

Take my words, Lord, and speak through them. Take our minds and think through them. And take our hearts and set them on fire with love for you; for we ask this for the sake of your son, our saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Friends I wonder if you have come across the Japanese art of Kintsugi? There's a pot on the altar, made by our friend here David - the head verger; I know there are other potters among you in the cathedral congregation. But I first heard of the art of Kintsugi from David, and there's a pot there which demonstrates the art. It's the art of mending pottery with lacquer made from gold. 'Kint' means gold; 'Sugi' means joining. And there's been a renewal of interest recently in Kintsugi which may have something to do with the virus-infected year through which we've been living. Kintsugi has become something of a guiding idea, as I've thought about what I need to be doing on my sabbatical, and I want to share it with you.

The story goes that a Shogun - a local ruler in 15th century Japan – broke one of his beloved pieces of pottery - probably a bowl used in the Japanese tea ceremony - and his artists decided to mend it in a way that didn't try to hide the break, but rather to make a feature out of the breaks with gold.

And there are echoes of Kintsugi - of that what has become now an extraordinarily sophisticated art form - there are echoes of Kintsugi in our Easter reading, from this morning's gospel reading from St. Luke. The reading starts, as two disciples are reporting back to the rest of the disciples, how they went for a walk to Emmaus, and as they were walking along a third figure joined them, but they didn't realise who it was until they stopped and broke bread together, and as they broke bread they recognised that it was the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead. And they rush back to Jerusalem where they tell their friends, they tell the rest of the disciples, that they had recognised Jesus as we read in the breaking of the bread. Maybe that recognition came partly as they caught sight of the marks of the nails in his hands, and as they are discussing this, suddenly Jesus himself is present standing with them. We read that they're startled - they're terrified - but Jesus says to them 'peace' – 'peace be with you' – 'shalom' - and he shows them his hands, and his feet, and his side, and he invites them to touch him, and to see that he is not a ghost.

Why is it that Jesus shows his disciples the wounds, the scars, of his crucifixion?

It's significant that Jesus was buried, and first appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, in a garden. Jesus we are told is the first fruits of the new creation: the echo is of the Garden of Eden where everything was perfect. So if we're looking back to Eden, if God is creating all things new in Christ, why does Jesus still have wounds in his hands, and his feet, and his side? Why is his body not perfect and beautiful? Have we not been promised a new heaven, and a new earth where all tears will be wiped away? How could the greatest miracle of all time - the defeat of death itself - leave ugly scars on the Lord of life?

Well, of course, it depends on how you define perfection. How you define beauty.

Maybe Jesus is redefining perfection, just as that 15th century Japanese Shogun's pot repairers were redefining the ideas of beauty, currently at that time. The Shogun was a rich man - he could simply have bought a new pot - why did he want so badly to fix the old one?

Maybe because of the relationship that he had with that pot? Maybe because of all the memories that it held for him?

Bradford Cathedral is a community that celebrates art of many different kinds: music, textiles, painting, photography, poetry, ceramics. The pot on the altar was made by David, and he was telling me when we talked about it, how it broke in the kiln as he was firing it. There must have been an invisible fault line in the clay that then split as it heated up.

But rather than throwing it away, David repaired that crack with lacquer, and with gold, as you can see. It's a bowl with a story.

Here's my own attempt at Kintsugi; if David is a black belt, I'm probably a white belt, or a yellow at most! But here's my first attempt at Kintsugi. It's a pot which is very precious to me because it was given to me by a dear friend, and I've used it over the years to hold a tea light as I've prayed in the mornings, and often it's represented for me the light of Christ.

And then it broke, and I thought what do I do with it now? And then a friend gave us, as a family, a Kintsugi kit and I thought 'here's my opportunity', so I decided to try and mend it with that epoxy, so it wasn't a proper one, and then dust the cracks with gold, because my little pot holds a story. Just buying a new one wouldn't bring back all those memories.

And maybe something similar was happening with Jesus. His body, including his wounds, were an integral part of him. As elements in the funeral service yesterday reminded us of Prince Philip's wartime experience in the Royal Navy, so these wounds of Christ remind the disciples of Jesus' victory over sin and evil. As the apostle Paul writes, 'he has made peace by the blood of the cross'.

It's easy in our society to think of perfection as being about freedom from blemishes, but we have to remember that Japan, where Kintsugi comes from, is a country that has had to come to terms with devastating earthquakes. Those earthquakes bring with them cracks; cracks in the landscape; cracks in buildings; cracks in lives, and belongings.

And I sometimes think that something like an earthquake has impacted our own society over the last year. COVID has made new cracks, and opened up old ones even further in our lives; in our businesses; in our economy; in our society. We've been forced to confront the fact that our society, for example, is deeply unequal, especially in terms of health, but in many other ways as well.

Over the last year it's been a huge privilege for me to work with a body that Bradford Council has brought together, called the Strategic Coordinating Group, with police, with businesses, with fire and rescue, with the university, with health, with other faith groups. We've come together almost every week, and what we've been confronted with have been the cracks of so many different kinds: the epidemic of mental health; the spike in domestic violence; hungry school children; resistant vaccine take up; failing businesses; so much more.

But as our environmental crisis has forced us to rethink our habit of throwing away things when they become cracked, so the question that many of us are left with, is what do we do with our society with the cracks that COVID has revealed?

And for me as a Christian, and as a Bishop, the question has constantly been for me what does the church bring to this debate?

And the answer is in the Gospel reading, isn't it? Jesus says to his disciples: 'peace'. That Hebrew word 'shalom' means wholeness; it means well-being; it means reconciliation; it means healing. It encompasses both personal well-being, and societal well-being, including economic. And in our Gospel reading, the message that Jesus commissions his disciples to take to the world, is the message of peace between God and humanity. But it's a peace brought about through suffering, and death. So my aim and prayer, in this upcoming sabbatical, is to do some Kintsugi reflection. A sabbatical is an extraordinary gift, of three months away from day-to-day work, and I want to use it partly to think, to talk with friends and colleagues, to pray, to read, to write, about the cracks in my own life, and the cracks in our life together, particularly here in Bradford.

What do I do with my own wounds of the last year? What do we do about the inequalities - health and other kinds - that have been horribly exacerbated as the pot, as it were, of our own society has been fired in the COVID kiln?

What about the legacy of colonialism; the scourge of racism in our society, and our church, which is causing not just Minnesota to burn, but many of our own assumptions, and traditional ways of working, as well.

Friends, what is the glue, and the gold, of the Gospel?; and how might that be applied? How are we to realise the 'shalom' that Jesus offers to the disciples, and to the world?

Just as Kintsugi is a highly developed art form, the healing that we are called to bring to our society, is something that we need to learn, and to work at. If I think about David, and the hours that he has spent developing his skills so that he can produce a pot like that, I think how much more do we need to learn, and practice, our art of applying God's peace to our lives and to God's world.

And the place that we learn the skills of making peace in our churches in ourselves, is here. We don't have much to offer to the world if we can't offer peace, reconciliation, and forgiveness, to one another in our churches. If we are not living as reconciled people with our own families, with our friends, with our brothers and sisters in the church, with ourselves, what do we have to offer outside to the world?

There are some who would want simply to throw away last year's pain and start all over afresh, but that ain't gonna happen. The story from Acts that was read to us so beautifully by Nora, was of Peter preaching after he has healed a man lame from birth: a man whom the crowd had seen walking, and leaping, and praising God, and yet who they recognised as the cripple who used to sit and beg at the gate of the temple. His withered legs were made strong through the name of Jesus, and who is speaking in that reading from Acts? It is Peter:

Peter, the man whose cracks in his own personality, split in the fire of a place of fear, into betrayal of the person he loved more than anyone in the world.

And then, yet, Jesus meets him afterwards by the lake, and just as Peter had denied Jesus three times, so three times Jesus dusts those cracks with gold, in recommissioning Peter.

Friends, as we learn to be reconciled: as we learn this art of Kintsugi in ourselves; as you pray for me, Jerry, let us pray for one another. Let us pray that we might be people who know what God has done in ourselves, and are able to offer that to others, and to the world.

Let's be people who know, and who show, that the cracks become gold. In the name of Jesus, and in his peace. Amen.