

Rev. Kim K. Crawford Harvie  
 Arlington Street Church  
 12 March, 2017

## **Broken/Open**

*The world breaks everyone.*

Ernest Hemingway is speaking.

The world breaks everyone  
 and afterward,  
 some are strong at the broken places.<sup>1</sup>

I took these words to my meditation this past week, as well as these,  
 from Leonard Cohen's *Anthem*.

Ring the bells that still can ring  
 Forget your perfect offering  
 There is a crack, a crack in everything  
 That's how the light gets in

That's the whole sermon, really.

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Things break, things fall apart, and people come apart – we are undone by aging, changing fortune, accident, disability, mental illness, addiction, heartbreak. Sometimes, we can restore and rebuild; sometimes, renovation – making new – is possible. Sometimes not.

Years ago, my father, who lived in Asia, bought a very nice camera just before a business trip to Bali. When the seaplane touched down, he hopped out into the shallow surf, camera held aloft, out of harm's way. But he lost his balance and fell, and dipped the camera into the waves. He never took a single picture with it.

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*

When he returned home, he handed it across the counter of the camera store. The proprietor looked it over, fingered the shutter, opened the back, shook it a little. Ceremoniously handing it back, with a deep bow, he intoned, “Beyond economic repair.”

For years, family and friends have injected humor into otherwise dire situations by invoking this pronouncement of profound brokenness. We have said it about ourselves; we have said it about each other: Beyond economic repair. Sometimes we have to live with the breakdown, the brokenness, whether or not the light is coming through, whether or not it makes us strong.

Lucy Kaplansky sings Julie Miller’s<sup>2</sup> *Broken Things*:

You can have my heart  
 It isn't new  
 It's been used and broken  
 And only comes in blue

It's been down a long road  
 It got dirty on the way  
 If I give it to you will you make it clean  
 And wash the shame away

You can have my heart  
 If you don't mind broken things  
 You can have my life  
 If you don't mind these tears  
 I heard that you make old things new  
 So I give these pieces all to you  
 If you want it, you can have my heart

So beyond repair  
 Nothing I could do  
 Tried to fix it myself, but it was only worse  
 When I got through

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<sup>2</sup> I'm having trouble tracking down the composer of the lyrics. Lucy Kaplansky credits Julie Miller; other sources credit Julie and Buddy Miller. If you find out, please let me know! And be sure to listen to Lucy Kaplansky sing this anointed song.

Then you walk right into my darkness  
 And you speak words so sweet  
 And you hold me like a child till my frozen tears  
 Fall down at your feet

You can have my heart  
 If you don't mind broken things  
 You can have my life  
 If you don't mind these tears  
 I heard that you make old things new  
 So I give these pieces all to you  
 If you want it, you can have my heart

We love from broken, open hearts: broken, open, broken open hearts.  
 Rumi says, “The wound is the place where the Light enters you.”

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Researchers Félix Guillén and Sylvain Laborde wrote a really interesting article about what they call mental toughness<sup>3</sup> – a kind of recipe for life in a body with a broken heart. They distilled it into four dimensions:

1. Hope: The unshakeable belief in our ability to move forward. Their example of the hope of mental toughness is, “I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.”
2. Optimism: A general expectancy that, in spite of everything, good things are to come. Their example of the optimism of mental toughness is, “In uncertain times, I ... expect the best.”
3. Perseverance: Not giving up when facing adversity or difficulty. Their example of the perseverance of mental toughness is, “I am so determined that I keep going long after other people have given up.” And
4. Resilience: The ability to adapt to challenges. Their example of the resilience of mental toughness is, “I don't dwell on things I [cannot] change.”

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<sup>3</sup> Félix Guillén and Sylvain Laborde, “High-order structure of mental toughness and the analysis of latent mean differences between athletes from 34 disciplines and non-athletes,” June 17, 2013. Please see [psicologiadeporte.ulpgc.es/docs/Higher-order-Structure-of-Mental-Toughness-and-the-Analysis-Latent-Mean-Differences-between-athletes-from-34-disciplines-and%20non-athletes.pdf](http://psicologiadeporte.ulpgc.es/docs/Higher-order-Structure-of-Mental-Toughness-and-the-Analysis-Latent-Mean-Differences-between-athletes-from-34-disciplines-and%20non-athletes.pdf)

Hope, optimism, perseverance, resilience: The good news about mental toughness is that it's a muscle we can build. Adolescents with mental toughness are more resilient against stress and depression than their peers,<sup>4</sup> and – best of all – mental toughness improves with experience and age.

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A friend in public relations taught me the maxim, “If you can't fix it, feature it.” I want to tell you about the Japanese pottery called *Kintsukuroi*.<sup>5</sup> *Kintsukuroi* means, literally, to repair with gold. Imagine a bowl that's been broken into several pieces. If you can picture this: The pieces are glued back together with lacquer mixed with powdered gold. Rather than trying to hide the breakage lines, the artist highlights them; they shimmer. The Japanese philosophy underlying this extraordinary art form is that the brokenness is part of the history of the piece. Adding gold to it increases its value; the proof of its fragility and its resilience is what makes it beautiful. It is “more beautiful for having been broken....”<sup>6</sup>

So ... I'm not really thinking about ceramics. I'm thinking about you. And me. I'm thinking about ... us.

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As a young man, Czeslaw Milosz <sup>7</sup> watched the Warsaw Ghetto burn. He fought with the Polish Underground, served as Poland's Ambassador to the United States, and defected to the States. He became a professor at Berkeley; and a poet, prose writer, and translator. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature. In his nineties, Czeslaw Milosz wrote these beautiful words:

In my advanced age, my health worsening, I woke up in the middle of the night, and experienced a feeling of happiness so intense and perfect that in all my life I had only felt its premonition.... It didn't obliterate consciousness; the past which I carried was there, together with my grief.... [But the] peace I felt was a dosing of accounts.... I realized that this was an undeserved gift and I could not grasp by what grace it was bestowed on me.... [It was as] if a voice were repeating: ‘You can stop worrying now; everything happened just as it had to.

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<sup>4</sup> research by Markus Gerber and colleagues, cited in Guillén and Laborde (see footnote 2)

<sup>5</sup> *Kintsukuroi* is pronounced keent-sue-coo-roy.

<sup>6</sup> Cami Travis-Groves, *Kintsukuroi – More Beautiful for Having been Broken*, 1/14/13. Please see <http://www.camiimac.com/good-juju-today-blog/kintsukuroi-more-beautiful-for-having-been-broken>

<sup>7</sup> Czeslaw Milosz is pronounced CHESS-wahff MEE-wawsh

You did what was assigned to you, and you are not required anymore  
to think of what happened long ago.<sup>8</sup>

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Beloved spiritual companions,

We love from open hearts:  
broken, open, broken open hearts.

The proof of our fragility and our resilience  
is what makes us beautiful;  
We are more beautiful for having been broken.

There is a crack, a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in.

May we build the muscles of hope, optimism, perseverance, resilience.  
May we be strong at the broken places.

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<sup>8</sup> from Czeslaw Milosz, *Awakened*