

Natalie W. Bell
 February 18, 2024
 1st Sunday of Lent

Be Still
Psalm 46:1-3, 8-11

*God is our refuge and strength,
 a very present^[a] help in trouble.*
²*Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
 though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea,
³though its waters roar and foam,
 though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Selah*
*Come, behold the works of the Lord;
 see what desolations he has brought on the earth.*
⁹*He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
 he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
 he burns the shields with fire.*
¹⁰ ***“Be still, and know that I am God!***
*I am exalted among the nations;
 I am exalted in the earth.”*
¹¹ ***The Lord of hosts is with us;***
the God of Jacob is our refuge.^[a] *Selah*

Today is the first Sunday of Lent—
Lent is the 40 day journey to Holy Week.
 It began on Ash Wednesday, and continues for 6 weeks.
 This year, we are sharing this journey to Easter—
 between FPC and Lincroft,
 And traveling to the cross and the empty tomb together.

We’ll hear the same scriptures in worship,
 share Sunday and Wednesday Bible study,
 Join in a Palm Sunday cantata,
 and celebrate Maundy Thursday and Good Friday--together.

We’re also studying a book, by Shane Stanford, called:
Mosaic: When God Uses all the Pieces.
 On Sunday nights we’re reading with Pastor Diane on Zoom,

and on Wednesday nights we'll discuss scriptures and questions here in the Fellowship Hall.

The premise of the book is *simple, and profound*.

God uses all the *broken pieces of our lives* to make a **MOSAIC—a masterpiece**.

God also uses all the *people and places* in our lives to make this art.

Why would that be *meaningful*?

Well, we are *all broken people* in this broken world, aren't we?

And we are all different—from different places and backgrounds,

With different ideas and perspectives.

We need someone to bring all those pieces together,

And make sense of it.

We need God to make us **NEW**.

Lent is often a time when people **GIVE UP something**---like food, or activities, In order to focus on God.

But Lent can also be a time to **TAKE UP NEW spiritual practices**,

To focus on God.

This year, as we journey through Lent, **we will CREATE an actual MOSAIC**, to be hung in the narthex of this church.

The mosaic will travel back and forth between LPC and FPC,

We will work on it every other week, starting Feb 25th.

The **SYMBOLISM of a mosaic is powerful**.

God is taking the pieces of our lives, and our communities,

and putting them together into a **mosaic masterpiece**.

I was **reading about mosaics** ---from a website called *OhLordhelp.us*.

The interesting thing about mosaics is—**they are NOT PUZZLES**.

When our lives are broken,

we often wonder how God can

put all the pieces of our lives '**back together again**'.

But is that what happens to us?

Is that even the goal?

That would be **making a puzzle**—which still has gaps and can fall apart easily where the pieces are put together.

It **APPEARS whole, but it's not.**

In contrast, a **Mosaic** is a bunch of broken pieces
creating something NEW and beautiful.

And it's **PERMANENT.**

Just like we will use **glue** to put broken pieces of glass on a big mirror,
God uses a kind of divine glue to put our broken pieces together.

We are NOT making a puzzle.

We are making a MOSAIC of what the **Holy Spirit is doing in our midst!**

That's why the picture we're creating is the Holy Spirit ascending from water, with rays of sun symbolizing a new day.

What does this mean **for you and me?**

It means that God sees our broken pieces, and sees a **beauty that we cannot see.**

God sees all the broken pieces, and **can envision a work of art.**

Isn't that the **definition of GRACE?**

As the mosaic of our lives and our community are created,

God takes each broken piece,

And **honors the STORY** of that piece.

Then God puts some **divine GLUE of grace and mercy** on it,

It is adhered to the other broken pieces, to make something **new and beautiful.**

The truth is, God sees **WHO we are.**

God sees what has happened to us.

where we are hurt, and how we were broken.

And God wants to use it **ALL to create a masterpiece.**

God also sees our COMMUNITIES.

And God honors our stories.

And God wants use it **ALL, to make a masterpiece!**

In the first chapter of the book,

Stanford talks about how God uses our **Restlessness---**

all the **distractions** of our lives,

and God puts that together to make a piece of art.

Distractions are just one way we are broken.

They cause us all kinds of trouble.

Think of the times that *distractions have caused you harm*.
 What happened the last time you lost focus in life?

When we are restless, we can't realize our full potential.
 We lose our focus, and we can *lose our purpose* in life.

But Psalm 46 reminds us that there is a better way to live.
We can BE STILL.

We can ***FOCUS on the fact that God is God***, and we are not.
 We can acknowledge that God is in charge of everything,
 Including making something of our brokenness.

Why is this so important?
 Well, in a world where everything and everyone changes,
Our God does NOT change.

The Psalmist writes:
*God is our refuge and strength,
 A help in times of trouble.
 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
 though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea...*

Our God does not change.
 Our God is a rock—a refuge—a strength.

***And what are we called to do in response to this truth?
 BE STILL.***

*Be still, and know that I am God!
 I am exalted among the nations;
 I am exalted in the earth.”*
¹¹ *The Lord of hosts is with us;
 the God of Jacob is our refuge.*

We all face distractions, and a loss of focus in life.
 But what if we could make time to ***BE STILL?***
 What if we would stop and focus--- on ***God—the only constant*** in this life.

What if this is what Jesus is talking about in *Matthew 11:28*?
Come to me, all who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...

What if we need to BE STILL, so that God can use all the pieces of our lives?
 What if we need to *focus*,
 so that God can put all the pieces together into something new and beautiful?

As we celebrate *Black History month*,
 We celebrate brothers and sisters
 who had the *courage to focus* on what's important in life.

On December 1, 1955, *Rosa Parks boarded a bus* in Montgomery, Alabama. And instead of going to the back of the bus, designated for black passengers, she sat in the front.

When the bus started to fill up with white passengers, the bus driver asked her to move, and she refused.

Her resistance set in motion one of the largest social movements in history, the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

By the time Parks boarded the bus in 1955, she was an *established leader in the Civil Rights Movement*. Parks not only showed active resistance by refusing to move, she also helped organize and plan the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Many have tried to diminish her role, by depicting her as a seamstress who simply did not want to move because she was tired.

Parks denied that claim and years later revealed her true motivation:
"People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day.

I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in."

Parks courageous act and the Montgomery Bus Boycott led to the integration of public transportation in Montgomery.

Her actions were not without consequence though.

She was *jailed* for refusing to give up her seat and *lost her job* for participating in the boycott.

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/rosa-parks>

But Rosa's focus led to change.

Incredible change.

Good change.

Imagine what can happen ***when we FOCUS*** on what's important?

Imagine what can happen ***when we allow God to use US for good?***

Imagine what can happen when we take time to ***BE STILL?***

Rosa Parks was a woman of deep faith,

She once said that:

*"Prayer and the Bible became a part of my everyday thoughts and beliefs.
I learned to put my trust in God and to seek Him as my strength."*

What if we did the same?

Imagine what we could do for good in this world?

Parks knew what the Psalmist wrote:

***The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.***

Do we ***believe*** this?

Do we find our ***strength*** in this promise?

We are all ***broken people, in a broken world.***

But our gracious God is using all of those broken pieces,
And making a ***MOSAIC*** of our lives.

God is also bringing ***broken people together---***

Into what Martin Luther King, Jr. called the ***beloved community.***

In his speech about *The Birth of a New Age*, given on August 11, 1956 in Chicago,
King spoke about the ***beloved community*** and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

He said:

*As we move in this transition from the old age into the new we will have to rise up
in protest. We will have to boycott at times, but let us always remember that
boycotts are not ends within themselves. A boycott is just a means to an end. ... It
is merely a means to awaken a sense of shame within the oppressor but the end is
reconciliation. The end is the ***creation of a beloved community.****

*The end is the creation of a society where **men will live together as brothers**. An end is **not retaliation but redemption**. That is the end we are trying to reach. That we would bring these creative forces together we would be able to live in this new age which is destined to come. The old order is dying and the new order is being born. ... justice eventually rules in this world. ... the forces of darkness cannot permanently conquer the forces of light and this is the thing that we must live by. This is the hope that all men of goodwill live by....*

Our **Lenten journey** this year is all about bringing broken pieces, people, and places together—into a **Mosaic**.

Where we see brokenness, **God sees potential**.
Where we see pieces that couldn't possibly be worth anything, **God sees art**.
God **isn't** fitting us back together again,
God is making us into something **NEW**.

And today we are reminded that **restlessness and distraction** is a part of our brokenness.

What can we DO about it?

God asks us to **stop and Be Still**—and Know that God is God (and we are not).
God is the one who can make a masterpiece of our lives.
God is the one—the only one—who can make that **masterpiece** out of our lives, and our community.

Friends, that is the **Good News of the Gospel** today:
God is at work in our lives, and in our midst,
Doing a new thing.
A beautiful thing.
God is making a masterpiece, from all the broken pieces.

May we **be still and allow God** to work that amazing grace.
And for that, all God's people can say together, Amen.