

“God Is in Control”
Broken — Good News for Tough Times: Part 6 of 6

a sermon based on
Romans 11:1-2*a*, 29-32

and delivered on-
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Today, we finish this sermon series “Broken - Good News for Troubled Times”. If you remember back to that first week, this vase in front of you was in a gazillion pieces. And I started my sermon reciting Humpty Dumpty. We all know the nursery rhyme. It speaks to the futility of restoring what has been broken.

So today, I put in this final piece. The vase is whole. But it still looks a little rough.

The Japanese have an art called *Kintsugi* for repairing broken pottery. Not only do they use this enamel with precious metal dust imbued in it too cover the cracks and to join the pieces together, but the often use it to fill in spots where broken pieces are missing altogether.

It's pretty. And some ways it's still seems like giving up on fully restoring the peace to what it once was.

In that passage we heard from Romans today, Saint Paul asks If God has rejected his people. He follows up by saying, “By no means!” But still - this isn't the first time in Scripture it seems that God gives up on people.

It starts all the way back in Genesis. In Genesis 3, after the man and woman have disobeyed God by eating from the tree in the center of the garden, they are cast out of the garden. Not just that but places these fierce warrior angels who hold flaming swords to keep them from returning.

Just a few chapters later and Genesis 6 we here beginning at verse 11:

¹¹Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹²And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth.

¹³And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth.

Israel (God's chosen people) spent four hundred years in Egypt where they became slaves to Pharaoh.

And it goes on and on. Even after Israel becomes a kingdom it splits apart. Eventually the Assyrians and the Babylonians will conquer them. And even after the people are restored then comes Alexander the Great and his Greek conquest followed by the Romans.

It sure seems that God might really give up on his people. This is the challenge in the passage today. Will God give up on Israel now that the Church of Jesus Christ has arisen? It's not an illogical question.

Isn't that the way we feel a lot of the time when things are falling apart around us? In our lives? In our relationships? Because if the sermon title today is right that “God Is In Control”, then all this chaos and pain and emotional turmoil we feel might seem like God is giving up on us. And we wonder “Why?” Especially when it seems like things have happened to us instead of because of us.

We even see it in our relationships with others: some sort of misunderstanding, misstep, or failing that breaks a relationship. Maybe, we give up on somebody else; or they give up on us. Either way, it can feel like God is done.

While I was away and date a few years ago for a preaching seminar, I met Mary Lynn Whitaker. At the time, her husband, John, was the pastor at Church of the Cross United Methodist Church in Kettering, Ohio (as is the Methodist way, he now serves a church in

Cincinnati. But Mary Lynn had her own ministry. A registered nurse, through the church and Lost and Found Traditional Ministries - She founded Haven Hope, not just a home but a comprehensive program for victims of sex trafficking and drug abuse.

Haven Hope is a 2 year program meant to help women move beyond the brokenness the chaos that is under their lives. The home has 14 beds. Because of COVID-19, they can't accept new residents now. The program had been going on for a few years when Mary Lynn and I met, but had yet to have a graduate.

As women come into the program they make a covenant to abide by the rules of the house and in return the staff will work with them to get their life in order. If you were listening to what I said about the number of open beds - I didn't say how many women had actually been admitted to the program but let's just say it's more than 14 - and the fact that there hadn't been a graduate yet it seemed as if that ministry might need to be reevaluated.

Mary Lynn told us about one woman who would come into the program that she had such great hopes for. In the process of her (Let's call it what it is) enslavement, she lost her children, she destroyed her relationship with everyone in her family - no one wanted to come to visit. But Mary Lynn wouldn't give up. She enrolled the woman in the program. She worked with her to get the services she needed, to get education, to get her life on track. But then came the day with that final rule violation. Mary Lynn had to kick her out. She had nowhere else to go and ended up in a homeless shelter.

Sometimes maybe we do just have to give up. But what about God?

God is in control, right? What exactly does that mean? One way to look at it is to blame God for everything bad that's going on because -- well he's in control. But that's not what it means to say God is in control. I think one way we can look at it, is to remember that God sticks with us.

Think about that. Humpty Dumpty was a lost cause. So was this vase.

But that's not an accurate picture of God. When Adam and Eve lost their place in the garden, God covered them with skins to keep them warm. When God was so fed up with the corruption on Earth that he needed to be destroyed, still saved a Remnant and Noah and his family and the creatures of the Earth. When Israel found themselves in bondage he led them to the Promised Land. And even after they were carried off into captivity by the Assyrians and the Babylonians God restored them.

In fact, God showed such commitment that he even became human died on a cross to prove to us how far he would go and how committed he was to our restoration. God sticks with us. God sticks with us even when we don't think we're worth having God stick with us. And because of that he can work wonders in our lives.

God isn't going to give up on us that we as a people can love one another as he intended -- whether they be in Charlottesville, Barcelona, or even Cherry Valley.

God didn't give up on that woman that Mary Lynn had to kick out of Haven Hope.

In fact, there's more to that story. Mary Lynn didn't give up on her either. She tried to follow up with her to see where she was and what she was doing; tried to offer spiritual counsel and guidance. Just a short time before I heard about Haven Hope, Mary Lynn stopped at a restaurant to get some food, and there was Janine. She had a job. She had a home. She was

sober. She'd started to have a new relationship with her mother. She was in the process of getting her daughter back.

She told Mary Lynn, that getting kicked out - being held accountable - and having to spend that time in the homeless shelter the best thing that could have happened for her (notice I said "for her" not "to her"). But it wasn't just the consequences, it was Mary Lynn's persistence in loving her.

Maybe all the king's horses and all the king's men can't put Humpty Dumpty together again; but the king can. God persists in his intention to restore us. God sticks with us no matter what. In Jesus' blood on that cross, we find something stronger than Krazy® Glue or Gorilla® Glue that does put us back together, even if the scars remain.

Remember how I said that in some ways the Japanese art of *Kintsugi* sort of seems like giving up. It's really not. In fact *Kintsugi* recognizes that the cracks and the missing pieces are part of the history of the object. It can never be what it was, but it can be restored into something new and in this something beautiful - and maybe even useful.

Like a *Kintsugi* craftsman, God will stick with you to restore you to make something useful and beautiful – yes, to make you a blessing too. AMEN