

ST STEPHEN'S HOME SERVICE – SUNDAY 21st JUNE 2020

INTRODUCTION



We know from our own experience that clinging onto things or people can sometimes cause them more harm than good. Think of children: we stifle them if we do not give them sufficient freedom. Or think of a beautiful but delicate butterfly, which we would damage by holding too tightly.

But in our Gospel today, Jesus tells us that the same principle applies to life itself: "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." We sometimes hear this as a threat, but I believe it is more of an invitation: an invitation not to stifle the joy out of life by clinging too tightly to it, trusting instead in the goodness and kindness of God and opening our lives to receive and give love in authentic ways. An invitation to discover and grow into our true, God-given selves.

So take a moment now to thank God for the gifts of love, of hope, of faith – and of life itself. And in accepting these as gifts, know the joy of freedom from the need to grasp and possess.

The peace of the Lord be always with you!

OPENING BIBLE VERSE AND PRAYERS

I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

**My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.**

O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.

**I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.**

Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.

**This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.**

The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.

**O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.**

O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him have no want.

**The young lions suffer want and hunger,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.**

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.

**Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD rescues them from them all.**

From Psalm 34

Thank you, Lord, that you were there in our past.

Thank you, Lord, that you will be there in our future.

Thank you, Lord, that you are here now.

**Thank you, Lord, that wherever we are, you are holding us all in
your love. Amen.**

God our Creator, we come to you seeking the gift of repentance.

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Jesus our Redeemer, we come to you seeking the gift of forgiveness.

Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Holy Spirit our Sanctifier, we come to you seeking the gift of wholeness.

Lord have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**



NEW TESTAMENT READING (Romans 6:1-11)

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Thanks be to God.

SONG

Come, wounded healer, your suff'rings reveal,
The scars you accepted our anguish to heal.
Your wounds bring such comfort in body and soul
To all who feel broken and long to be whole.

Come, hated lover, and gather us near,
Your welcome, your teaching, your challenge to hear;
Where scorn and abuse cause rejection and pain,
Your loving acceptance makes hope live again!

Come, broken victor, condemned to a cross –
How great are the treasures we gain from your loss!
Your willing agreement to share in our strife
Transforms our despair into fullness of life.

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GOSPEL READING (Matthew 10:24-39)

"A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

"So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

"Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION

Allow me to introduce you to *Kintsugi*.

Kintsugi is the Japanese art of putting broken pottery pieces back together. I suspect that you or I faced with a broken vase or plate would simply reach for the superglue. But *Kintsugi* (which means "golden seams") instead uses gold or other precious metals to join the broken pieces. The repaired vessel is certainly different from the original, but is strikingly beautiful – often more beautiful than the original piece.



The idea underlying *Kintsugi* is that in embracing flaws and imperfections, you can create an even stronger, more beautiful piece of art. Every break is unique and instead of trying to repair an item like new, removing all traces of the cracks, the technique actually highlights the "scars" as a part of the design.

Jesus tells his followers, "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." The words sound hard and uncompromising – a call to sacrifice and self-denial. But I think they also point to one of the deepest truths of the Christian life: that the path to life is through embracing our own brokenness, and allowing God to transform that very brokenness into something beautiful. Like the seams of gold in a *Kintsugi* pottery, God traces the lines of our brokenness with his healing, not denying or hiding the cracks, but transforming them as only He can.

None of us has had a life so sweet, so free from pain that we do not bear at least a few knocks and chips. Some of us probably feel like there are more cracks than unbroken vessel! The Coronavirus crisis has brought plenty of additional knocks.

The very real temptation – in the Church, just like outside it – is to try to smooth over those cracks: to hide them, or pretend they are not there. And when it comes to God, do we assume that what He ultimately wants for us is for those cracks to go away? Is that what we think it means to be healed?

The fact is, what God wants for us, more than anything else, is for us to learn to be loved and to love - deeply, authentically. And it is impossible really to be loved and to love without getting hurt, without suffering some damage. It is in the nature of love to take risks, to make us vulnerable, and sooner or later that means there will be breaks, there will be cracks.

"Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." Those who are unwilling to open themselves to love, who try to remain impregnable, who cling onto their own selves for fear of being hurt – they will turn out to have lost the most essential thing of all. But those who are willing to take the risk of love, who open themselves up – they will discover, for all the brokenness, that they have touched the source of life, who is Love itself.

The scars, the chips, the breaks – they are not something that we need to pray to be taken away. Those breaks are our badges of love. God asks us to trust that He can use them – yes, our very brokenness – to make something of beauty with His seams of pure gold.

If you want to see this perfectly, just look at the scars on Jesus' hands – the scars which are the badge of his love, not airbrushed away, but gloriously still there in heaven. That is God's idea of *Kintsugi*!

When the theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff lost his 25-year old son in a climbing accident, he wrote a book titled *Lament for a Son* to express his sense of brokenness. Years later, working with life inmates in a prison, he found them reading his book. But he realised that they were not reading it as his lament, but as their lament, helping them to find healing in their own anguish, including the pain of the hurt they knew they had caused to others. His brokenness had become something beautiful and healing for them. That is God's idea of *Kintsugi*, too.

And what of you or I? Will we try to hide from our own brokenness, our failures, our hurts? Or will we own them, bringing them into the open, where God can begin mending us with seams of gold? As Jesus again says, "Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known." Perhaps then we, too, can be formed as God's *Kintsugi*, our scars bearing witness to the transforming power of His infinite love and mercy.



PAUSE FOR REFLECTION....

If you would follow me,
follow where life will lead:
Do not look for me among the dead,
For I am hidden in pain, risen in love;
There is no harvest without sowing of grain.

*All that is hidden will be made clear.
All that is dark now will be revealed.
What you have heard in the dark
proclaim in the light;
What you hear in whispers
proclaim from the housetops.*

If you would rise with me,
rise through your destiny:
do not refuse the death which brings you life,
for as the grain in the earth
must die for rebirth,
So I have planted your life deep within mine.

All that is hidden

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PRAYERS

Let us pray to our Heavenly Father,
Who is familiar with our world
And understands our humanity.

Lord of all, wherever Christians are ridiculed
Or persecuted for their faith,
We ask your courage and inner strength;
Wherever we are called to be your witnesses,
We ask for the grace to communicate your love.
Wherever love for you has grown cold,
We ask to fan the flames again.

Silence

Christ of the wounded hands
Renew us and make us whole.

Lord, wherever the human spirit is ground down by oppression,
And wherever our silence allows injustice and corruption to flourish,
We ask for deeper compassion and commitment;
We ask for our kingdoms to become your kingdom,
And the desires of your heart to be ours.

Silence

Christ of the wounded hands
Renew us and make us whole.

Lord of all
Wherever families are struggling to stay together,
And wherever there are ongoing arguments and family feuds,
We ask your anointing for tranquillity and harmony.
Wherever children are unwanted and unloved, neglected or in danger,
We ask your protection and help.

Silence

Christ of the wounded hands
Renew us and make us whole.

Lord, wherever bodies, minds or spirits are wracked with pain,
Or too weak or exhausted to pray,
We ask the bathing love of your presence,
And the practical caring of hands working in your name.
Wherever there are doubts and the battle is strong,
We ask your empowering and clear guidance.

Silence

Christ of the wounded hands
Renew us and make us whole.

Lord of all
Wherever the dying are anxious or afraid,
We ask your peace;
Wherever the faithful have passed from this life into eternity,
We commend them to your unchanging and everlasting love.
Among those who have died recently, we remember Sheila Noble, and Sheila Ross.
And among those whose anniversaries fall at this time we remember with love and gratitude: Geoff Clarke, Mick Tudge, David Drew, Christmas Phillips, Geoff Stephens and Marcus Cairns-Terry.
May they rest in peace – and rise in glory.

Silence

Christ of the wounded hands
Renew us and make us whole.

Wherever nature's beauty, or the daily miracles around us
Alert us to see your face,
We thank you for the grace to live this resurrection life.

Merciful Father

**Accept these prayers
For the sake of your Son,
Our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

A SPECIAL PRAYER FOR FATHERS

Lord God, you are the perfect Father to us all.
Thank you for those in our own lives who have shown us a father's love.

It's not easy being a father today, and so we pray:
for fathers in a society that is constantly redefining their role;
for fathers who stay at home and look after children;
for fathers who have been forced out of their families or away from their
children;
for fathers with adult children who must relearn what it means to be a
parent.

We pray also for families with fathers who are inadequate, violent, lazy or
unkind;
for families where there is no father present at home;
for families in which there is no stable father-figure,
making it hard for the children to build lasting relationships or know their
true identities.

And we pray for all mourning the loss of a father or a child today.

Bless all fathers in the world today.
Give them love, to share with their children.
Give them wisdom, to teach their children.
Give them courage, when the job seems hard.
Give them patience, when things don't go to plan.
Give them strength, to carry their children when they are tired or frightened.
Give them love, to share with their children, and let it be enough.
may every family find wholeness and help
as they look to you, the loving Father of us all.

Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (this version, or the traditional one)

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

ENDING

**Loving God, bring us all to life
by the power of your love.
Transform our brokenness into blessing.
And as we go on our way,
May our minds be full of your voice,
our hearts full of your love,
and our thoughts full of your praise.**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The love of God,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
Be with us all evermore.
Amen.**