



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 26, 2017
The Rev. Sharon K. Gracen

Broken, Unbroken by: Mary Oliver

The lonely
stand in the dark corners
of their hearts.
I have seen them
in cities,
and in my own neighborhood,
nor could I touch them
with the magic
that they crave
to be unbroken.
Then, I myself,
lonely,
said hello to
good fortune.
Someone
came along
and lingered
and little by little
became everything
that makes the difference.
Oh, I wish such good luck
to everyone.
How beautiful it is
to be unbroken.



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Broken and unbroken are broad categories into which fit so many conditions and moments in life. When I think of the language used to describe what Jesus was about, it starts in the Christmas story... “she will bear a son and you shall name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” As I ask often from this pulpit, what does that mean? From what do we need to be saved? This poem is a clarifier for me...we need to be saved from our brokenness, whatever that looks like in each and every one of us and all of us together. I think that that is the biggest work right now. We need our broken places to be mended and made whole. We need to be unbroken.

In today’s gospel story, Jesus heals a blind man, with mud and spit. The man didn’t ask to be healed as does every other one of Jesus’ patients. Blindness is a central theme of Jesus work of healing. And it’s a good reminder to us that God sees our broken places before we even ask to be helped.

When I first read this poem my mind kept jumping to Lauren Hillenbrand’s book *Unbroken*. It is the story of Louie Zamperini, an American Olympic runner and WWII GI. His plane went down in the Pacific and he endured nearly two years in POW camps and was the favorite target of a particularly sadistic guard. The scene from the movie version of the story which captures Louie’s refusal to be broken has him staring down his captor while holding an impossibly heavy beam over his head. He had been told that if he put it down, he would be shot. He didn’t refused to put it down. He was beaten repeatedly and at one time, given an opportunity to escape his punishment by taking part in a propaganda broadcast. He declined the offer and chose to remain unbroken in his integrity and his spirit.

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Thinking about Louie's story and how it was characterized, got me looking at the idea of *unbroken* from several different angles. Louie remained unbroken in his spirit even though several of his bones were repeatedly broken; they weren't the point of the story. Louie inhabits one universe of *unbroken* – that of the *never broken*. I think that there are two others. Something that has been broken can be fixed; a broken bone can mend, a plate can be glued back together, a broken down car can be repaired, a broken relationship can be mended. It is possible, indeed it is a goal, spiritual and otherwise, for broken things to be mended and made whole. The third kind of *unbroken* happens when something is reframed, seen in a new way. We see this kind of unbroken in people who persevere through some kind of brokenness and eventually come to see themselves and their experience differently. Or maybe they are seen differently by people around them. Two other examples here... One of a coffee shop customer who is deaf. He would always write out his order because he had no other way to communicate with the barista. One day, the woman who usually waited on him hand back a note telling him that she was learning American Sign Language so that he could place his order just like everyone else. He is still deaf but feeling quite unbroken and valued. Collette Divitto is a Bostonian with a passion for baking. She also has Down's syndrome. She applied at every Boston bakery only to be turned away. Yes, she has good skills, but it just wasn't a good fit. So she started her own bakery, Colletty's Cookies and had 65,000 orders over Christmas. She is determined to show the world that Down's syndrome doesn't mean broken. And there are those who discover perfect peace while living and dying with disease. They might say, "my disease hasn't been cured but I have been healed. Perhaps they are referring to being no longer afraid or angry or alienated. They are unbroken because they know themselves as whole and mortal at the same time. Ann Collier comes to my mind. Even as she was at Hospice she was the most unbroken person I can imagine. So we have the three categories; the unbroken who have remained pristine and whole, those who have been restored to an unbroken state, and those who have been redeemed to a new way of seeing that which was formerly thought of as broken.

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Most of Jesus' healing miracles involved his powerful ability to see people as whole, as unbroken. Their faith and his power made it a reality. But there's usually more to these stories than a physical healing. There is something more that is healed. The blind man who suddenly sees is given his sight and he is restored from the invisibility that afflicts so many who are not unbroken. Those who questioned him weren't even sure who he was – "is this the guy I walk by every day; I never really noticed him?" Lepers are cured of their disease and they are restored to their community. People aren't afraid of them anymore. It is the same with those who were possessed by demons. The demons are banished and families are reunited. Women who are healed are restored to their full humanity, no longer someone's property but fully realized, unbroken, valued members of God's community.

All of Jesus' healing work reconnected people within themselves, with each other, with God. His purpose was and is to bring everything to its unbroken state. And as his church, it is now our purpose. May we be guided and encouraged for such a mission. Amen.

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