

Chipped and Broken

Scripture: Revelation 21:1-6

Rev. Katie Ebel

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

Speak to us, Giver of Life, and make us new. We thirst for the waters of eternal life, we yearn to know ourselves as Resurrection People. Send your Holy Spirit upon us this day and create in us your new heaven and new earth. Speak to us words of comfort and hope, words of challenge and courage. Come: move among us, we pray. **Amen**

~ from *Making All Things New: Service Prayers for the Fifth Sunday of Easter*, written by the Rev. Mary Nelson Abbott. Posted on the United Church of Christ's *Worship Ways Archive*.

FIRST READING: Revelation 21:1-6

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.”

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

SERMON

Well, this happened last week: I scratched my wok. I have this wonderful, non-stick piece of cooking equipment that I love to use when I find myself with many vegetables; it cooks things perfectly with relatively little oil. It's yielded many midwestern stir-fries for us. But the last time I pulled it out, I noticed that the non-stick surface was starting to chip off. And I have to say that I was more than a little angry with myself; obviously, I hadn't been careful. And now, I fear that the chipped surface will grow, and I won't be able to use my wok anymore.

Which leads to the question of what to do with it. Unfortunately, as an American living in the 21st century, my first thought was to consign it to the trash can; I don't have that much space in my kitchen. But it's sad, isn't it? This thing that is so elegant and so useful will end up in the dump. It's even sadder to think that we discard things so easily. Worn shoes get tossed. Socks with holes in them end up in the trash can. Bent and scratched pans and even old cars find their

way to the trash heap. Even worse, as our animal shelters across the country and around the world tell us, we are quick to get rid of unruly pets. And our overburdened prison system attests to the fact that difficult people don't fare much better.

Now, before we go any further, let me point out that this sermon is not telling you to hold on to every single thing you've ever owned, cram it in a closet, and leave the sorting and discarding for someone else to do after you die. That, my friends is not loving your neighbor, your children, you nieces and nephews, or you spouse. Don't do that. Instead, I hope that we might consider a new way to view our possessions, our neighbors, and the beautiful world in which we live. .

As I read our passage from Revelation today, I am reminded that this discard mentality, the idea that if something isn't working, we can simply get rid of it, is not modeled for us by God. If God threw away defective people, we would all be consigned to the trash heap. For we all fall short of who God is calling us to be. I don't know about you, but there are many days when I feel my chipped and broken state. I can't count my many past mistakes and failures. I wince as I remember times when I was not kind or gracious or when I missed opportunities to share love and laughter. I know that I chucked out thoughts and things and relationships because I was just too lazy and fearful to work on them. I did not trust that God would give me the fortitude to work on them. But I find hope in this: Scripture is filled with the witness of God reaching out to a flawed humanity again and again. Even when we rebelled and turned from God, humanity was not abandoned. And we are not abandoned even now when our topsy-turvy world seems caught up in chaos. Instead, out of love for us, our divine parent has shown up and continues to show up, extending grace and renewing our hearts. Undeserving as we might be, there is something about us that is in the sight of God valuable beyond our actions or our mere function in the world.

And I believe that is the way that God sees all of creation. Our text from Revelation describes a new heaven and a new earth, a paradise that we so long for. This is place of abundance, where the faithful from all nations enjoy an existence free from want and tears. These words assure us that the pain and suffering we see in the world is not eternal; our chipped and broken existence will not last forever. At some point, we will be made whole.

But our scripture text reveals that this new wonderful place is not somewhere out there. Our new life is not in the clouds or in the cosmos, but rather here, on the earth. Among the masses of humanity, among the plants, among the animals. It is in the world. For God is not making new things; God is making all things new. Let me repeat that for the people in the back: God is not making new things; God is making all things new. Despite our missteps and our mistakes, despite our willful ignorance and downright nastiness and sin, God values the world enough to stay and make things new.

Maybe God doesn't look at the world through the lens of functionality, wondering what each part of creation – including humans – can achieve. Maybe God looks at us through the eyes of love, simply because we are... simply because we flow from God and are called good.

What would happen if we started to look at the world through those set of eyeglasses? What would happen if we stopped considering how we might use the world to our own ends and

simply gazed with wonder, awe, and love at this complex system that sustains life itself. What if we recognized the fact that human beings are not simply workers, producers, cogs in a machine, or numbers on our membership rolls, but beings so beautiful in God's sight that God would send His only begotten son to live, die, and rise for them. Maybe we would be less likely to discard things and people, to brush them off as unimportant. Maybe our national policies such as immigration and asylum wouldn't revolve around how useful an applicant is, and would instead ask this question: "How can we help this person become the being God is calling him or her to be?" Maybe we would stop assuming that we know what a person thinks, feels, or believes based on the color of their skin, the language they speak, the creed they confess, or the political party to which they adhere. Maybe we could begin to see others as beloved children of God. And maybe we wouldn't view the great seams of coal, or reservoirs of oil and natural gas as mere sources of power and wealth, but as a testament to the amazing forces of time and nature. Maybe we would stop viewing our forests and fields merely as places that support *our* well-being; we would stop going into the forest simply to calm our minds or into the fields simply to plant our food. Instead, we could consider the mysteries of planting and harvesting, the cycle of death, rebirth, and growth. And in this, we might glimpse the workings of the divine.

I don't know what I will do with my wok. Chipped as it is, I'm not sure I want to cook in it. But throwing it away seems wasteful. Maybe it will find a home in my kitchen or in my garden, blessing my life with its continued graceful presence. May we see the blessings that creations mere existence brings to us all. Amen.