

I would like to share with you an incident that took place on our campus a week ago. I was texted by the School Office early in the morning, around 6:30a.m., to tell me that there was a man sleeping in front of the Gym.

We have had some history with this gentleman. He has exhibited some destructive behavior in the campus. A couple of times, he strayed into the school where our children play. When asked to leave, he would be testy and confrontational with the faculty and parents.

So when I met the Pleasant Hill police, who were assisting us with the situation, I was asked to sign a restraining order. I thought for a moment and I said, "No, it is not in my job description." We priests and pastors want people to come to church and not drive them away. I said to myself, "This man probably needs our church, and you and me more than anybody else."

Of course we had to do the right thing by our children. Our school office personnel signed the papers. The truth is, it has disturbed me quite a bit in the past week. How can we see the face of God in people, especially those who seem to be a threat to us?

How can we step up and help people that sometimes make us uncomfortable and uneasy? Especially in this season, when we reflect on the Christmas story, the story of Joseph and Mary finding no room in the Inn for their baby? Or the story of the angels announcing the good news of the Savior to poor shepherds in the deep cold on the hills watching their flock? Or the story of the Holy Family fleeing to Egypt as refugees and staying there for months? The question is how do we see the face of God in the poor, the homeless, those whom everybody rejects? In shutting people out of our Churches and schools, are we driving God out of our lives?

In the first reading of today Isaiah the prophet writes,

**The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners.**

Isaiah summarizes here the very essence of the Christmas story. In fact Jesus would use these words to express his mission as he announced his public ministry, with "glad tidings to the poor, healing for the broken hearted, liberty to captives (just think about this word captives – refugees held captive or on the run) and release to the prisoners (Wow! These are people who break the laws, and in our society, they belong behind bars)."

In fact, He would repeat these words in a different way when he talks about the last judgment where He identifies Himself with the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, strangers, the ill and those in prison.

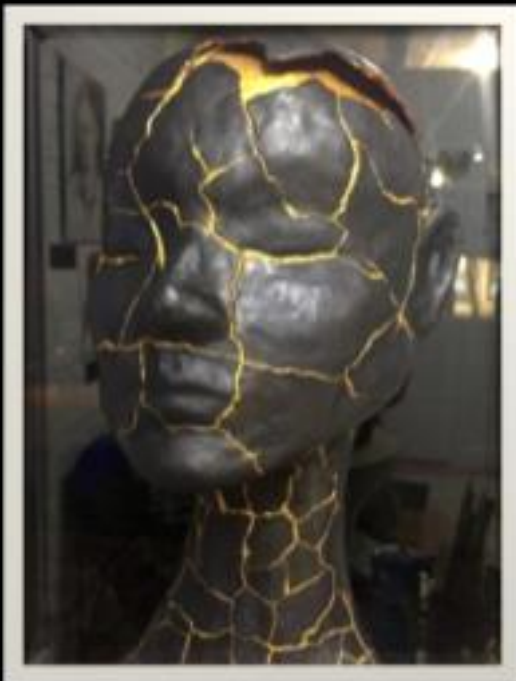
Sometimes, I feel we are no more the people God want us to be. We have hardened our hearts against the hungry, the thirsty, the alien in our midst, those in prison." The wind blowing across our nation is one of disdain and disregard, sometimes for the very ones that Jesus identified Himself with. Let us make Christmas about the people that Jesus came to heal, liberate and release- the broken hearted.

This world is filled with brokenhearted people. Everywhere we look, things are broken. There is **broken confidence in our nation** because of the uncertainty of the future and an unstable climate. There are **broken relationships** resulting in **broken homes** and **broken lives**. Mental institutions and our city streets are crowded with **broken minds**. Hospitals are filled with **broken bodies**.

Many immigrants spend their days and nights saddened by their broken dreams. This week, I read and saw images of 14 million people in Yemen who are on the verge of famine. Why? Because of war and economic blockade. What does Christmas mean for the world and us with so much brokenness? Can you walk in the shoes of Jesus who came to make a difference in the lives of these people 2000 years ago? Can we open our eyes and see the brokenness all around us and be Jesus to the world, to a neighbor next to you?

Are YOU among the **BROKENHEARTED**? Then you have a reason to be happy this Christmas. God came for you.

In Japan, they've made an art out of restoring broken things. An ancient practice called *Kintsugi*, meaning "golden joinery" or "to patch with gold," is an age-old custom of repairing cracked pottery with real gold, not only fixing the break, but greatly increasing the value of the piece.



Kintsugi Art



The heart of it all - turning what is broken into beautiful, cherished pieces, by sealing the cracks and crevices with lines of fine gold. Instead of hiding the flaws, Kintsugi artists highlight them, creating a whole new design and bringing unique beauty to the original piece.

The art of Kintsugi reinforces a profound belief that the repair can make things not only as good as they were before, but "better than new."

Better than new. Let that soak in for a moment.

Yet God breaks through all that mess. That is the advent message, that God breaks through all our mess and brokenness. You are never beyond healing. You are never too broken for restoration. You are never too shattered for repair. Don't be ashamed of your scars, of the deep crevices that line your soul, or the broken places of your life.

He will take what is broken and turn it into something beautiful.