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My ex-sister-in-law is from Moscow, Russia. She was visiting her family in Moscow in the spring of 1997, when Nate and I were engaged. When she returned to the United States, she hand-carried a large box during the entire, excruciatingly long flight. What she carried was to be a wedding gift for Nathan and me. The box contained a tea set of Gzhel porcelain, with formal service for eight. Gzhel porcelain from Russia is among the finest in the world, dating back to 1802, and a wedding gift of a formal tea set is *supposed to* bring good luck to a marriage...

Over the years, I have used this set fairly frequently, especially around the holidays, because it is so very gorgeous, with its bright blue pattern painted on the white porcelain. I was always paranoid that someone might accidentally break or drop one of the cups or saucers, especially after we had

kids. The pieces are so delicate and fragile! But wouldn't you know it, one afternoon a year or two ago, the inevitable did indeed occur, but it was not one of my sons or an unfortunate guest who broke a teacup, but me!

Despite all my best efforts to catch the cup before it hit the counter, I failed, and it fell and the handle broke off, and I superglued it, and you really can't tell it's broken, but I know it's broken, and I also know I am the one that broke it. I have no one to blame. I did it. Now, the tea set in my mind is flawed. No matter how good a job I did in piecing that cup back together, it is still, and will always be, broken. The only way for the set to be perfect again would be to replace the broken cup with a new one, but since I do not have travel plans to Moscow anytime in the near future, it seems as though I am stuck with the broken cup, the one I broke.

The broken cup reminds me a lot of some relationships I know.

Delicate and fragile, beautiful to look at, but not sturdy, and easily

broken...does this describe a relationship you are in? Has something happened in a relationship in your life where you had to piece it back together, and on the outside it looks ok, but deep down, it's still broken and flawed?

Today we talk about divorce. Or, I should say, Jesus talks about divorce. I am not going to ignore today's readings because of my own recent divorce. I might be many things, but I am not a coward. A pastor friend of mine even called me the other day to ask me about today's sermon. She said, "How are you going to preach on the Gospel of Mark, Sarah?" "As a sinner," I replied, "just like every other Sunday."

Divorce is an example—a symptom, if you will—of broken relationships in the world. In our reading from Genesis, we hear the words, "What God has joined together, let no one separate." And we like to point to

divorce as an example of people breaking up what God has joined together, but there is a whole host of other examples we might point to, as well.

In the beginning, God gathers the waters on the face of the earth together; we have broken up those waters with our pollution. In the beginning, God gathers trees and vegetation together, and we have stripped the earth bare of some of its most precious plants and trees. In the beginning, God gathers together air that is able to sustain life so that we might live and breathe, and we break it by smogging it up. In the beginning, God gathers land together so that we might walk as mammals, and we have broken the land up with our toxic waste. In the beginning, God gathers together animals, so that we might have meat, but we have broken this up by hunting many animals to extinction. There's a whole huge list of things we have broken. And among them, is, of course, human relationship. And it begins

with Adam and Eve, with each one blaming the other for disobeying God's commandment to not eat fruit from a specific tree.

The simple, awful truth is that we break stuff all the time, like that broken tea cup hand carried from Russia, glued back together with superglue. The simple, awful truth is that divorce does not bring God delight, just like any other manifestation of broken human relationship, whether it be incest, abuse, molestation, prejudice, genocide or whatever. Broken relationships exist in creation because we broke them, and we have no one to blame but ourselves.

So, then, sin is sin...and whether we choose to talk about humankind's destruction of earth's rainforests or our burning holes in the very ozone layer which we need for survival or our hunting the Dodo bird into absolute extinction, we are certainly not lacking in examples of how we manage to break every good thing God gives us. So, then, is there no hope?

Is there no hope for our earth and its animals and vegetation? Is there no hope for humankind and its twisted, distorted understanding of relationship? Is God's plan for this creation for us to simply crawl forward in time, as broken, despairing people, in a broken, despairing world?

No, that is not God's plan. God's plan includes a new creation, which began on the cross. (You see, this first creation that we live in now began with a wound to the side, when God opened up Adam, took out a rib from which he formed Eve, and closed the wound back up. Some say that human relationship never recovered from that wound, and has since that time been chasing each other down to get that rib back. And so this first creation is marked by the wound to Adam's side, and from that wound we are born, we who descend from Adam and Eve.)

But there is a second wound to the side, a wound to Jesus' side as he hangs on the cross, a wound caused by a Roman soldier's spear, a wound

that pours out blood and water over God's entire creation...a wound sealing Jesus' identity as the New Adam, the firstborn son of a New Creation...phase two of God's creative plan in the universe...a wound that spills baptismal water over the entire world, washing it clean of its sin, and a wound that spills the blood of Christ over the entire world, coming to us in Holy Communion, the blood of Christ that spilled from the wounded body of Christ, given to us to eat and drink for the forgiveness of our sins...and in this way, on the cross, God begins again...a new creation, a second creation, a new plan that has begun and will culminate when his kingdom finally comes to this earth with the triumphant return of Jesus, the New Adam, the Firstborn son of a new creation, God's superhero who saves the whole world from hell by his death on the cross and by his resurrection from the dead...

...This wound to Jesus' side proves to us that the one thing God will not allow to be broken is his relationship to us. Since Adam's first breath, to

the very last breath of the very last person left on this earth, God will not allow his bond to us to be broken, no matter how much we break up our relationships with this creation and with one another.

It will be good, when God's second creation finally comes to completion and perfection, because, in the meantime, as we wait, we weep bitter tears over the things we break...the teacups of shattered human relationships...yet, in this meantime, in these middle days between Adam and the final coming of Jesus the New Adam, we cling to our faith, because it's all we have—faith in a God who loves us, no matter what sin we commit, faith in a heaven that exists for every single thing God has ever made, and faith in a future kingdom that is coming to and for us.

“Heaven and earth will pass away,” we read in Hebrews, “and creation will wear out like clothing, but you are the same,” you are the Christ, you are the Lamb of God, the firstborn of a new creation, a New



Adam, who will bring his kingdom to a world desperately in need of  
perfected and balanced and healthy and joyful relationships, relationships  
that are grounded in the eternal love of God that poured out from his Son's  
pierced side over all of our broken creation...

Creation begins with a wound to the side and ends with a wound to  
the side. And so, on the cross, a new creation begins, for all broken human  
relationships, including divorced people, abused people, destroyed people,  
oppressed people, enslaved people, people who are left out, people who are  
lonely...there is God's promise for brand new existence of human  
relationship, where there will be no more weeping and no more broken  
hearts and no more broken homes. The teacups of human relationship will  
not just be pieced back together. These shattered and broken teacups will not  
just be glued back together, but exchanged for brand new ones, perfect ones,  
teacups that cannot be broken, no matter how far or how hard they fall.