

## Kintsukuroi – Christianity

Acts 19:1-7

January 11, 2015



Golden repair.

Japanese artists often do this when a precious piece of pottery has been broken. After mixing lacquer resin with powdered gold, they use the resin to put the broken pieces together. They end up with a pot with cracks in it, *but the cracks are filled with gold.*

Such restoration creates a gorgeous piece of art and makes a philosophical statement as well. Kintsukuroi (pronounced keen-tsoo-koo-roi) asserts that breakage and repair is part of the unique history of an object, rather than something to deny or disguise.

We need more golden repair in *our* lives – because we so often hide our brokenness.

Let's say, like a friend hurts us deeply, and we retreat inside ourselves. Or we lose a job or suffer a pay cut...and pretend like everything is really okay. Or a spouse abuses us, but we never speak up. We sense that we have a drinking problem, but feel too embarrassed to ask for help. Or a marriage begins with intimacy and anticipation, and ends with alienation and anger.

Life breaks us...in a variety of painful ways...and unfortunately we often deny it. We would rather disguise our cracks than undergo golden repair.

In Acts, the apostle Paul travels to Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). He finds 12 disciples there, and asks them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They reply, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

While it might be a stretch to call these disciples broken, they clearly have some cracks. Not only have they not received the Holy Spirit, they don't even know that it exists!

Paul is perplexed. He asks, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answer, "Into John's baptism." And suddenly Paul understands that they need some golden repair, some kintsukuroi Christianity.

"John baptized with the baptism of repentance," Paul explains, "telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." Paul knows that John baptized with water, while Jesus baptized "with the Holy Spirit and fire". (Luke 3:16)

On hearing this, the disciples are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, and when Paul lays hands on them, the Holy Spirit enters them. Immediately, they speak in tongues and prophesy, just like the first Christians on the day of Pentecost.

The gift of the Holy Spirit---that is pure gold! Suddenly, the gaps in the lives of these disciples are filled, and they are made whole as disciples of Jesus. But notice there is no attempt to deny or disguise their deficiencies. Instead, God fills their cracks with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, making them stronger and more beautiful in the broken places.

That is Kintsukuroi Christianity. In her book [Flickwerk: The Aesthetics of Mended Japanese Ceramics](#), author Christy Bartlett writes that "not only is there no attempt to hide the damage, but the repair is literally illuminated." Not hidden, not disguised...but Illuminated.

Everyone has gaps and breaks in their lives. Everyone has been shattered by some destructive experience. This reality is illustrated by what Bartlett calls "the breaks, the knocks and the shattering to which ceramic-ware also is subject to. Mended Japanese ceramics inspire us to show compassionate sensitivity to the broken people around us, and compassionate sensitivity to ourselves as well.

The apostle Paul knew the significance of brokenness in the life of faith. He complained of a thorn in the flesh, "a messenger of Satan sent to torment me, to keep me from being too elated". (2 Corinthians 12:7)

We don't know the exact nature of Paul's thorn; it could've been chronic eye problems, malaria, migraines, epilepsy, a speech disability, or some kind of temptation. It could even have been a person,

someone who did him harm. We all know people like that. But whatever it was, Paul's thorn caused him a lot of pain, and made him feel broken.

"Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me," writes Paul to the Corinthians, "but He said to me 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.'" (vv 8-9) Jesus didn't remove Paul's thorn, but promised to fill his broken places with grace. The grace, which is nothing less than the gift of Christ's own self, is the most powerful kind of golden repair.

(v. 9) Paul says, "so I will boast more gladly of my weaknesses so the power of Christ may dwell in me." Paul actually boasts of his cracks and his gaps, because he knows that Christ can come into him only if there is an opening. "Therefore," concludes Paul, "I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong." (v. 10)

That's Kintsukuroi Christianity. Whenever I am weak, then I am strong. Whenever I invite Christ to fill my breaks and knocks, then he works powerfully through me.

Being a Christian doesn't mean that we roll over and allow ourselves to be pummeled by insults and persecutions. But it does mean that we allow Christ to enter our places of weakness, helping us to control our drinking one day at a time. It means that we face hardships of a job loss without giving up or losing our sense of personal worth. It means moving through the calamity of a failed marriage without feeling that all is lost.

When I am weak, Paul says, I find strength in the presence of Christ. I know that he is making me stronger and more beautiful through his ongoing work of golden repair.

Most of us realize that the strongest and most beautiful people around us are those who have cracks filled with gold. The parents of an autistic child who gives valuable guidance to others in the same situation; the AA sponsor who patiently helps a fellow alcoholic to remain sober; the survivor of abuse who provides a lifeline to those who are being abused; the wife of an Alzheimer's patient who offers support to families dealing with various types of dementia.

Extraordinary power belongs only to God, and is delivered when people open the cracks in their lives to the golden repair of Jesus Christ. Extraordinary power enters us when we discover that something is missing and ask for help, like the 12 disciples in Acts who had not even heard there was a Holy Spirit. When they agreed to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, their cracks were filled with spiritual power.

"Forget your perfect offering", says the poet and songwriter Leonard Cohen. "There is a crack in everything...that's how the light gets in." Hallelujah!

So let's not disguise or hide our brokenness. Each of us has cracks and gaps. Instead, let's allow the light of Christ to fill us and the power of Christ to make us beautiful, strong, and whole. Amen.