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Thirty years ago, I received two chalices and a communion plate at my ordination, gifts given by one of the sponsoring congregations that affirmed my path in ministry. They were handcrafted in central Indiana in a pottery shop, reminding me of my Hoosier roots as I prepared to embark on a path that has taken me from Indianapolis to Kentucky to Illinois to Missouri and back home again in Indiana.

In one of those congregations, the custodian came to me one morning and said, “I need to apologize to you, for while I was cleaning your office, I knocked a chalice off your table, and it landed in pieces on the floor. I kept the pieces, but since you have two chalices of the same design, I can throw away the broken pieces for you.”

“Accidents happen,” I replied, “but please don’t throw away the pieces. They will remind me of the brokenness in life that we all experience, alongside the whole chalice that reminds me of God’s healing love.”

I’ve used several kinds of glue through the years, with the pieces often coming apart again. The

glued chalice fell apart once again in my last move, and the pieces have been sitting in my workshop for several years, waiting for another gluing treatment. Even when I finally put the pieces back together again, the chalice will never look like it originally did. The broken chalice carries a special meaning for me, for it reminds me of the broken places in my life as well as the lives of those who have shared the stories of their brokenness—relationships that have fallen apart, jobs that end abruptly, physical ailments, disappointments that life doesn’t go the expected way. We’ve all experienced those broken places in life.

The writer of Psalm 147 also recognized the broken places in our lives, but rather than dwelling on our shattered fragments, he celebrated the healing that God offers.

The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem,
gathering up Israel’s exiles.

³God heals the brokenhearted
and bandages their wounds. (147:2-3, CEB)

The psalmist refers to a difficult time in their history, about 580 years before Jesus was born

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when God's people had been forcibly removed from their homes and taken into Exile to an unfamiliar land. While remembering this trauma when they experienced their lives shattered into pieces, the writer offered the hope that God could heal the brokenhearted and bandage their wounds.

Even in the chaos of their lives, the psalmist reminded them that God provides water for the earth, food for the cattle and birds, and helps those who are poor.

Caring for the poor is a message that Disciples pastor William Barber wants us to remember, for this past weekend he held a digital rally where thousands of people gathered to support those who live in poverty. Originally planned as a march in Washington D.C., he had to adjust the plans due to the coronavirus and create a digital event, which will be rebroadcast this evening at 6:00, [June2020.org](https://june2020.org). He leads "the Poor People's Campaign...a movement of tens of thousands of people across the country who are organizing to end the interlocking injustices of systemic racism,

poverty, militarism and the war economy, ecological devastation, and the distorted moral narrative of religious nationalism."¹

In a sense, he's inviting us to remember and restore the beauty of God's creation.

- Rather than treating some people as better than others, we're reminded that all of God's children are beautiful, from light skinned to dark.
- Rather than taking advantage of the environment, we're reminded to use only what we need and to care for this earth that we live upon.
- Rather than a few having a majority of the resources, everyone needs access to the basics of life to survive.

I think most of us realize that parts of our world seem broken—from a virus creating destruction, to racial tensions, to environmental stresses, to economic hardships, the world seems to be crumbling apart. And yet, if you look out your windows, I imagine you can find something of beauty. A hummingbird...a flower that has opened

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toward the sun...a babbling brook...clouds creating patterns in the sky. Our world is *wabi-sabi*, a Japanese word that means broken and beautiful.

According to Japanese legend, a young man named Sen no Rikyu sought to learn the elaborate set of customs known as the Way of Tea. He went to tea-master...who tested the younger man by asking him to tend the garden. Rikyu cleaned up debris and raked the ground until it was perfect, then scrutinized the immaculate garden. Before presenting his work to the master, he shook a cherry tree, causing a few flowers to spill randomly onto the ground.²

In this perfect garden he added an imperfection, which reflects the reality of life. To live a life of *wabi-sabi* means one “celebrates cracks and crevices and rot and all the other marks that time and weather and use leave behind. To discover *wabi-sabi* is to see the singular beauty in something that may first look decrepit and ugly.”³

There’s another tradition that compliments this idea of *wabi-sabi*, which is to fill any crack with gold, highlighting the imperfection in a piece of pottery. Rather than throwing away a cracked piece

of pottery or hiding it from display, artists fill the cracks with gold, reminding us that even with imperfections, one is still beautiful.

Our lives are often filled with cracks, with imperfections, mistakes, sins, things we’re afraid to admit, but from those cracks we might learn something new, as was the case with

a Chinese woman who had two large pots. Each pot hung on the ends of a pole, which she carried across her shoulders. Every day, she used this device to carry water to her home.

One of the pots was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water. The other had a deep crack in it and leaked. At the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full.

For a full two years this situation occurred daily, with the woman bringing home only one and a half pots of water. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection and miserable that it could only do half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be bitter failure, the cracked pot spoke to the woman one day by the stream, saying, “I am ashamed of myself because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house.”

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The woman smiled and replied, “Did you notice that there are flowers on your side of the path, but not on the other pot’s side? I have always known about your flaw, so I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walked back home you watered them and made them grow. For two years, I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table and give to my friends and neighbors. Without you being just the way you are, there would not have been this special beauty to grace our homes and lives.”⁴

Even within those cracked places in your life, you still have a purpose in this world. May you look for the beauty of God shining through the gold-filled cracks within your life—cracks that still have enough space for God’s Spirit to flow into you and back again into the world.

¹ <https://www.june2020.org/>

² Robyn Griggs Lawrence, “Wabi-Sabi: The Art Of Imperfection,” September-October 2001, www.utne.com/mind-and-body/wabi-sabi

³ Ibid.

⁴ www.tcmworld.org/ancient-story-modern-message-the-cracked-pot/