

Repair

Isaiah 61:1-4, 10-11

I am fairly useless when it comes to DIY in the home. I remember as an undergraduate at Oxford going to Boswells, the sadly no more department store (trading since 1738 – which is when it feels like I was an undergraduate). I was going to purchase a kettle. In those distant days the kettles did not have plugs attached and people were supposed to know how to do this. I didn't. Seeing my perplexity, the shop assistant directed me to a specially set-up counter where a brown-overalled gentleman spent his day attaching plugs to electronic goods for the benefit of DIY-challenged undergraduates like me.

So, given my general uselessness with DIY, I've been surprised to discover that over these last months, one of my favourite programmes on television has been *The Repair Shop*. *The Repair Shop* is an antidote to the throwaway culture of our world. It finds things of value in our homes, not financial but emotional. It connects us to the broken and forgotten things, and repairs them. It doesn't wipe away all of the history and scars, but renews and repurposes things that we think are broken beyond repair and beyond redemption.

Metal workers and woodworkers and leather workers, clock repairers and toy restorers, furniture upholsterers, ceramic conservators, stained glass window experts, musical instrument repairers, painting restorers – this programme uncovers stories and memories from the past, and gently brings things that were lost and broken back to life. It is a living parable told in a quirky, warm and utterly human way.

In tough times, whenever those times occur, the idea of repairing, of making things whole again, and worthwhile again and useable again is a powerful image. It can be the repair of something physical that is broken; it can be the repair of something emotional that is broken; it can be the repair of something spiritual that is broken. On most occasions, when things are in pieces, people seek to put them back together again.

Of course, not everything that is broken can be mended; not every problem can be fixed; not every wound can be fully healed. But the fact that some can is surely impetus enough to attempt, where we can, to be about the work of repair. It is sometimes out of broken fragments that mosaics of hope can be made.ⁱ

Our reading from Isaiah this morning is a wonderfully lyrical poem that sings to us about the hope that comes from God. It is a prophecy, Christians believe, about Jesus. It tells us about One Who has been specially appointed and sent by God to bring good news. Jesus is the One Who will not only tell us what the good news is to be, but will do something about it. Jesus will bind up the broken-hearted; Jesus will set free those Who have felt that their lives have been lived in some kind of prison; Jesus will comfort those who are sad; Jesus will get alongside people who have gone through a time of lament and, by their side, plant hope. Jesus will, **with** His people, build up ancient ruins, and out of what has looked smashed beyond repair will create something new. Ruined cities will be repaired. Broken people, broken lives, broken communities, broken dreams, a broken future, set within a fractured world, will be repaired.

Faith teaches us not to ignore the hard things or the painful things but, if we are able, and with help when necessary, to square our shoulders and to face up to them and to begin, on our own, or better, with others, to start the work of repair. Did you notice, in the reading from Isaiah, that the subject of rebuilding and repair is three times. “they”. The work of rebuilding and repair is not something done alone, not even by the Anointed One sent by God. It is something to be done together. It is to be done by the oppressed, the broken-hearted, the captives, the prisoners, those who mourn. With the One Who has come to bring good news, the defeated, the marginalised, the powerless, the ones who mourn are, with Jesus, going to be the ones who will rebuild and repair. Those who have felt defeated and overwhelmed, with this good news, are going to be enabled to construct, and build, and repair.

For so many people this has been a broken year. This Bible reading wondrously tells us about hope that will lead to a public transformation of our fractured world. The fractured politics; the fractured economy; the fractured church; the fractured families; the fractured friendships. All of

this will be repaired, willed by God, put into action by the children of God working together for each other and with each other. This is not an empty hope, this is a sure promise.

The work of God, the mission of God, the hope of God is something that *defines* us. If we follow God, then our actions must be defined by our desire to make a difference for God, and to transform what is broken by repairing it whenever we can.

This will move us from generalities to specifics, as this reading does. Isaiah has named the things that are broken in his day. Can we do any less? When it comes to things to be repaired, let us begin locally and “name those conditions closeted in the human heart and made acute” ... by the fractured world. “The relationships severed, the addictions hidden, the violence barely domesticated, the depression denied, the affair raging, the self-loathing cut deep into the flesh, the greed, the hatred, the fear.”ⁱⁱ There are big picture things to repair in our world, but the repair also needs to happen nearer to home too. How is the advent of God trying to come into my life and our world? What do we need to do and to be to prepare for God’s advent? What do we need to repair in order to allow God’s transformation to take place in our lives and in our world?ⁱⁱⁱ

The late Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks tells the story of a young man studying his religious books so intently that he failed to hear the cry of his baby son. His father heard, and went down and took the baby in his arms until he went to sleep again. Then he went up to his son, still intent on his books, and said, ‘My son, I do not know what you are studying, but it is not the study of the Bible if it makes you deaf to the cry of a child.’ To live the life of faith is to hear the silent cry of the afflicted, the lonely and marginal, the poor, the sick and the disempowered, and to respond. For the world is not yet mended, there is work still to do, and God has empowered us to do it, with Him, for Him, and for His faith in us.^{iv}

Our faith is a door onto a wider world. It’s like that great wooden door in the Repair Shop programme. Each time it is pushed open people from all walks of life, and all ages, come in carrying their broken objects. Experts with the skills needed come forward to a work bench, and together they assess what needs to be done. Cracks and chips, years of dirt and neglect, broken pieces and frayed materials are reshaped and cleaned, new pieces are made and attached, and

out of what was broken, the old thing/new thing emerges from the repair, to be used, or enjoyed, to recall memories, or to tell its story to another generation.

In his long-ago message to the exiled, frightened, broken people of Israel, God speaks through Isaiah words of hope, and calls them into His repair shop of love, where together, God and God's people, they will work on what needs to be mended and restored.

The message speaks still, to us in our Covid devastated world. Hope is coming, and we with God, will in partnership with our Saviour, work to heal our fractured world, and begin the repairs that will transform everything, and transform us.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen

ⁱ Jonathan Sacks, To Heal a Fractured World, p78

ⁱⁱ Cynthia A Jarvis, Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol 1, p52

ⁱⁱⁱ Donald Booz, *ibid*, pps53-55

^{iv} Sacks, pps82-83