Rev. Laura Fitzpatrick-Nager
The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme
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The Potter's House: Healing at the Broken Places

Jeremiah 18:1-4 (Inclusive Bible version)
This word came to Jeremiah from YHWH: "Get up and make your way down to the potter's house. I will give you my message there." So I went down to the potter's house, and there the potter was working at the wheel. Whenever the object of clay that the potter was making turned out badly, the potter tried again, making of the clay another object, of whatever sort the potter pleased.

One of the interesting things about being married to a carpenter and an artist is that there is nothing that is ever discarded- be it barn board, a chipped plate, extra nails, left over shingling, … nothing should be thrown out that has the possibility of being reused, reimagined, and transformed into something else down the road.

Indeed, as many times as Paul and I might argue about bringing the pile over there behind the fence to the transfer station (I won't say "dump" about these potential treasures) …well, I confess I often lose the battle.

Nonetheless, I am a devoted admirer of all things pottery and am especially taken with the Japanese art of Kintsugi. It is a metaphor for the work of healing and hope that we participate in here at FCCOL.

Dating back to 15th c Japan, Kintsugi, (meaning golden joinery), pictured in your bulletin, is the art of repairing broken things… making all things new again by mending what is broken with veins of gold. Once-discarded objects become beautiful in a whole new way.

Rather than concealing the damage to a chipped blue bowl, for example, the kintsugi approach magnifies it, transforming brokenness into part of an object's history and beauty. The philosophy is closely connected to wabi-sabi, the appreciation of impermanence and imperfection.[1]

Thus, a fracture, scar or wound or (dare I say wrinkle), can become an opportunity for renewed beauty. The beauty of imperfections. Says one potter, "It used to be an old broken bowl, but now you see a gold river running through it."

And as my husband reminds me, the repaired part of an object is known to be the strongest! Or as Ernest Hemingway famously wrote, … *"The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places."*

[1] https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/19/t-magazine/ceramics-kintsugi-classes.html

Our Ladies Who Stitch here at church already practice this art in a way with their spirits and hearts of gold (taking donated cloth and transforming them into future gifts). …

This "theology of making new" is one that offers an intriguing metaphor for the human experience. The artist Makoto Fujimura has spent decades exploring what he calls "broken beauty"—the observation that beauty is often born, not despite the fractures and scars we carry but through them. Especially poignant given the state of our world right now.

In his recent book, *Faith and Art*, Fujimura describes his own process as an artist and also his "theology of making", of finding beauty in broken things…"Rather than asking how quickly our deepest cracks can be repaired, he wonders whether we might first learn to behold them in a different light."[2]

Fujimura teaches that a Kintsuigi master ultimately does not seek to fix the broken vessel but to savor its beauty just as it is and admire its potential.
What kind of church might we (He asks) be if we simply allowed broken people to gather, and did not try to fix them but simply to love and behold them…?

Two sacred conversations have brought this wisdom home to me over the past few weeks. (An understanding of how we might embrace the brokenness and see how it might be transformative and beautiful.)

I met Mr. Ray Boyd (known as Ray) at York Correctional in Niantic last month where I'd signed up for a tour of the prison through The Frederick Douglass Prison Project.
I'd been to York several times before but never had the opportunity to tour the whole facility and to participate in a circle of curated conversations with those called, "Indoor" and "outdoor" participants. As a visitor I was invited to be an "outdoor participant" and had the opportunity to hear Ray's story. His role as an ambassador with the Douglass Prison Project was to help foster dialogue and connection to see beyond the negative stereotypes of those incarcerated. In short, we were invited to see one another as human beings on a journey toward wholeness.

A juvenile offender at 17 years old, Ray shared that he was incarcerated for over 30 years and sentenced to life in prison. They were throwing away the key on him until a new law giving juvenile offenders a chance at the possibility for freedom changed his life.

Five years ago, Ray was released from the Connecticut Department of Corrections. Now, as an Ambassador of the Justice Project, author, and employee at the Yale Law School, Ray changes lives while sharing his own. He is a work of art in progress. During his lengthy incarceration, Ray changed his life, co-founded 2 justice programs to assist his fellow inmates; one of those innovative programs was the subject of a segment that aired on 60 Minutes. [3]

[2] Makoto Fujimura, Art and Faith: A Theology of Making. Yale University Press, 2020.
[3] https://www.nextlevelemp.org/

Finally, last February, Ray was granted a full pardon from the Connecticut Board of Pardons and Paroles. I'm hoping he can come to FCCOL sometime next year and share his remarkable journey. As a role model of resilience and restorative justice for others, Mr. Ray's life has emerged from brokenness into an unfolding of healing.

"*See", said the prophet Isiaiah prophesied, "I am doing a new thing!*
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." (43:19)

A second conversation that has stayed in my heart took place at the Breakfast Run in New York City with our youth group a few weeks ago. On this particular Saturday, about 60 people lined up for coffee and food tables, among them was a 72-year-old woman named Kathryn. Kathryn stayed off to the side observing for a while. She looked through the sweaters displayed and one of our high schoolers handed her a hot cocoa.

Kathryn looked familiar to me and in fact, I was stunned when she remembered me and I realized that we'd met before, 2 years ago on another Breakfast Run in the same park in Chelsea. Here she was, still needing a place to sleep, still riding the subways for warmth at midnight, still alone.
Her life circumstances had not changed at all.
I shuddered to think of her life over the past couple of years…and thought of all of the places I'd been to travel, to all the privileges of my life contained, the resources I could call on should I ever be in dire straits. And here Kathryn, a senior citizen…still without a safe place to call her own. Does she have an address to even receive Social Security, I wondered.
"How are you today, "I asked?
"Well, I spent last winter sleeping in the blizzard, she told me. "I don't want to have to ever do that again." Gazing passed me into the distance, Kate's weathered face and sharp blue eyes were worn with fatigue.

One of our students asked later on when we reflected with one another, "How does a Breakfast Run once a year change anything for someone who lives on the street?"
"How can we really help her?" This profound question still hangs in the air for us to grapple with…

What we were able to do in that particular moment was see her as a person, feed her a warm meal and help her to transfer her belongings from a paper shopping bag into a more durable Stop n Shop one. We spent some time talking. We gave her extra sandwiches. What we were able to do was let our hearts be opened by the experience of connecting with her, seeing her as a human being and knowing her name. We weren't going to fix anything substantial that day. But maybe some of us in the future would work towards a solution and eradicate homelessness once and for all. Maybe that person is you!

We said goodbye to Kathryn, and I watched her walk down the block and turn the corner to somewhere else.

While the City of New York has increased its spending budget to house and shelter the thousands of folks living on the street each night, people like Kathryn and so many others are still living without reliable shelter.[4] The system is broken, affordable housing and senior housing is in very short supply….. Funding cuts from the Feds are felt in big and small ways on the street.
According to the Coalition of Homeless, a report from this August indicated that homelessness in New York City has reached the highest level since the Great Depression of the 1930s.
65% of those who are considered homeless are families….and,
In the month of August 2026, alone, **96,852** people slept each night in NYC shelters. We visited one of them…

The brokenness of the system falls on the shoulders of Kathryn and so many others… relegated to shadowed corners of the park or in doorways.

When I remember each of these people, Ray at York CI who is a ray of light himself, and then, Kathryn, the unhoused elder living on the street in NYC just trying to survive another winter…both human stories reflect the brokenness and the light…

In our own lives as in the art of Kintsugi, attention and repair become the tasks. Love is the measure.

*"Love is the Measure," wrote Dorothy Day (*Today is November 8th, 1897, it is also the anniversary of her birthday, so it feels right to hear her words at this moment. As co-founder of the Catholic Worker Houses of Hospitality that started in NYC after the Great Depression, she wrote about love and her own struggles to find her purpose and to make a difference in the world.)

What we would like to do
is change the world — make it
a little simpler for people
to feed, clothe and shelter themselves
as God intended them to do.

And to a certain extent,
by fighting for better conditions,
by crying out unceasingly
for the rights of the workers,
of the poor, of the destitute —
the rights of the "worthy"
and the "unworthy" poor
in other words, we can to a certain extent
change the world.

[4] https://gothamist.com/news/nyc-spending-on-homelessness-has-soared-so-has-the-number-of-people-on-the-street

We can work for the oasis,
the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world.

We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident
that its ever widening circle will reach around the world.

We can give away an onion.

We repeat, there is nothing that we can do but love,
and dear God —please enlarge our hearts

to love each other,
to love our neighbor,
to love our enemy
as well as our friend.

Let us go to the Potter's House, preaches the prophet Jeremiah. Let us get our hands in the clay and get our fingers dirty with the art of making something better than new.

Let us make something of ourselves that heals and opens other hearts, too, and when we break, let us let the light in anyway, let the Spirit of Love pour through us again like golden pathways of light.