suffering. He was humiliated and abandoned in the worst way possible. And He never abandoned us. Even in his dying moments, he forgave those who had turned on him and those who tortured him and those who doubted and betrayed him.

So too, for us. We are not abandoned in our time of need. We just need to sit patiently; or walk patiently, And not fill the hole of our pain with activity or stuff. Can we keep our eyes and ears open, and wait in patient hope for the resurrection? When all will be brought to new life?

*"Don't fill the hole."* Can we see how our brokenness and vulnerability create the opportunity to connect deeply with each other and with God? If we try and fix our lives on our own, we are saying we have no need for each other, for community, or for God. It seems counterintuitive in a culture that values self-sufficiency and strength to be open, dependent and vulnerable but this is the kind of life Jesus is calling us to.

I'm sure we all know people who through tragedy have allowed their lives to be transformed. I remember hearing a radio show years ago about a woman whose 5-year-old son was caught by a rogue wave on the Olympic Peninsula and pulled out to sea. He drowned. And when his body was found, it had been partially eaten by some sea creature; probably a shark. This woman's heart and mind were blown open and she told the interviewer that her life was turned upside down. Her life that had focused on the pursuit of wealth and comfort suddenly seemed so petty and she began to devote her life in service to others. And in doing this, found a peace and satisfaction that didn't take away her suffering, but made it manageable.

Hopefully most of us won't experience this kind of harsh wake up call but we can willingly make the move to slow down and acknowledge the ways in which we pursue happiness at the expense of others, or of our integrity. When we sit with our brokenness and vulnerability, offering it up to God, we allow for a creative, dynamic kind of waiting that creates space for the Spirit to speak, guide and send forth. Being receptive reminds us that God's plans are far better

than anything we could ask for or imagine. We stay with our thirst, and ask the One who has the living water to quench it in the way that is best for us. We can stop thinking of how to avoid the pain of life and see that in that pain, we are reminded of our need for God. Our brokenness is not the problem, it is our offering.

As the great Canadian poet Leonard Cohen once wrote:

*Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in.*

Amen.