

A Theory of Broken Things

Luke 1:47-56

First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, Illinois

Music Sunday, Vivaldi's Magnificat

15 December 2019

Matt Matthews

I love Christmas carols. My favorite is "In the Bleak Midwinter," which we sang *three* times last week. But I like almost all carols and I love many of them. Some of you, perhaps most of you, feel the same way about carols.

Of all the hymns, we've sung our Christmas carols most often and most widely—in church, in school assemblies, in public gatherings, at civic club meetings. We don't hear "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee" and "How Great Thou Art" on popular radio very often, but we *do* hear Christmas carols there. Bing Crosby sings them. Dean sings them (both Dean Martin and Jimmy Dean). The Mormon Tabernacle Choir sings them. Pop singers sing them. Country pickers sing them. And we seldom, if ever, hear a church song on the muzak at the grocery store except for Christmas carols, which we often hear on the bakery aisle where we find the ginger bread mix and on the international foods aisle where we sometimes find figgy pudding (whatever that is).

Christmas carols take us back to the Christmas story, to a time when angels sang songs, and people wore halos, and babies were born onto the covers of Christmas cards. It was a safer time, a gentler time.

Except, of course, it wasn't. It wasn't a safer time. The world into which Jesus was born was as broken as our world is. Just listen to Mary. She is not meek and mild in Luke's gospel. She is strong, brave, and outspoken. She intimates that the powerful abuse their power; the proud distort human relations; and the rich ignore the hunger of the poor. But God has identified with the have-nots, with the lowly, with the likes of Mary. God has remembered the promises to Abraham. God has scattered the proud. God has toppled the powerful. God has identified with the poor. God has chosen Mary to mother his son.

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Emily Enders Odom unwrapped her ceramic nativity set this year and one of the donkeys had another broken ear.^[1] The other ear had been repaired in a previous year. As she fetched the Crazy Glue to fix the new break, she thought again.

A friend had recently told her that in a certain kind of Japanese art form called Kintsugi, broken pottery is repaired with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. As a philosophy, this art form "treats breakage and repair as part of the history of the object." The break is not to be covered up or hidden, but highlighted with honor. The term literally means "golden joinery."

There is a human aspect to this theory of broken things. At a human level, we need not cover up the broken parts of us. We don't need to hide the wear-and-tear. God came for the cracked and for the fractured. God not only came for us, but came for us on our bad hair days, on the times when we've hit the lowest-of-low, when we find ourselves most mired in shame and sin. We get to rock bottom and discover that God has been waiting for us all along.

And so, as we prepare to approach the manger, we can bring our true selves, the broken pieces and all, to receive God's greatest gift. Mary was delighted to welcome God, despite the fact that she may have thought of herself as broken and incomplete or lowly and unworthy.

What God saw in Mary was a young woman who was brave, capable, and faithful. God saw in Mary somebody with whom he could partner—a woman with a gifted, willing spirit.

What does God see in you?

More importantly, what do you stand ready to offer?

^[1] *President's Message from The Presbyterian Writers' Guild December 2019 newsletter.*