

Sermon Topic: **BROKEN VESSELS, HEALING CHANNELS** by Rev Dr Lorna Khoo

Sermon Text: Acts 2:1-21

1. Introduction

Today is Pentecost Sunday, when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the church, which also makes it the church's birthday. Colours have changed from white to red, the colour of fire/the Holy Spirit. Also colour of blood, because the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.

We often think that God would use only high class, multi-talented people for important tasks.

2. God's choices tend to be fragile, weak and invariably broken people.

Simon Peter, Moses, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, John, King David, Ruth, Naomi, Joseph, Paul, John Mark: God used them all

Acts 1 & 2

We often have a romantic picture of disciples in Upper Room awaiting Pentecost – expectant, excited? The reality:

- a. more uncertain, unsure, a broken community (12 – 1 = 11 + 1 = 12, i.e. Matthias was hastily chosen to replace Judas)
- b. traumatized, broken people – had undergone great stress in previous weeks: arrest, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension; unexpected changes in everything
People present there at Pentecost – mostly conquered races; not in top ranks of society;
- c. with dreams shattered; nationalistic kingdom on earth was not going to come about
- d. broken leadership structure – Jesus pops in & out for 1 month & 10 days. They don't know what to expect. Peter the unstable one as leader – to trust him or not??

They were all stressed out.

God's Unusual Choice: Broken Vessels

a. *Fragile vessels:* 2 Corinthians 4:7-10

7 But we have this **treasure in jars of clay** to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

b. *Weak vessels:* 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in **weakness.**" Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my **weaknesses**, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in **weaknesses**, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. **For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

• *God's values different from ours:* 1 Corinthians 1: 27-31

27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from

God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

3. Why use broken vessels?

God chooses people who’re not perfect or not up at the top. He chooses broken people. In the Scriptures, broken people/vessels are people desperate enough to be open. Maybe that’s why God can use us. Where there is no crisis, there is no desire/willingness to change. If everything goes smoothly, no reason to change anything. When you are down, there is nowhere to go but up.

a. Desperate people – know they have nothing to lose

Example of Wesley’s Penitent bands and Select Societies

John Wesley formed Penitent Bands – people who had sinned very badly. Gathered them to support one another to grow towards holiness. Many in Penitent Bands later became members of the Select Societies. Select Societies were made up of mature Christians who’re growing greatly in faith.

Those who have hit rock bottom are the desperate ones God can use to grow in a deeper way.

b. They have experienced God’s grace and therefore have been filled with grace and are giving grace to others. Giving what they have received. Example of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10)

- Chief tax collector
- Cheated people
- Jesus accepted him – still a son of Abraham
- Gave half of wealth to the poor as well as paid back four-fold to those he cheated

People who have experienced grace will extend grace to others and change their lives. Willing to pay the price, sometimes price can be very high – even death/martyrdom.

c. They are willing to pay the price out of love and gratitude

e.g. John Newton (author of the *Amazing Grace* hymn)

- Had chequered past – abused & abusive
- Experienced God’s grace and great love and was willing to pay the price in serving God

Broken people can be open people (ready for change, open to others, open to God)

4. BUT not all broken people are necessarily open people.

IF FOCUS ON SELF:

- a. can become bitter and closed
- b. can hurt others – used to being abused and abuse others
- c. can play victim and feel entitled (“Poor me”), no sense of personal responsibility and desire/ability to change
- d. can use it as a prideful badge of honor/marketable identity (I have nothing; I am an ex-prisoner/drug addict/adulterer/abused person...) and be stuck there. Whenever we focus on self, we turn backwards. Dangers: focus on self, wrong place for identity to be grounded (on one’s sinful past), stuck to the past.

Learn to turn to other people. When broken people turn to others, they become whole in Christ.

5. Story of Pentecost/Acts Chapters 1 & 2: The disciples learnt to

- a. focus on others, moving into unity, be inclusive of those different from themselves
 - John, Peter, Thomas (different in character) women, older people
 - all in one accord in one place
- b. focus on God: willingness NOT to be in control; cooperating with Him (gift of tongues – it doesn't all depend on me to learn languages)
- c. be willing to let God open the future, to be open to a new day, an exciting new experience. Never in history did God's people experience something like what happened on Pentecost!

(Romans 8:14-17 THE MESSAGE version)

14 God's Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go! 15 This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike "What's next, Papa?" 16 God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children. 17 And we know we are going to get what's coming to us - an unbelievable inheritance! We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with him!

Only when there is willingness to move with God can we see Pentecost, i.e. a reversal of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). At Pentecost, God healed the divided peoples of the world and pulled them together.

BABEL	PENTECOST
Focus on self (Survival & Glory)	Focus on God (in unity with each other)
People could not understand each other	People understood each other beyond languages
Scattered / Separated The End of it all.	United / brought together To build His Kingdom

God loves to use cracked pots to transform us into healing channels. Reverse Babel's curse and become channels of God's healing in a broken world.

APPLICATION/QUESTIONS:

1. Are we a broken people? (as individuals, as a church)

Or are we comfortable, having a good life, satisfied with the status quo. Without crisis, there may be no desire to change, no willingness to unite with other people.

Or there could be resistance to change e.g. calls to serve in ONE NORTH marketplace. AMC is nearest church to ONE NORTH but not doing much. Join AMC Marketplace Ministry to reach out to people there.

Requires change/willingness to unite with people not like us to serve God's Kingdom.

Brokenness need not be from external circumstances. Sometimes, it comes from the willingness to have eyes that can see and hearts that can feel. Until our hearts and minds are broken by the sight of the pain that God feels towards what is broken in the world, we cannot be broken people who have the heart of God.

Blessed are those who mourn ... for they shall be comforted (Matthew 5:4).

Blessed are those who can feel pain (of God and of others) ... that they shall be strengthened to move out with God.

The gift of brokenness ... because the Lord speaks to us about His heart.

God will give us a new heart and put a new spirit in us. He will remove our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh (cf Ezekiel 36:26)

Are we willing to be broken people for Him in our hearts? And when God asks: "Who shall I send?", we can say with Isaiah, "Here am I. Send me!"

That's what happened at Pentecost. There was a change. They had undergone trauma, but some of them had begun to see what God sees – the pain of a broken world.

- **Am I desperate enough to move to the next level, confident that His grace that I have experienced is real and can flow through me in whatever situation he sends me? Am I willing to be made desperate/very hungry?**
- **Am I willing to be a broken person for Him?**

2. As a broken person (from hurts of the past), am I

- a) bitter and closed
- b) hurtful to others
- c) playing the victim card, feeling entitled to being treated in a special way and not wanting to be free from being a victim?
- d) wearing my brokenness as my prideful identity ... and like a stuck record, playing the same old story of past grace received?

Is it not time for me to repent and receive His healing so that I can be empowered to live a new life in Him?

3. Pentecost is about being empowered to be channels of God's healing in a broken world. It is about learning to
- a. focus on others, be inclusive, move in unity
 - b. focus on God: willingness not to be in control; cooperating with Him
 - c. let God open the future – a new day, an exciting new experience.

Which of the above do I need to grow in ... in the coming months?

Our prayer:

May broken vessels become His healing channels ...

May cracked pots like us become His serving dishes

Closing Prayer (Author unknown)

I can't get over, Lord,
how often in the pages of Your Word
You've told of using broken things in working miracles:
The boy's five loaves of bread, broken, fed a multitude ...
A roof Your followers broke up to lower that poor palsied man into Your presence ...
The pitchers carried by the men that Gideon led, the pitchers broken
that the lamps within could then shine and implement a victory ...
And too, the alabaster box which Mary broke in order
to release its fragrance as she worshipped at Your feet.

You've spoken to my heart, Lord
Through Your use of broken things.
And now, somehow I feel that brokenness –
of heart, of will –
Must be the starting point if You would work
A miracle through me.

And so, break me –
To feed a multitude Your word
to bring the ill in heart into Your presence
shine in victory from my life
and send forth fragrance
in praise of You.