

The other night my infant daughter was too quick for my or my husband's reflexes, and she knocked a ceramic bowl from our dinner table onto the hardwood floor. It cracked and shattered. Tiny pottery shards everywhere. The bowl was full of food. The dog went right for it. Dan and I sprang into action. Within seconds I had barricaded the dog and baby and myself in the den while he swept up and threw out the broken pieces.

Stuff breaks. Whether there's a baby around or not, brokenness is a fact of life. Typically, we throw away broken pieces. Maybe protect others from their danger, but then we move on. But what happens when the broken pieces are not from an old cereal bowl, but are from something . . . important? What about when the broken pieces are part of an everlasting covenant with God? What happens when what breaks are God's commandments?

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In our reading from Exodus today, Moses has gone away from the group of Israelites and has gotten God commandments. God expects the people to obey these laws as a response to being in a relationship with God, in response to God having brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. As a way to show the world who they are and who the Lord God is, the Israelites are to live according to these words.

We know them as the Ten Commandments, and they begin a long series of laws God writes for the people. When God is finished speaking with Moses, God gives him two tablets of stone, written with God's own finger, as a sign of the commitment, promise, and covenant that God is making.

Now, it took a while for Moses to listen to all these laws and while Moses was with God, the people begin to doubt whether he's coming back. So, they make themselves a nice golden statue to worship in place of the Lord God. When Moses finally returns and sees the golden calf, he gets FURIOUS. ENRAGED. SO MAD, that he THROWS the tablets upon which God just wrote. Moses chucks the tablets symbolizing the covenant, and they break. Shatter. Stone pieces everywhere.

Before Moses can even read or report the rules to the people, the commandments are, literally, broken. Even the one who carries the rules of God can't help but break them, let alone the ones asked to follow the rules. The tablets become a metaphor for God's relationship with people: in this relationship, all of God's perfect rules will be broken. Brokenness will be at the heart of the tie between God and people.

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Jesus has a vivid message about brokenness and destruction at the beginning of the Gospel of John. John's Gospel says that God has sent God's Son, to the

world, and that while “The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

And now, Jesus Christ is doing some breaking and destruction of his own: making a whip of cords, driving all the money changers and sheep and cattle out of the temple, pouring out their coins, and overturning their tables.

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” he says, talking about breaking the temple. But John tells us he’s speaking of the temple of his body. The Word of God will be broken. Grace and Truth will be destroyed. God's perfect law made flesh will break once more. Because Jesus’ body will be shattered on the cross and destroyed by crucifixion.

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Jesus on the cross will not be the last time the Body of Christ experiences brokenness. In the Corinthian community to which Paul writes, there is a lot of division. Fragmentation. Splintering among Christ’s people. And Saint Paul writes to remind them that it is from the foolishness of the cross that wisdom comes; that God decided, through the foolishness of Christ’s destroyed and broken body, to save those who believe.

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A set of tablets shattered. A temple destroyed. A community torn apart. For human beings, brokenness is part of reality.

Violations of the Ten Commandments are just the tip of the iceberg. We live amidst broken relationships, fractured friendships, un-mended marriages. We are sinners who disregard not only God's law and but also God's other children, our neighbors. Here at LCOS, we are beginning to reckon with quite a bit of brokenness and broken pieces: committees that no longer exist, a projected budget misaligned with current giving, vacant ministries that need volunteers.

The Good News, is that in our covenant with God, in our relationship with Christ, even the broken shards have the power of God. It is in brokenness on the cross that we find God's transforming power and the seat of resurrection. This seems foolish to the Jews and the Greeks and likely to us, but God's foolishness is wiser than our human wisdom. God's weakness is stronger than our human strength. God's brokenness is more holy and more whole than any human attempts at perfection.

Because smashed pieces are God's raw materials for resurrection. Destroy the temple, and in three days God will raise it up. Resurrection will dawn from the darkness of death. The body that was broken will be raised whole.

The moments when we shatter the tablets, when we break God's law, when Christ is on the cross, and when we are divided from one another . . . These are not moments to clean up quickly and forget about our relationship with God. Because even these moments can be sacred. Even the broken pieces can be holy. Divine. Redemptive.

Now let me be clear: God doesn't ask us to *seek out* brokenness or purposely *break us* in service of some greater good. No, Christians recognize that things will simply break: Ceramic bowls and tablets; laws, rules, and relationships; bodies, systems, and societies.

Moses will go back and get a second, perfect set of tablets from God. And that second, perfect set will get carried around in a very, very holy box called the Ark of the Covenant. But tradition says that the Israelites also carted around the broken pieces of those first tablets in the Ark of the Covenant ***because even the broken tablets were sacred and holy too.*** In the Israelites' relationship with God, even the broken pieces were sacred.

So, it is in our covenant with God in Christ, a covenant symbolized with pieces of broken tablets: even the broken pieces, the missteps, the sinful deeds, the shattered fragments...even they are part of the sacred relationship. Even those times are part of God's holy promise. Because even from rubble, God promises to raise up new life. AMEN.