

“THINGS I WISH MY FRIEND KNEW:  
II – EVERYTHING CAN BE MADE NEW!”

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Elkton United Methodist Church

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Father's Day

Lamentations 3:22-26

Luke 19:1-10

Some of you may have noticed as you drove into the church parking lot this morning a little sign that says “Camp Pecometh.” Camp Pecometh is our conference's residential camp located about midway between Chestertown and Centreville, Maryland. It's a really lovely place, with a section for summer campers with cabins, a section with bunkhouses for groups to rent for retreats, and then, the newest part, which is a really, really nice retreat center. That's where I've spent this past week.

I was blessed to be on the faculty of this year's Local Pastor's Licensing School. It's where brand new pastors come to have a crash course in things like pastoral care, weddings and funerals, church administration and finances, and of course, preaching. That's one of the things I taught.

It was a phenomenal week. The enthusiasm of these pastors who will step into the pulpit for the very first time on Sunday, July 3<sup>rd</sup> was contagious. We had classes all day long and then at night we would sit in the lounge until way too late because they had so many things they wanted to talk about and so many questions to ask. I was so honored to be on this part of the journey with them.

Well, one day, when it wasn't my turn to teach, I was sitting on the front porch of the retreat center in a rocking chair and I began reminiscing about all the times I've been at Pecometh. I've been going there since the 1970's.

But one particular trip to Pecometh will always stand out in my mind. It was not long after I had come here to this church, and I think Marlene Gautsch was the youth leader at the time, and she and I and some other adults took our youth group there for a weekend retreat. I have no idea what the theme of the retreat was, but I do clearly remember one activity I had them do.

I broke the group up into teams and gave each team a flower pot – you know, the rust-colored kind of pots. We were out on the wharf by the gazebo on the river. What I told them to do with these pots next shocked them. I told them to stand apart from the other teams, and then drop their pots. They looked at me quizzically

but then I assured them I was serious – so, they dropped their pots, and of course, they shattered.

“Now,” I said, “as a team put it back together.” I gave each team some glue, and of course, they had to work together, holding the various pieces, gluing them and then holding them longer until they adhered. It was not an easy process, and it took all hands on deck to accomplish it.

All of the team did pretty well, except for one, which happened to be my team. Somehow, we had gotten our flower pot wet, so when we tried to glue it, it wouldn't stick. No matter what we did, it didn't work. We tried and we tried and we tried, and just when we thought a piece would stick, it would fall off again.

Meantime, mind you, the other teams were motoring through the project, and their pots were almost restored. And, of course, being precocious kids, they were giving us a hard time. Finally, I told them, that they could go off and do something else while we finished.

Time went on and on, and finally, seeing we were getting nowhere, I told my team they could stop. It didn't matter, and we had given it the old college try. But they would not give up. So fifteen minutes turned into a half hour, and then forty five minutes, then an hour. They would not give up.

And then one of them hit on an idea, ran to the pile of supplies and got a roll of masking tape. And piece by piece by piece, we taped that puppy back together. It wasn't pretty and it didn't look the same as the others, but it was whole again – and if we had to say so ourselves, it looked darn fine! We were so proud of it that we got markers and drew designs on it and put our names and the date on it so we wouldn't forget what we had done.

You know, I'm sure that memory came back to me this week because I was working on this sermon, about broken things being made whole and new, and that there is nothing, or no one, so broken that God can't make everything new. Sometimes, as in the case of some of the youth teams, it happens quickly; sometimes, it takes a while – but no matter what, with God, everything can be made new.

There was something broken in this morning's Gospel lesson, and that something was actually a someone – his name was Zaccheus. Many know his story – we sang his song in Sunday School. Do you remember? “Zaccheus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he . . .”

Well, indeed, Zaccheus was a man short of stature, but that's just part of who he was. Zaccheus was the chief tax collector for the Roman government in the city

of Jericho, and as one person put it, “he was, very possibly, the most hated man in Jericho.”

You see, Zaccheus worked for the occupying forces, and thus, was a traitor to his own people. He charged exorbitant taxes, turned in some of the money to the government and kept the rest for himself – and, in so doing, became a very wealthy man. So, he was rich in money, but poor in everything else.

People hated him. He was an outcast among his own people, and he had done it to himself. Because of greed, self-centeredness, cheating, he had nothing and nobody – he was broken. His life, though filled with stuff, was empty of meaning – he was a broken man.

And then, one day, he heard that Jesus was coming to town. He had heard about Jesus. He had heard about the miracles he was doing, the things he was saying, the lives he was changing. I doubt if Zaccheus thought that would happen to him, he was probably just curious and wanted to get a glimpse of this guy.

But to do that, he’d have to be in a crowd, and remember the crowd would be filled with people from the town – people who hated him. And besides, remember he was short, and wouldn’t be able to see Jesus over the heads of the people in the crowd. So, he thought of the best way possible – he would climb up a tree – and from that vantage point, get a good look at Jesus, and keep people from getting a good look at him. That was his plan, at least.

It started out fine. Zaccheus saw Jesus coming, and he got a really good look at him. He could see him walk down the street, he was going to pass by in front of him soon and he’d get a really good look then – and then, boom, all of a sudden, he stops right under the tree in which Zaccheus has hidden himself – looks up and right into the eyes of the broken man.

Don’t you know that Zaccheus was probably trembling at that point, and thinking, “Uh-oh, I’m in trouble. He’s seen me, and he’s probably heard about me, and he might be getting ready to lower the boom.” Amazingly though, Jesus calls out to Zaccheus, and invites him to come down. Then, even more amazingly, he says he wants to go to Zaccheus’ house – and they do.

Nobody knows exactly what went on during their meeting, but what we do know is that Zaccheus’ encounter with Jesus changed him – profoundly. He came out of his house and changed his ways – completely. Not only did he pay back what he owed, he paid it back many times over. His heart was changed – it was no longer just about him anymore. He was made whole. Jesus touched Zaccheus and made him whole.

Friends, Zaccheus' story is the Good News of the Gospel in a nutshell. With God, all things are possible, and when Jesus enters a person's life, even the broken is made whole and well. From the beginning of the Bible to the end – is the story of restoration.

Think about it – though they sinned and marred the beauty and perfection of creation, though they were broken, God restored Adam and Eve, he clothed them and let them begin again. After his affair with Bathsheba and the terrible consequences that happened because of that, the broken David was restored by God and became the greatest king Israel ever knew. Mary Magdalene's broken and storied life, was made new by her encounter with Jesus. Peter, broken after denying Jesus not once, not twice, but three times – yet was restored after Jesus rose from death – and was used to start the church that we are a part of today. And Paul, broken beyond belief, because his life was centered on persecuting those who would follow Jesus, made new and made whole by the transforming love of Christ.

Broken to whole – that's the gift God offers to us in Christ Jesus. And isn't that the message that you want your friends to know about? Don't you sometimes look at those who are broken and think, "if you would only turn to Jesus, he could make you new again?"

Oh friends, there is so much brokenness in the world today. People are broken – some by their own doing, others by life itself. Systems are broken, and sometimes, like this week, it seems like life itself is broken – especially if we look at the terrible things that happened in Orlando.

It would be so easy to wallow in despair, wouldn't it? It would be so easy to say that things are so badly broken they can't be fixed. It would be so easy to lash out at the terrible things that happen with angry words of our own and calls for revenge – and sadly, social media is filled with just that.

But as the people of God, we are called to do otherwise. We are people who have seen firsthand, what God has done in Jesus Christ. We have seen firsthand, that God **can** make all things new. We saw it when his only begotten Son, though cruelly, horribly murdered on a cross, did not stay in that tomb, but broke forth and rose victorious from death. God took the brokenness of Good Friday and made everything well and whole on a glorious Easter morning – and if God can do that, there is nothing God cannot do, no broken thing that God cannot fix, no situation that God cannot redeem.

In times like these, we need to remember that. No matter what it looks like, all will yet be well, and it will be well, because of Jesus. So tell the broken ones, there is hope. There is a man called Jesus, who is calling to you, and wants to make you whole.

On Sunday night, the first night of the Local Pastor's Licensing School, everyone had a chance to tell their story, and so, one by one, we did. They were some pretty amazing stories, but one in particular I will never forget. It was a young man who said as he began that he was probably going to cry – and he did, and eventually we all did. He had a good life, and then he started taking drugs, and he lost everyone and everything that mattered to him. His life was completely and utterly broken, and he had no hope.

And then, he met Jesus, and nothing was the same again. Jesus called to him just as surely as he called to Zaccheus, and he answered, and it wasn't easy, but eventually his life was transformed, and made well, and made whole. And his family was reunited, he found a new job and a new calling, ministry, and he has helped many other addicts along the way. Because of Jesus, everything was made new for him, and on Sunday, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, he'll be the pastor of a church, helping to lead the broken to wholeness! With God, all things are possible!

The passage from Lamentations reminded us so beautifully, "New every morning are your mercies, O God!" and oh, how true that is. New every morning! That is the promise of God. Because of Jesus, every day is a new day, a new beginning, filled with mercy and grace and possibility. Because of Jesus, what is broken, even what is shattered, can become whole again. Because of Jesus.

So if you know someone who is broken, tell them about the One who can make them whole again. Remind them that he's reaching out to them, and all they need to do is reach out to him.

And if you're the one who is broken, or even if you're broken today because of the evil and sadness of the world, do not be afraid – God is still in control. He is in the healing business, and with him, all things are possible. All things can be made new. All will yet be well. Thanks be to God.

Amen.