

Wonderfully made

Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God. (Corrie Ten Boom)

I suppose most of you have come across those people who “know” they are a gift to humanity, the sort of person who feels that without them the whole world would be in a mess. And there are also those people who feel that nobody would notice if they were not there. They don't think they have anything to contribute, or know anything, or never get things right. I believe the truth is that it is not completely one way or another, and I also believe that in life we try to mature, we try to develop in such a way that what we were at one time is not what we are years later. None of us human beings are perfect, and sometimes it is the cracks in our life that make the difference.

The Japanese art of KINTSUGI, (“golden joinery”), is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery by mending the areas of breakage with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. As a philosophy, it treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise.



I am quite uncomfortable around people who think they are the centre of the universe, that the world owes them everything; though I feel quite at home with those who have found strength in weakness; I remember Paul writing about “the thorn in the flesh” he struggled with, and God reminding him *‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’* (II Cor 12; 9). As I have said quite often in the last few months: God has a different way of doing things, a way that we might find difficult to imagine, but for which we should be grateful.

Let us consider the passage from the prophet Jeremiah we have just heard – the potter who is able to use the clay in such a way that when it does not work out as expected, it is not thrown away, but can be re-used in such a way that it can be improved. God is presented as the potter, who works and re-works the clay, for the best. And here I come face to face with a tricky question: what is that best? I do not know the answer to that question, but what I believe is that God's will is that all of us can become the best version of ourselves, not in isolation but as members of the human family.

On Friday evening I attended the welcome service for Rach Collins as minister of Bath Road, and the induction of Dave Gray as superintendent. Jonathan Pye -the chair of the Bristol Methodist District, preached a wonderful sermon, reminding us all that at a time of national crisis and world crisis, it is important to remember that we are human as we see humanity in others. The sermon keeps going round in my mind still, and it reminded me of a word you have heard me say lots of times, a word I got to know from Archbishop Desmond Tutu: UBUNTU – “I am because you are” – that is the essence of our humanity. This is what being

wonderfully made is trying to tell us. This is what God wants for us, and that is why in the image of the potter in Jeremiah, the potter will continue to rework the clay till it becomes the best version of itself.

I am aware of situations which limit the fullness of life for many people, and at the same time I have been inspired by people who have overcome what most of us would consider limitations, in an amazing way – I can think of Paralympians, I think of Helen Keller, I think of those artists who transformed their pain into wonderful works; I think of those people who through their pain, have helped others overcome pain. Who could decide that any of these people are not “wonderfully made” (quoting the psalmist). And I am aware of those who have hurt others and caused pain, unnecessary pain: domestic violence, racial hatred, sexism... all of this based on the concept that one person, one group is better and superior to others. RUBBISH!

Going back to Archbishop Tutu: “A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed.”

Seeing what goes on in the world, and our country – the pain of those who suffer persecution, violence, no access to health or education, discrimination; refugees, political prisoners, the homeless, the hungry.... These are people, and not stereotypes, and when our humanity is linked to their humanity, then matters change. We will not see that their lives are expendable, that they are them not us... we are human together, made whole in our togetherness: UBUNTU.

This is what I believe the reading from Jeremiah is saying to us... At the potter's workshop the call is to turn from evil, and to experience the new possibilities. Like the potter, God is not out to destroy the people but to reshape us in faithfulness and justice. God, through Jesus Christ and his teachings, and by the challenge of the Holy Spirit, is inviting us to amend our ways and doings on the path of justice.

The call to worship this morning was taken from Psalm 139, which is an invitation to all people to be open and welcoming to all who feel forsaken or rejected. It may not be fully true in the world today for many people, but in God's vision of the Kingdom we should accept the promise that God knows, God loves, God cares.

We need to be part of the re-defining of what is important

- power is made perfect in weakness.
- Light shines in darkness, and darkness will not overcome it.
- *That God chose what the world considers foolish to shame the wise. God chose what the world considers weak to shame the strong (1 Cor 1:27)*

Let me finish with words of the poet and singer – Leonard Cohen- who in his poem ANTHEM, says: “*Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering. **There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.***” To accept that we all have cracks is not always easy, but it is a fact, and recognizing that fact is the first step to fullness of life, which is not the same as being perfect.

Amen