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Imagine you were sailing with a group of Phoenician sailors thousands of years ago. When you find yourself shipwrecked and need to cook the evening meal, you place your cooking pot on a block of natron, which is a sodium block, that you had in storage of the ship. You build your fire underneath it on the beach, and the next morning you discover the most amazing sight. The block had melted and turned into a beautiful previously unknown substance, something colorful and shiny and reflective.

According to Pliny the Elder, a Roman author of a *Natural History* Encyclopedia and a contemporary of Jesus, this event was the discovery of glass. Others suggest that Egyptian or Mesopotamian potters discovered glass earlier as they heated their pottery, for archaeologists have found glass beads over 4000 years old. At St. Paul's Monastery in Jarrow, England, ruins of a church founded in 686 AD contained multiple pieces of colored glass, attributed to be from the first stained glass window.¹

From the beginning centuries of the church, colorful glass pieces have formed windows, with the

more elaborate designs depicting stories of Jesus. The meticulous process involves creating a pattern, cutting the glass into various shapes, placing foil or lead around each piece of glass, placing the pieces together like a puzzle, and then heating a bead of solder around the edges of all the pieces.

Sometimes we may wonder about why someone would go to all this work.

Rev. Roberta Corson, of Campbell, California, tells about a family with a small girl of perhaps 2 who visited her church. During the service, Rev. Corson invited all the children present to come forward to hear a story. When Corson finished the story, she instructed the children to return to sit with their parents. The visiting child "remained in the front, standing alone in the chancel area facing the stained-glass window, oblivious to other people and activity. She simply stood in silence, having caught a glimpse of something the rest of us had failed to see. Was it the light coming through the stained glass? Was it the high-vaulted ceiling? Was it the holy mystery of God? After a long time, she quietly turned and went back to be with her parents."

Corson writes, "I never came to know that child, but I also have never forgotten her. She is you and me, our children, and the children of our neighborhood and world. She is every child, open

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to the holy. She has not yet been conditioned to miss it."²

The stained-glass windows of churches throughout the centuries have told stories, helping those who could not read to see and experience the stories in a visual way, similar to how we use graphics on a screen today. Whereas we use tiny pixels of colored light to create a picture, the early church used tiny pieces of glass, a mosaic of color to bring the stories of Jesus to life.

Imagine a stained-glass window of Luke's story of two healings. One window might contain Jairus (Ji-rus), a leader of the synagogue, on the ground before Jesus as he pleads for him to come heal his 12-year-old daughter. The next window might show a woman kneeling before Jesus, touching the hem of his robe. The third scene might show a girl lying in a bed, with people weeping beside her. In the last colorful window, Jesus holds the hand of the girl, who now sits up in bed, with smiling faces of those gathered around her.

Even without the colorful stained-glass windows of these scenes, we can still imagine the mosaics of healing that Jesus offered in these stories. When the

synagogue leader begged Jesus to visit his home, the man probably did not anticipate the interruption of the woman asking for her own healing. I imagine he felt impatient, wanting Jesus to leave the scene quickly in order to help his own daughter who was dying. I envision him waiting impatiently amidst the crowd, his foot tapping, his hand grasped together in impatience. He may have felt like saying, "Hurry up, Jesus. We have more important healings to do today," and yet, I imagine he also understood Jesus' willingness to help everyone.

The story contains a contrast in healings: first, an important man who's named, someone with status in the community who could interrupt Jesus and speak his request. In contrast, we have an unnamed woman of lower status who silently reaches out to Jesus. Two different kinds of people, but Jesus treats them both with respect and healing.

In both cases of healing, Jesus ignored the ritual purity laws. In the situation of the woman, since she was bleeding, she was considered unclean, and anyone who touched her would be considered unclean. In the case of the girl, when Jesus arrived, she had already

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died, and touching her corpse was also considered unclean.

Even though they may not have understood the health implications of those ritual purity laws in the same way as us, today we also avoid touching blood or a corpse without the proper gloves and precautions, for we know disease can spread through contact.

During Jesus' day, these people would have been considered impure and outsiders, someone not to touch. Jesus moved beyond these restrictions to offer a mosaic of healing, as though taking the shattered pieces of their lives and creating a beautiful picture out of the pieces.

Each of us is a broken piece of glass. Jagged edges. Various shapes. Many colors. And yet, when assembled together, we form the church, a mosaic of healing. One writer reflected on this idea as he looked at the stained-glass windows of his church:

The sun came out from behind the clouds, shining through the stained-glass windows that were all around the tiny chapel. I was amazed I hadn't really noticed them before, but now the sun lit them up brilliantly

I sat and thought about how we're all God's pieces of art, his stained-glass poetry, each of us a panel on display to the heavenlies as we fulfill the purpose he created us in advance to do.

I looked closer at the stained-glass panels and realized the pieces themselves weren't beautiful, but the beauty was in the assembled pieces. Like the sin-stained human beings we are, God assembles broken pieces like us into beautiful images — his workmanship — used for his glory as his light shines through. What makes the stained glass beautiful isn't the glass itself, but the sunlight shining through it.³

You are a piece of God's stained-glass window of the church, a mosaic of healing for everyone, even those considered as outsiders. May Christ's light shine from within you, illuminating God's healing presence.

¹ <https://stainedglass.org/resources/history-of-stained-glass/> and <https://stephenliddell.co.uk/2018/08/22/st-pauls-monastery-in-jarrow-and-the-oldest-stained-glass-window-in-the-world/>

² As referenced by Bob Olmstead, 11 April 1993, Reno, Nev. Quoted on homileticsonline.com.

³ Dan Kimball, "Stained-glass reflections," *Rev.*, January-February 2003, 110. Reprinted by permission, *Rev. Magazine* copyright 2003, Group Publishing, Inc., Box 481, Loveland, CO 80539. As quoted on homileticsonline.com.