

Nik Scott commissioning (2nd service): Just before I preach this morning, I want to invite Nik Scott to come and join me. Nik spent most of his growing up years in our church; if you're wondering where you've seen him before it was likely on this stage—singing, playing guitar, or keys, or drums. For the last 4 years Nik has been attending Columbia Bible College, finishing a degree in Bible, Theology, and Worship.

And while Nick has one more semester to go, he was recently hired to be the worship pastor at Fraserview M.B. Church in Richmond; he begins his new role in January. Many of you know Nik, have invested in Nik, and been blessed by Nik, and I wanted to take this opportunity—before he steps into his first pastoral role—to have you join me in praying a prayer of blessing and commissioning over Nik.

I'm going to invite you all to stand with me, and I'm going to invite Ronnie, Maree, and Alyssa to come and join me; Brendan, Paul, Zach, Liz, can you come join me too? **Pray**

illus: For those of you who have connected with me on social media—Instagram and Facebook—you know that in the last year or so I have been getting into woodturning. I bought myself a chainsaw, a bandsaw, and a wood lathe and I have been making bowls and vases out of trees that have fallen to the ground.

But here's the thing, long after a tree falls it continues to act as a living thing—it shifts, shrinks, or expands, and this unpredictability makes it difficult to work with. I can cut up a bowl blank, attach it to my lathe, and begin to give it shape only to discover a crack within the wood. At times, you can cut deeper and remove the crack, but sometimes the crack runs too deep to remove. There have been times

when I have turned a piece of wood and it took shape exactly as I saw it in my mind; everything was perfect, until it wasn't.

About a year ago I had a small piece of cherry wood that I couldn't bear to throw out and so I decided to make a small, tea-light, candle holder. The wood took shape easily and the form was pleasing to my eye; I sanded it, put finish on it, and left it in my shop over night. When I came back in the morning, I saw a large crack had appeared overnight; the candle holder was ruined.

I took one look at the piece and threw it in the garbage, angry that all my efforts had been wasted. But a moment later I sensed the Lord asking me to retrieve it. As I picked it out of the garbage, the Lord filled my mind with the following thoughts: *Mark your life is a lot like this piece of wood—it's cracked—but I didn't cast you aside when the cracks become evident. I know who you are, and I'm working with the raw materials of your life—cracks and all—to make something beautiful and purposeful.*

Sometimes the Lord interrupts you when you least expect it, when your guard is down. I was both comforted by the Lord's words, and also disturbed. I don't like my flaws, imperfections, or cracks. I'm a part of the self-help generation—I work on my weaknesses, eliminate them where possible, or when all else fails, I try to ignore them. The alternative of course is to look my brokenness square in the face and admit that it's beyond my ability to fix.

These days you might feel overwhelmed by your “cracked-ness,” angry about your wasted efforts, or frustrated about the way things have turned out. If this description fits your life, then I want to extend God's invitation to you: *If you are broken, then come to Jesus;*

He will not cast you aside. Like a Master Craftsman, Jesus takes great satisfaction and delight in taking what is broken in order to reclaim, refurbish, and restore.

Over the next few Sundays, we will continue to preach through a series entitled *A Christmas Invitation*. As Pastor Paul said last weekend, this advent, we want to focus on the invitation Jesus extends to us—it's an invitation for everyone! As Paul did last week, I want to explore an Old Testament text that identifies humanity's need for God, before looking at a New Testament text that speaks of fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Humanity's Need; God's Promise (Isaiah 61:1-3): Have you ever looked at what's happening in the world, in our country, or city, and said to yourself, "*Things aren't the way they're supposed to be*"? Or perhaps you've spoken these words while looking in the mirror.

If we are honest, whether we look inward or outward, we are forced to admit that things aren't the way we want them to be. Brokenness abounds—broken bodies, broken emotions, broken dreams, desires, and families, even broken economic systems, and nations. "*It shouldn't be this way,*" we tell ourselves. We long for a sense of wholeness and peace.

More than 700 years before the birth of Jesus, God raised up a man by the name of Isaiah, who functioned as God's messenger to Israel. It was a dangerous time, both politically and spiritually. When the Northern Kingdom of Israel turned away from God to idols, God lifted His hand of protection and the super power of that time—Assyria—conquered the Northern Kingdom. The Southern Kingdom was the next to fall, this time to Babylon.

In Isaiah 40-66, the prophet Isaiah speaks a future word of promise—God would one day release His people from captivity; one day they would return to rebuild Jerusalem. In Isaiah 61:1-3, Isaiah does more than speak of a future return, he speaks about a reversal of fortunes; God's supply would meet people at their point of need.

If you have Bible with you this morning, please turn with me to Isaiah 61:1-3; if you are using the Blue Bible from the seat rack in front of you, you can find our text on page 607.

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3 provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour."

While this prophecy is primarily a future word of promise, it reveals just how broken Israel—and her situation—would become:

- this is a word to the **poor**;
- a word to the **broken-hearted and blind**;
- a word to those who are **imprisoned**;
- a word to those who feel **cursed**;
- a word to those **unjustly oppressed**;
- a word to those **mourning** tremendous loss—homes, family, jobs, identity;

- it's a word to those living at the **bottom of the pile**;
- it's a word to those who are **depressed** and **without hope**.

2. Blind To The Truth Of Our Need: God's promise of help is comforting but I've lived long enough to know that many of us will never receive the help God wants to give. Why? Because so often we are blind to the truth of our need.

Sometimes we need the help of trusted loved ones before we even become aware of our need. Now, when a person's need is really serious, we have a word for helping them to see—*intervention*. Maybe you've been a part of an intervention before; a group of you have sat down with a loved one who was blind to their eating disorder, or gambling addiction, or hoarding, or mental illness, or workaholicism. The best case scenario is that the person is confronted by the truth of their need and then reaches out for help.

In Revelation 3:17-18, Jesus spoke to a group of people who were suffering from this kind of blindness. *"You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see."* Sometimes we are blind to our own need.

illus: But blindness isn't always a matter of incomplete self-knowledge, some blindness is a matter of personal choice. When my mom was first diagnosed with cancer, she felt overwhelmed. A few months into the journey, I can remember talking with her on the phone and asking questions about the specific kind of

cancer she had, what prognosis the doctors had given, and the treatment plan. I was met with silence on the other end of the phone. Eventually I broke the silence and asked, *"Mom, do you not know the answers to these questions?"* She responded saying, *"I'm not sure I want to know."* Sometimes we choose to turn a blind eye to our need because admitting what's wrong feels too scary or painful.

At other times we turn a blind eye to our brokenness because of shame. When we say to ourselves, *"I'm better than this,"* or, *"What will others think?"*, we can be sure that pride has become a barrier between us and the help we need.

I want to bring you back to the illustration I opened with. Working with green (wet) wood can be difficult because the drying process often includes shifting, changing, and cracking. Add to that the simple fact of human error; I can be working with the most beautiful material and make mistakes.

Making a mistake isn't the problem, the problem is in thinking that I will not—or should not—make any mistakes. As I think about the time we live in, social media isn't helping us in this regard. Social Media makes it possible to continuously put our life on display. Up until a few years ago, no one knew what you were eating for dinner, nor did they care, but these days we use social media to broadcast every interesting or "beautiful" thing that we do.

We rarely post pictures of our burnt casseroles or bad hair days; we don't want people to see this side of us. When it comes to my woodturning, I'm far more likely to post the wonder shot than I am to post something that has cracked or twisted. We typically showcase

the one side, but the truth is, we are always dealing with both realities.

In life, and in woodturning, I've had my fair share of "epic fails," but *Jesus takes great satisfaction and delight in taking what is broken in order to reclaim, refurbish, and restore.*

Jesus once said something that bears repeating: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*". The Greek word that is translated here as "poor," refers to someone who is destitute and forced to beg; this person doesn't have the bare essentials and they know it. The one who is *poor in spirit* recognizes that they need God—utterly and completely—and they have let go of the illusion that they can make life work on their own.

All of us stand before God in moral and spiritual bankruptcy—we are empty-handed and unable to save ourselves. *Blessed are you*, Jesus says, *when you declare spiritual bankruptcy*. The blessing doesn't lie in the poverty itself, the blessing is found when we live in dependence on our all-sufficient God.

We are blessed when we recognize our need. We are blessed when we turn to God, knowing that He is patient, wise, and strong. We are blessed when we surrender and submit to Jesus, for then, and only then, can He do the work of reshaping our lives.

3. The Answer To Our Need For Wholeness Is Jesus (Luke 4:18-21): In the time remaining I want to connect what Isaiah foretold to the coming of Jesus. In fact, the prophecy of Isaiah 61 was the very text that Jesus chose for one of the first sermons He ever preached. He happened to be in own home town of Nazareth,

and when He went to the synagogue—surrounded by family, friends, and neighbours—He was given Isaiah's scroll and invited to read.

He opened the scroll to chapter 61 and read the following words, "**18** *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.* ' **20** *Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'*"

Isaiah's prophecy captures a long list of needs: this is a word to the **poor**; to the **broken-hearted and blind**; to the **imprisoned**; to those who feel **cursed**; to those **unjustly oppressed**; to those in **mourning**; to those living at the **bottom of the pile**; to those who are **depressed** and **without hope**.

To all of these—to all of us—Jesus says, "*God has sent me to heal your brokenness.*" To those who are enslaved in a prison of their own making, Jesus brings good news—He comes to rescue and deliver. To those mourning great loss, He brings a word of comfort. To those searching for love, for peace, for hope, Jesus offers the gift of Himself.

After reading from Isaiah's scroll, Jesus said, "**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**" Not yesterday, not someday, but today—"*the good news I'm announcing is available today, in Me.*"

This Christmas season I want to invite you to fix your attention on Jesus. For God so loved the world that He sent His one and only Son. This is the message of Christmas; in Jesus, the invisible God has been made visible—God in the flesh, God with us, God for us.

Video (Anti-Santa Rant, 3 min): A number of years ago, on Christmas Eve, we played a video that highlighted this message; in light of my sermon this morning it seems particularly fitting. Let me encourage you to turn your attention to the video screen. **(Play)**

This Christmas season you might receive many invitations—to musicals, to parties, to family dinners—but none compare to the invitation of Jesus. *If you are broken, then come*; the answer to our need for wholeness can only be found in Him.

“Born in a stable, wriggling in straw, [He was] fully committed to life in the raw...To a world in need He did not send another, God the Son became God our Brother.”

Jesus lived with the same complexities, temptations, wounds, longings, and disappointments that we experience. Jesus didn’t float through life, five feet off the ground—He walked the same dusty streets, stubbing His toes on all the same rocks. Jesus was fully committed to life in the raw, life as it is, life as we know it.

Brokenness abounds in every direction. *"It shouldn't be this way,"* we tell ourselves. We find ourselves hoping for something better, and this longing for something better is more than wishful thinking. This longing is a whisper that points to Jesus; we were made for

more than brokenness. In Jesus we find the promise of rescue and restoration—the promise of wholeness. In Jesus, God came near with a face to behold and a hand to embrace. He became one of us. He came to be with us. Jesus is living proof that God is for us.

There is much about the Christmas message that is easy to market in our shopping malls: hope, peace, and the giving of gifts. Easter is much harder to market; not surprisingly, crucifixion doesn’t hold the same appeal to consumers.

One author writes, “When I picture the cross, always, always, I see arms. The outstretched arms of Jesus. Think about it for a moment... if Jesus had been stoned, His arms would have been raised to protect His face. If Jesus had been beheaded, His arms would have been tied behind His back. Instead, Jesus’ arms were stretched taut, leaving bare his heart. Even when he could no longer physically hold them out, His arms were held in place by the nails.”¹

In the Bible, one of the titles applied to Jesus is “*Emmanuel*,” which means “*God with us*.” Not “God far off,” “God uncaring,” or “God out of touch.” He understands brokenness, pain, and loss. The death He died, He died for us. The wounds He bore, He bore for us.

But while His body was once marked by wounds, now, only scars remain, and He invites us to enter into His healing and wholeness.

The truth is, none of us are as strong as we want to be; we’re not as wise as we want to be; we’re not as complete or whole as we want to be. We’ve all got gaps, holes, and cracks—those that we see, those

¹ Andrea Midgett, as quoted by Stephen Seamands, *Wounds That Heal: Bringing Your Hurts To The Cross*, 113.

that we are blind to, and those that we ignore. But Jesus more than makes up for our gaps, holes, and cracks.

Conclusion: I've come a long way since the day when I threw the cracked candle-holder in the garbage. I've come to realize that broken things are still beautiful, and more, things that are broken can be repaired and restored;

I made this bowl a few weeks ago, but after setting it aside to dry some cracks began to form. The cracks were too large to ignore and the bowl was too beautiful to become firewood. I had put too much time into shaping it to simply cast it aside. And so I went online, looking for answers and I found a secret that many other woodturners employ—2 part epoxy.

When you combine these two liquids a chemical reaction takes place; the mixture hardens, protects, and stabilizes cracks. You can still see the crack, the bowl is no longer perfect, but the crack has been halted and the bowl has been repaired.

And isn't that what Jesus does with our lives? This side of heaven, brokenness will always be with us, but Jesus takes what is broken in order to reclaim, refurbish, and restore. This morning I want to invite you to bring your brokenness to Jesus.

Pray

Prayer Ministry

Bowl Give Away (closest birthday to Christmas can have it)

Benediction: *May the Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; may the Lord turn His face towards you and give you peace.*