

# Scarred and Sacred

June 28, 2026

The first church I served out of seminary was in a VERY posh neighborhood. We're talking the kind of neighborhood where the houses had names and the dogs probably had better health insurance than I did.

There was a tiny grocery store up the street that catered to that posh crowd, the kind of store that would have looked down its nose at Whole Foods.

Now, I was just out of seminary, living in a studio apartment about the size of a walk-in closet, and I was barely making ends meet. Still, one of my favorite things to do was to go to that grocery store the day before I got paid. (Remember the days when you could write a check the day before you got paid, knowing that it wouldn't clear for a day?)

I would go the day before I got paid, and head straight to the produce section. Way in the back corner, they had an alcove labeled, I kid you not, "Room for Improvement." In it were bruised apples and mis-shaped carrots and the kind of potatoes people sometimes imagine to be in the shape of the Virgin Mary. I'd buy them all up, in part because they were more than 50% off, but also out of kinship with them. In this neighborhood that was far ahead of the airbrushed and Botoxed trend of keeping up appearances, it felt like a spiritual exercise to give a home to the ugly produce they wouldn't buy.

I suppose I've always had a soft spot for things with a few dents. (Maybe because I have a few myself. Maybe because one of the central threads in my ministry is this keen awareness that we all have a few dents, and God has called me to love you into loving yours.)

This week I read an essay by Sean Dietrich about homegrown tomatoes. He writes about all the things supermarkets try to eliminate—the cracks, the scars, the funny shapes, the zipper marks, the places where the tomato isn't perfectly smooth. He says those are the very things that make tomatoes marvelous.

And then he asks a larger question: When did we become so afraid of showing our cracks? Our culture works very hard to convince us that our job is to look like we have everything together.

- Perfect families.
- Perfect careers.
- Perfect retirement.
- Perfect health.
- Perfect children.
- Perfect faith.

And now we even have filters that can smooth away wrinkles before we've even taken the picture. We've become experts at editing ourselves.

The problem is...real life keeps refusing to cooperate.

- Some of you are carrying frightening diagnoses.
- Some are lying awake worrying about adult children caught in choices you cannot fix.
- Some are grieving.

- Some are exhausted from caregiving.
- Some are quietly fighting anxiety or depression that no one else in the pew knows about.
- Some walked in this morning simply trying to make it through another week.

And when life gets like that, it's easy to believe that somehow we've become less useful to God. That maybe if we were stronger...more faithful...less afraid...less broken...younger...God could really use us.

Paul couldn't disagree more. I had Megan read our first scripture today from the First Nations Version of the Bible, a 2021 translation that seeks to meld the Bible with cultural and linguistic patterns of those indigenous to North America. Today's reading included the line, "Our bodies are like old clay pots that have been filled with the sacred gift of the Great Spirit's light."

Not crystal vases. Not polished silver. Old clay pots.

In Paul's world, clay jars weren't collectibles. They were ordinary. They chipped. They cracked. Sometimes they broke.

And Paul says that's exactly what we're like. God places light inside ordinary people. Not because we're strong enough to hold it...but because the light was never ours to begin with.

Then Paul says something I think many of us need to hear this morning. "Trouble surrounds us and presses in on us, but we know there is always a way out. Even when we do not know which way to go, we never lose hope or give in to fear."

Notice what he doesn't say. He doesn't say Christians aren't afraid. He doesn't say faithful people never get anxious. He doesn't say followers of Jesus never feel overwhelmed. He also doesn't say that a life following Jesus will have all the answers.

He says we are pressed. Perplexed. Knocked down. Yet within that, he says we are never abandoned. There's a world of difference.

Friends, we are scarred and we are sacred. Those two things can exist at exactly the same time. You can be scarred...and still be sacred. You can be grieving...and still carry light. You can have questions...and still belong completely to God.

Your fear or despair is not evidence that God has left you. When you have fear, it's simply evidence that you're human.

In our Gospel, Jesus adds one more beautiful picture: "If you give even a cup of cold water..."

Just a cup of water. He doesn't tell us we're responsible for changing the world. Not solving every problem. Not fixing addiction. Not curing cancer. Not answering every question. Just offering a cup of cold water.

It's such an ordinary act. And, it's how God's kingdom usually arrives. A cracked clay pot carrying light. A disciple carrying a cup of cold water. A gardener dropping off a sack of bruised tomatoes at their neighbor's or at a shelter. A bruised congregation carrying hope.

None of it looks very impressive. Until you realize that God keeps choosing exactly these kinds of people. Maybe that's because people whose own hearts have cracked open know how to welcome others with compassion. People who've walked through depression notice the darkness in someone else's eyes. People who've buried loved ones know how to sit quietly with grief. Parents who've cried over their own children somehow find the words another frightened parent needs to hear. Our cracks become places where grace leaks out.

After the resurrection, Jesus could have erased every scar. He didn't. Instead, he had Thomas touch them. The marks of suffering became part of the testimony. The world says hide your scars. Hide your weakness. Hide your fear. God says those very places may become the places where someone else finally recognizes hope.

There's an old Mahalia Jackson song that includes the verse:

“Oh, it don't cost very much  
To give a glass of water  
To a pilgrim in need of such  
Oh, you may not be an angel  
And you may not go to church  
But the good that you'll do  
Will come on back to you  
It don't cost very much”

She was right. Sometimes all we have to offer is a kind word. A prayer. A casserole. A ride to an appointment. A listening ear. A cup of cold water. It may not seem like much. But in the hands of Christ, ordinary things become holy things.

Friends, I don't know what each of you carried into this sanctuary today. I know some of you are scared and some of you are scarred. Some of you are tired. Some of you are wondering how much longer you can keep carrying what you're carrying.

Whatever it is that you carry, hear the good news: You do not have to hide your cracks. You do not have to pretend everything is fine.

Because the miracle has never been the strength of the clay pot. The miracle is the light that keeps shining through it.

Friends, shine on, for the world needs your light. Shine on with every scar, every crack, every hard-earned mark of grace. Shine on every time you walk into the Room for Improvement. Do so, trusting that what the world calls scarred, God has already called sacred.

May it be so. Alleluia and Amen.

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**2 Corinthians 4:5-9; Matthew 10:40-42**  
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