

It's Up to You 2025 (Week 8) - Will you talk about the Japanese practice of kintsugi?

Yesterday's Sermon Summary



1. Yesterday we didn't explore a question but a suggested subject - the Japanese art form called kintsugi. Kintsugi is when a broken piece of pottery, plate, or dish is mended back together using a lacquer mixed with metallic powder (often a precious metal) called urushi. Kintsugi literally means "joined with gold."
2. Kintsugi is distinguished from another Japanese craft called yobitsugi: in the latter, you use pieces from DIFFERENT objects to create an altogether-new patchwork finished product, whereas in the former you use pieces from the same object to repair and make it whole again. Kintsugi is a reflection of several fundamental aspects of the Japanese worldview: a) it demonstrates "wabi-sabi," which embraces impermanence, flaws, and breaks as a normal part of life, and b) it champions "mushin," which tells us that the only life we can live is the one in this present moment, so dwelling on the past (i.e., past wounds) does us no good whatsoever.
3. Christy Bartlett is one of the English-speaking world's leading experts on kintsugi, and she offers insight into how kintsugi is a window into some of the deepest truths of life, injury, and healing: "The practice of kintsugi treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise...The vagaries of existence over time, to which all humans are susceptible, could not be clearer than in the breaks, the knocks, and the shattering to which ceramic ware is also subject. Kintsugi celebrates a break, honoring the story of the object, its ruin and repair. Mistakes and accidents are simply a part of the experience of living. Rather than trying to restore a broken object to its original glory, kintsugi focuses on creating a newly imagined, distinctive vessel. Kintsugi teaches us that cracks and breaks are events in life, not the end of life. Our scars are what make us uniquely beautiful. By embracing the perfectly imperfect, we can learn from this beautiful craft how to walk through our daily lives with grace and loving acceptance."
4. A favorite image of the Old Testament prophets for our relationship with God is that we are the clay and God is the potter (for example, [Isaiah 29.16](#) and [Isaiah 45.9](#)). In [Isaiah 64.7-8](#), we see God not just as a potter, but as a master of kintsugi in the lives of God's people: In verse 7, God often turns us over to the consequences of our own iniquities so that we can learn and grow, but, moving to verse 8, while that happens God never stops shaping and reshaping us as our benevolent divine Potter.
5. Gretchen Crowder, writing for Ignatian Spirituality, does a great job of helping us imagine God not just as a Potter, but as that master of kintsugi: "Imagine for a minute God sitting at the potter's wheel, hands wet with clay, forming you. There God is, taking time to make each curve and line special. Then, God walks over to the kiln and fires you. Every unique element is now solidified in a finished product. But then, as God puts you out into the world, you get a little beat up along the way. First small chips appear. Then much larger cracks and breaks occur as you grow and have more life experiences. But now imagine that every time you return to God's workshop God picks you up, examines you closely, and notes each wound. Then God stirs up a cup of gold adhesive and carefully repairs you. The breaks are still there but no longer threaten your usefulness or even your every life itself. After the adhesive dries, God places you in the windowsill and there the sunlight dances and sparkles off every single mark, line, and patch that makes you who you are."

6. Kintsugi aligns with some many basic facets of the Judeo-Christian faith tradition. First, it tells us that breaking - over and over again, in big and small ways - is just normative in life. When it happens, we shouldn't be surprised, nor should we often fault ourselves - or God - for it. This is how Bryan Stevenson, founder of The Equal Justice Initiative, describes the common human experience of being broken in his book *Just Mercy*: "We are bodies of broken bones. I guess I'd always known but never fully considered that being broken is what makes us human. We all have our reasons. Sometimes we're fractured by the choices we make; sometimes we're shattered by things we would never have chosen. We are all broken by something. We have all hurt someone and have been hurt. We all share the condition of brokenness even if our brokenness in the present moment is not equivalent."

7. Kintsugi tells us that our breakage over time changes us irrevocably. As a shattered and mended plate is both the same and different, same goes for us. It's not fair nor wise to ask yourself or others to be the same after you are wounded or come apart at the seams. But the hope of kintsugi is that we may be different but we are not worse or less than. In fact, our healed injuries and hurts may be some of the most striking, beautiful parts of the person we are and are becoming.

8. As is true for a finished piece of kintsugi, your breaks and repairs tell your story. Instead of minimizing, hiding, or trying to get past these things, we need to integrate them into how we understand ourselves, the character we hope to have, and how we make our way through the world. For a biblical example of this integration, look no further than the apostle Paul ([1st Timothy 1.12-15](#)): in this text, he (or its author) is unflinchingly about grave missteps and mistakes of his past, but grateful for God's grace poured out upon him that has healed and saved him over the course of 2-3 decades. Father Richard Rohr puts it this way: "Our brokenness is the raw material of God's restoration"; Rumi, the great Persian mystic and poet from the 1200s CE says it even more poignantly, "The wound is the place where the Light enters you."

9. Last, our own breaking and healing is the gift and comfort we offer others. The next two verses in that 1st Timothy text mentioned above demonstrate this: Paul is vulnerable about his past failings and present regret about them, as well as God's abundant grace, so that he can be an example of God's healing work for others (see [1st Tim. 1.16-17](#)). In [2nd Corinthians 1.3-5](#), written 10 years or more earlier and expressing the same idea, Paul says that the consolation we offer others is the very same consolation that we have received from God. This is part of what it means to be the church together: to use Martin Luther's analogy, church is a hospital in which we are all patients, all under the care the sole doctor named Jesus Christ. The late Rachel Held Evans said it like this: "I believe the church is called to the slow and difficult work of healing. We are called to enter into one another's pain, anoint it as holy, and stick around no matter the outcome."

For this Week

Spend some time reflecting on, praying about, or journaling about how your own life, past and present, reflects the deep truths revealed in kintsugi. Where are your broken pieces now? What healing do you seek? How has God healed your past brokenness? How did your past wounds change you, but over time not for the worse? How can you offer your own story to others who need healing too?

Spend the week dwelling on the scripture we used in yesterday's service and sermon (and one extra), all oriented God's work of kintsugi in our lives:

- [Psalm 147.1-6 NRSVUE](#)
- [Isaiah 64.7-8 NRSVUE](#)
- [2 Corinthians 1.3-5 NRSVUE](#)
- [1 Timothy 1.12-17 NRSVUE](#)
- [Philippians 3.4-11 NRSVUE - even though I, too, have reason for - Bible Gateway](#)

Interested in learning more about kintsugi? These two short videos will help you go a little deeper:

- [EASTERN PHILOSOPHY - Kintsugi](#)
- [Kintsugi, the ancient art of making shattered dishes whole](#)

A devotional written by Bryan Stevenson on the need to embrace our common brokenness and let it point us toward compassion: [Wounded Healers Embrace Brokenness and Mercy](#)

Here are three more devotionals to sprinkle throughout your week about brokenness:

- [Broken Hearts](#)
- [The Dump and the Church](#)
- [Blessed Are the Broken - United Church of Christ](#)

On the psychological work of healing from brokenness and integrating both into your life story (the first link even makes an explicit tie to kintsugi - bringing things full circle):

- [Am I Broken? Understanding Emotional Brokenness and Finding Hope](#)
- [Feel Broken Inside? It's Time to Heal | Psychology Today](#)

And this is the autobiographical book Just Mercy written by Bryan Stevenson (which has also been adapted into an excellent movie - see the 2nd link):

- [Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption \(One World Essentials\)](#)
- [Just Mercy \(2019\)](#)