

Sermon : “Life Broken into Pieces?” by Rev. Dr. Deb Lind-Schmitz



(Based on Rev. 1:4-8, John 20:19-31)

Beginning with Broken Pieces: (I began by unapologetically claiming, “This is my children’s sermon for adults” while dumping out a bag of puzzle pieces) I brought a bag of puzzle pieces as an illustration of times when we feel our life is broken, chaotic, thrown up in the air, no longer what it was or should be.

The disciples were gazing at the jumble of broken pieces of the life they’d known with Jesus when he mysteriously appeared. To identify him as Jesus, he shows them his scars, stigmata on his hands and feet. Why can’t they recognize Jesus? Are they so blinded with grief? Are they too shocked by his improbable resurrection? It’s a puzzle left for the future. The piece that has been missing is back in the center of their circle. Thankful, they rejoice and share the good news with Thomas.

He’s out of the loop; he’s regrouping by going forward outside the group. At this moment, Thomas reminds me that we grieve and believe using different paths. What is significant for the future faith is necessity of Thomas’ doubt. The Gospel of John is directed to a generation who have not seen or known Jesus. “Do you believe because you have seen?” Jesus somewhat chastising statements are a blessing for the first century believers and for future generations.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

The Book of .Revelation, a theological puzzle for centuries was written for the generations born after Jesus’ death. Just a piece of historical trivia, Martin Luther relegated Revelation to a non-canonical category and later readmitted it into the books of the Bible. John Calvin, on the other hand, accepted The Book of Revelation into the Protestant Bible. However, he did not write a commentary for the one book.

There is political chaos and brokenness in the Judeo/Christian community at the time of the writings. Roman imperialism remains strong. The Romans seize Jerusalem and the temple destroyed in 70 AD. Political ideology conflicts with developing Christian theology. Whether Revelation was written in 65 AD or after the fall in 95 AD, it contains reflections of faithful in a broken, baffling world. Religious sects Jews and Christians are persecuted.

Roman Imperialism prevails. Caesar is the ultimate ruler of the world. All Military and economic accomplishments serve to bolster the Roman dogma; The Christians focus on God and Jesus as ultimate ruler, is anti-Rome and pro-God. God, alone is the ruler of our lives or hearts. Allegiance and loyalty is to Christ. Even the gifts of grace and peace mentioned in the first verses of Revelation take on new meaning. The Greek word for grace, “Charis” recalls the Roman patronage system, in which a patron displayed generosity to his clients and expected loyalty in return. The gift of God’s Grace, on the other hand, is freely given, undeserved, and little is expected in return. However, I believe there’s a response of gracious living. It’s difficult to explain, yet grace is linked with the Hebrew concept of peace, shalom, “Eirene”, in Greek.

Puzzle Parable: How do we piece our lives back together? Where do we find peace in this brokenness? These are driving questions for the first century believers as well as for our lives. We may live in a different society and culture, but the questions are the same. What happens when we lose a friend, a spouse, a child or a pastor who has been with us for 30 years? Take this puzzle as modern day metaphor or illustration. I bought this picture of Hot Air balloons because that is what uplifts my spirit and I have a fond memory of flying after I finished my Masters of Divinity, If you have lived even a few years, you have experienced brokenness, a transition when throws all the pieces of the puzzle up in the air. Brokenness may be caused by crisis of job, marriage or illness. Regrouping after a major change is like a putting a jumble of puzzle pieces together.



#1 The framework for Peace begins with God, or Christ. (take a look at the puzzle, point to the frame) Edna May and I were working on this puzzle together and she said, I always finds the border pieces first. I tend to group puzzle piece by colors and images. We found using the border pieces and matching the subjects were a great combination.

#2 Don't try to puzzle this out alone. When ever possible let someone help you The disciples managed together and became the church. When you have it right, it will last longer. Interlocking puzzles hang together.

#3 Content matters, Grace, Forgiveness, faith matters. The Risen Christ entered into the disciples' brokenness with the blessing of peace. Fearful of their oppressors, Jesus revives and mends their spirits with this divine gift. And, then he instructs them one more time about forgiveness. With the memory of violence fresh in their minds, forgiveness does not come easily. Yet, Christ forgave their fearful responses of denial, betrayal, doubt and disbelief. God forgives us. That's one of the gifts which may piece your life back together. Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit into the disciples so they could carry on.

#4 Leave a few of those missing pieces for another day. It's okay. Honestly, you can still see the big picture even now in the midst of this transition. I hope you can breathe a little more easily. And see the vision of what is yet to be. God's Grace freely given, frees us from past regrets and sins to pick up the best of who we have been and grasp the best of who we can be. It takes time. Be patient.

May God, the Holy One "who is and who was and who is to come" bless us all with patience, endurance, hope, grace and peace.

Revelation 1:4-8 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood,⁶ and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen.⁸ “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

John 20:19-31 ¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.