

Traditional Home service Sunday 9th Jan

OPENING PRAYER

Eternal Father, who at the baptism of Jesus revealed him to be your Son, anointing him with the Holy Spirit: grant to us, who are born again by water and the Spirit, that we may be faithful to our calling as your adopted children; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

We come to God as one from whom no secrets are hidden, to ask for his forgiveness and peace.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name. Amen.

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.
Open our lips, Lord:
and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (*The Church's One Foundation*)

READINGS - Isaiah 43.1-7
Luke 3.15-17,21,22

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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.

HYMN 2 (*Jesus! the Name High over All*)

CONCLUSION

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every
The Lord be with you all; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

HYMNS TO USE

1 The Church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ, her Lord;
she is his new creation
by water and the Word.
From heav'n he came and sought her
to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her,
and for her life he died.

2 Elect from ev'ry nation,
yet one o'er all the earth;
her charter of salvation:
one Lord, one faith, one birth.
One holy name she blesses,
partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses,
with ev'ry grace endued.

3 The Church shall never perish.
Her dear Lord to defend,
to guide, sustain, and cherish,
is with her to the end.
Tho' there be those that hate her
and strive to see her fail,
against both foe and traitor
she ever shall prevail.

4 Tho' with a scornful wonder
the world sees her oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder,
by heresies distressed,
yet saints their watch are keeping;
their cry goes up, "How long?"
and soon the night of weeping
shall be the morn of song.

5 'Mid toil and tribulation
and tumult of her war
she waits the consummation
of peace forevermore
till with the vision glorious
her longing eyes are blest,
and the great Church victorious
shall be the Church at rest.

1 Jesus, the Name high over all,
in hell or earth or sky;
angels and mortals prostrate fall,
and devils fear and fly.
Jesus, the Name to sinners dear,
the Name to sinners giv'n;
it scatters all their guilty fear,
it turns their hell to heav'n.

2 O that the world might taste and see
the riches of His grace!
The arms of love that compass me
would all the world embrace.
Thee I shall constantly proclaim,
though earth and hell oppose;
bold to confess Thy glorious Name
before a world of foes.

3 His only righteousness I show,
His saving truth proclaim;
'tis all my business here below
to cry, "Behold the Lamb!"
Happy, if with my latest breath
I may but gasp His Name,
preach Him to all, and cry in death,
"Behold, behold the Lamb!"

Sermon - Barbara MacMillan
The Blessing of Brokenness

Recently, I was introduced to the writings of Henri Nouwen, who was a Catholic priest, professor and writer. One of his books, *Life of the Beloved*, has deeply impacted me. Nouwen writes that our deepest spiritual need is to hear the voice of God say to us, “You are the Beloved”, and to allow that truth to penetrate our spirits so deeply that all the other voices—the lies that tell us we’re not good enough, smart enough or successful enough—are silenced.

Nouwen uses communion, the Lord’s supper, to help explain the journey of living as God’s “Beloved”. Matthew 26:26 says,

26 As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “Take this and eat it, for this is my body.”

Jesus took the bread, he blessed the bread, he broke the bread, and he gave the bread. To live life as God’s beloved, therefore, we must be aware of being taken, or chosen, of being blessed, of being broken, and finally of being given. And like all things spiritual, I don’t believe this is a linear journey with a start and a finish, but rather a cyclical process that we experience throughout our lives at varying depths or from different perspectives. The more I dwell on it—that as God’s beloved I am chosen, blessed, broken, given—the more I see it as a recurring pattern everywhere, something that is foundational to the Christian life.

I don’t know about you, but in my experience, churches globally, especially protestant evangelical and charismatic churches, seem to emphasize being chosen, blessed and possibly given, but the idea of being broken doesn’t get the same attention. It’s not ignored but at the same time, it’s not exactly embraced, in my opinion. So that’s what I want to talk about this morning: the blessing of brokenness. It is a blessing to be broken by Jesus because it takes us deeper into the life of living as The Beloved.

So, starting by looking at the verses in Isaiah I want to look at how they too whisper to us “You are my Beloved”—that we are chosen, blessed, broken and given. As with most Old Testament prophecy, the language is full of imagery and metaphor, and it makes reference to ideas talked about other passages of scripture. We’ll use the Isaiah passage as a

springboard, landing in a few Old Testament verses, and then spend a good chunk of time in Daniel chapter 3.

Just a bit of background that I think is helpful: According to most scholars, the book of Isaiah was written over several hundreds of years by multiple authors, and it can be divided into three parts. The first part, chapters 1-39, was written before the Jewish people were exiled to Babylon. The second part, chapters 40-55, was written much later, about 150 years, while the Jews were living in captivity. The final section, chapters 56-66, was written after the people had returned from exile. The passage we’re looking at today, Isaiah 43, was written during the Jewish people’s captivity, arguably one of the darkest times in their history because they were once again slaves. They hadn’t heeded God’s warning. They had completely blown it. They had lost absolutely everything.

But this is what Isaiah writes,

43 But now, this is what the LORD says –
he who created you, Jacob,
he who formed you, Israel:
‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name;
you are mine.

Isaiah starts by lovingly getting the people’s attention, by extending an invitation to reclaim their identity, reminding them that they are not only known by God but named by Him. That although they were faithless, He remained faithful. And then he goes on to say a much-loved and often-quoted verse:

2 When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.

There is so much packed into this one verse! Although the sentences are written with future meaning, the imagery brings to mind the miraculous and supernatural ways that God had intervened in the lives of his people... in the very distant past, and perhaps, the not so distant past.

CHOSEN

In the first part of the verse, Isaiah says “When you pass through the waters, I

will be with you.” I think he’s alluding to the miracle of when God parted the Red Sea in Exodus 14:21-22.

²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, ²² and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

After the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, Moses tells them in Deuteronomy 7:6 that they are God’s chosen people:

⁶ For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession

Isaiah captures a snapshot of this pivotal moment in Israel’s history and invites them to remember how special they are— that they are CHOSEN. remember the God who led you out of captivity in Egypt, remember the miracles He performed to deliver you, remember His power over your enemies, remember how His presence was with you walked through the waters, remember that He told you that you are his chosen people, His treasured possession. You are CHOSEN.

BLESSED

In the next part of this verse, Isaiah refers to rivers: “and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.”

Again, I think He is bringing to mind the time when they crossed the Jordan river and entered the promised land. The promised land was God’s blessing to them. In Deuteronomy 27:2 it says this:

² When you have crossed the Jordan into the land the LORD your God is giving you, set up some large stones and coat them with plaster. ³ Write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over to enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you.

Isaiah reminds the people of the incredible blessings that God had lavished upon them in the past. A promised land of milk and honey—

symbols of joy and prosperity—a land he promised to them generations before. Isaiah shows that God not only **CHOSE** them-- delivered them out of slavery-- He supernaturally deposited them into a land to call home—He **BLESSED** them with a gift to bring them joy and, prosperity.

BROKEN

Now, looking at the next part in verse 2, it says:

When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.

In these verses, Isaiah refers to walking miraculously through fire unharmed. Is this something that had happened in Israel’s distant past, recent past, or was it a prophecy to prepare them for what was to come?

As I started reading these verses more historically rather than metaphorically—seeing the connection between the waters/rivers and the Red Sea/Jordan River—for the first time I saw the link between the words “the flames will not set you ablaze” and the passage in Daniel 3, in which three of Daniel’s friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were thrown in the fiery furnace for refusing to bow down and worship an idol.

When faced with a brutal and torturous death, they say this to the king:

¹⁶ ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us^[c] from Your Majesty’s hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.’

Their faith is as miraculous as their deliverance! Undoubtedly, they were strengthened through their own devotion to God and their commitment to prayer, but I have to wonder: when did this event happen? Had they already heard the words of Isaiah—“the flames will not set you ablaze”? Was that a prophecy for them in that very situation? Are these the words that made them fearless as they walked into the fire? After all, this portion of Isaiah was written whilst the Jews were in captivity. Or had this miracle already happened? Was Isaiah recording it as one of the most awesome miracles that God Almighty

performed in the lives of his chosen people, on par with the crossing of the Red Sea and the Jordan River, in order to give hope to everyone in exile as they waited for God to deliver them again? I would love to know the answer! In whatever order—whether Isaiah prophesied this event or simply recorded it—I love to imagine how God was working through and communicating within the Jewish community in exile. I think that the book of Esther gives us some indication that they were a tight-knit group, that the palace walls didn't stop them from communicating with one another, and that they shared words of hope, encouragement and possibly prophecies with each other.

And the third option, of course, that this verse is merely beautiful poetry to empower generation after generation to hold fast to God's faithfulness in their darkest hour, is still pretty amazing, too.

I think, the situation that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego found themselves in is an example of what it means to be BROKEN by God, when you find yourself face-to-face with impossible circumstances that you feel will destroy some aspect of your life, but God is calling you to walk through them nevertheless.

So what can we learn about brokenness, and specifically, the blessing of brokenness in this Daniel passage?

One way in which this event is different from the previous two recorded by Isaiah is that the external circumstances didn't change. When confronted by a sea and a river, the Israelites saw God transform the natural world in order to protect them. But this time, God didn't extinguish the flames as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego entered them. The flames continued to blaze all around them. However, God sent the presence of Jesus to be with them—He physically appeared to them-- and it was His presence that so transformed them that the flames could not touch them. The flames were utterly powerless against them. It says: the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. So, that's the first blessing of brokenness: when we are broken by Jesus, we see Him more clearly, and we also see how He transforms us and empowers us to live from His miraculous might, unaffected by our circumstances.

The second blessing of brokenness is that we are set free from things that previously held us in bondage. Notice that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were tied up by some of the king's strongest men before being thrown into

the furnace, yet they were unbound and walking around freely in the fire. I believe that when we are broken by Jesus, when we live surrendered to him and say "yes" to the impossible circumstances that face us, even when it costs us, we suddenly find that things that had previously limited us, trapped us, or even held us in bondage—harmful mindsets, destructive habits, or unhealthy relationships, for example—lose their power because we've learning to live from a higher realm.

A third blessing of brokenness is that the people around us actually see Jesus.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisors, 'Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?'

They replied, 'Certainly, Your Majesty.'

²⁵ He said, 'Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.'

When our friends, family, colleagues, and neighbours witness us living through life's harshest trials and tribulations, and see us focussed on Jesus, on his faithfulness and abundant blessings rather than on the limitations in front of us, are themselves transformed because they can see God at work. They see our freedom, our transformation, but most importantly, they have an encounter with Jesus himself!

A fourth blessing of being broken by Jesus is that nations are ultimately blessed. When Nebuchadnezzar sees this miracle unfolding before his eyes and sees Jesus, he says:

²⁹ Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.'

I doubt they were impressed by the king's grotesque punishment added to the decree, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were privileged to see the effect that their faith had on their nation. I am confident that modern day believers are having as great an impact transforming nations, simply by saying yes to Jesus, whatever the cost. Heidi Baker, and the way her ministry is blessing Mozambique, is one example that springs to mind.

The fifth way that we can see the blessing of brokenness in this passage is through

promotion. ³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon. When we give our all for Jesus, He gives it all back to us. We are promoted—our sphere of influence is expanded and we carry authority in ways that we didn't previously. We extend the light and life of God's kingdom into areas that were previously controlled by darkness.

These are just a few of the blessings of brokenness that I could find in this bible passage.

GIVEN

So, finally, let's close by looking at what it means to be GIVEN. In verses 3 and 4, Isaiah writes:

³ For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your
Saviour;
I give Egypt for your ransom,
Cush^[a] and Seba in your stead.
⁴ Since you are precious and honoured in
my sight,
and because I love you,
I will give people in exchange for you,
nations in exchange for your life.

In these verses, we see that God is the giver, not the Israelites. By using dramatic and poetic language, Isaiah says that God favours Israel above every nation, and would even swap the wealthiest and most advanced kingdoms—Egypt, Cush and Seba—for them. God is the giver of all good things, so what could we possibly offer him? For me, I have to remember that to be given is not the same as to give. To be given means we relinquish control and we surrender: we yield to the power of Jesus. After Jesus broke the bread, he gave it to his disciples and said, "This is my body." We, as followers of Jesus, call ourselves the body of Christ. Our giving, therefore, is horizontal, not vertical. We give to one another in the name of Jesus, as Jesus gave to us.

In *Life of the Beloved*, Nouwen explains that the question is not so much what we can give (or offer) one another, but who can we be for one another. The gifts we have to give are things like friendship, kindness, patience, forgiveness, gentleness, love, hope, trust... to name a few.

And notice, as well, that Jesus gave broken bread. Not unblemished loaves, but broken pieces. I think that the ultimate blessing of brokenness is offering our brokenness to

others. Being vulnerable, being authentic, being transparent—really sharing with people our struggles, failings and fears, but also our victories, our mountain-top experiences, and our baby-steps—is so important because it shows the transforming power of Jesus in us.

As we enter this New Year, let's look for ways that God is revealing to us that we are His Beloved—that we are chosen, blessed, broken, and given—and let's embrace the seasons when we feel broken, let's offer our brokenness to one another, and look for the incredible blessings, the treasures He has hidden for us, even in our brokenness.

Amen.