Repair Part 2 - Possibility
A Sermon for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington
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Ezekiel 47:9, 12

9 Wherever the river goes every living creature that swarms will live, and
there will be very many fish once these waters reach there. It will become
fresh, and everything will live where the river goes. 12 On the banks, on both
sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will
not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month,
because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for
food and their leaves for healing."

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A few years ago, John's cell phone stopped working well. He tried to get it working again, but it no longer worked as a phone. Now, John is not one to give up on a piece of equipment but he did set this phone aside for a while, using it for things other than a cell phone, like a camera above our dryer so we don't have to walk downstairs to figure out when the laundry is ready.

Fast forward to this summer. Zac and I both, in unrelated incidents, dropped our phones and shattered their front screens. Oops. Both of us scotch-taped the screens and limped along for a few weeks. I took my phone to a cell phone repair store in search of a new screen but I was told my phone was too old, I should just buy a new phone. And….I did.

But John, who saves electronic devices of all kinds, already had another old phone that he had planned to set up for Zac. This one also needed

some work, so he told Zac, let me try to update this phone we already have. If I can get it updated, it will do everything you want. *But then* it turned out the microphone had stopped working.

For the next several weeks (or so it felt to me), most nights, John spent time fiddling with this phone. He took the whole thing apart multiple times - parts spread out across our dining room table, tiny little screwdrivers in use. John was trying to fix the mic, so for many nights in a row we heard "Testing, testing…Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers…hello…hello" coming from the dining room. One thing would start to work, and another thing would fail. This went on for a while. John researched every possible fix for the hardware malfunctions with this phone. At one point, John tried percussive engineering. You know what that means? He hit the phone against things. At one point, I considered percussively engineering that phone into the trash can.

And then one night, on try 18 or so, the phone worked! The microphone worked and all the other functions, too. John had managed to repair this device, and yes, it is now Zac's fully functional cell phone.

I should never have doubted.

John has taught me, over the years, that we could repair a lot of things I would have otherwise thrown away. We have a frankly ancient stereo system but the music still sounds great. For years we had a Franken-Drill - with a battery pack spliced into an electric drill by copious quantities of electrical tape. Some of you know that we drove our old Prius until it was 17 years old, no duct tape there but a lot more repairs than the average vehicle. John fixes things, and when he can't fix them, he repurposes them.

So this is a sermon about believing in the possibility of repair. *A Star Trek captain said: things are only impossible until they're not.* True, *some things* just break and can't be fixed, no matter how much energy and effort we put in to them. And those of you who have gone through the illness of a

family member or the end of a relationship, know, sometimes a fix doesn't come. *But* sometimes we just give up too soon. Or we don't want to put in the work. Or we decide we need the newer model. Or we decide the thing that needs fixing just isn't worth the effort.

An *object* isn't inherently worthy of effort. A broken cell phone itself doesn't deserve something. But it is a gathering of resources that are part of creation. The minerals that are part of the battery, the energy expended in manufacture, the plastic molded to form the case - the use and disposal of these have impacts on creation. You could say that creation deserves our efforts to repair.

British pastor N.T. Wright makes a theological point about God's desire for repair: "The God in whom we believe is the creator of the world, and [God] will one day put this world to rights. …[God] is going to renew it, to restore it, to fill it with new joy and purpose and delight... 'The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom, and rejoice with joy and singing; the desert shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.'"[1]

Today we read from the very end of Ezekiel. The prophet Ezekiel preaches to a people in exile, whose land is ruined, whose temple has been destroyed. For most of the book of Ezekiel, the prophet lays down fire and brimstone. He tells the people that their actions caused their exile, caused the temple to fall and caused their own exile. I'll be honest, I see a parallel between the way Ezekiel describes the Babylonian exile, and the way contemporary prophets describe human caused climate change. And the prophets *have a point.* We are now seeing the natural consequences of our communal actions.

But in the last chapters of his prophecy, Ezekiel speaks of a future marked by the people's return, the land's renewal, the Temple's re-building, and God's reconciling love. Ezekiel's vision of the future says, don't give up too

[1] https://ntwrightpage.com/2016/03/30/the-road-to-new-creation/

soon. We can repair, we can rebuild, we can restore. And a rebuilt temple and a restored environment will not only be beautiful, they will a sign of the healing of the earth. Clean waters will feed the fish, fruit trees will be abundant, their leaves will heal. So if the first part of Ezekiel, the fire and brimstone, is relevant to 2026, so is the prophet's hopeful final vision.

We look at an object that's broken and sometimes, we can't believe it can be repaired.

We look at a world marked by forest fire and flood, and sometimes, we can't believe it can be restored.

And it is surely true that the earth is hurting.

Maybe it is even so daunting that *it's easier* to believe creation cannot be healed. Because if nothing can be done, we don't have to *do anything.*

But something can be done.

Our Jewish neighbors share this teaching by Rebbe Nahman of Breslov: "If you believe that you can damage, believe also that you can fix. If you believe that you can harm, believe also that you can heal."

Believing in the possibility of repair, I'd say to us Christians, is the most Jesus thing. Jesus is a healer. How many stories are there of Jesus encountering the person cast aside, disposed of - and he heals them and brings them back into community. At the core of his actions and the message of his life story is the believe in the possibility of repair. That when things are broken they can be fixed, when people are hurt they can be healed, when creation and creatures and beloved children of God are hurt they deserve to be healed, that the worst thing is never the last thing.

My friend and UCC pastor Laura Everett says this about God's mending ways: "God is a mender. God takes what the world considers disposable, curls up in a large chair and looks with patience to repair what is broken in

each of us. God sees our tears and tenderly stitches us up…mending is an affirmation of worth."[2]

Friends, it's not about fixing an old cell phone or driving a seventeen year old car. Those are signs and symbols of a greater possibility. Those practices help us to get ready for the communal work of the repair of a hurting world, which is necessary, and which is possible.

What we do individually then impacts what we believe about our community and our society, and what we will strive for, advocate for, commit to. For repair is possible, more possible than we might imagine in the face of brokenness. Let our small and individual acts be a sign of greater healing; let our local and tangible repairs multiply and grow like trees planted by the river. Amen.

[2] https://ministrymatters.com/2019-04-10_the_spirituality_of_mending/