

BiTS & piEcES

A Modern Day Parable (inspired by Matthew 13:1-23)

The days have become painfully long, and the nights unbearably longer. Life has profoundly changed, and will never be the same. It was pretty stressful before, but now the choice is to stay home alone, yet another day, or venture out into what feels like an apocalyptic movie. Everyone is forced to hide behind masks and stay away from each other. It is exhausting trying to make some connections through eye contact, trying to decipher the muffled sounds coming through the thick cloth. It can leave you feeling lonelier than actually being alone.

William hasn't been getting out much since the pandemic hit. He awakens early and searches for things to do around the house to keep him busy and distracted. This morning, as he walked down the long hallway, he paused in front of the beautiful vase they had brought back from Italy. It has been in this place of honor for years, serving no purpose other than to give beauty and receive admiration. William just stood there frozen, looking at the intricate details, the small lines painted into the design that gave life to the vase. Maryanne had especially loved this piece of art. It really looked so strong, and stable, and beautiful. William just stood and stared at the empty vase.

The house was painfully quiet since Maryanne had gone. Complete silence begins to fill your ears after a while. Then, it works its way into your mind, sometimes bringing peace, sometimes pain. After nearly thirty minutes staring at the vase, William took a deep breath and broke the silence with a long, whispering sigh. He shifted his weight and uncrossed his arms, realizing the tight grip he had on himself. This ever so subtle movement allowed a sunbeam to find its way to the top of the vase. Amazingly, the vase looked completely different in this new light.

William could see a thin layer of dust clinging to all of those delicately painted lines. He peered over the edge into the opening to discover it wasn't empty at all! It was filled with dirt and darkness. He squinted his eyes trying to see all the way to the bottom. But, it was impossible. He used his phone as a flashlight to see inside, but it was impossible. The curves and angles kept the bottom third of the vase a complete mystery. He felt an overwhelming desire to see every inch of the inside of this vase. It was as though he wouldn't be able to do another thing today, unless he could accomplish this!

Without thinking, William grabbed the beautiful vase by the neck and smashed it to the floor. All the feelings, memories, and questions he had kept at bay flooded the hall with each broken shard. His mind screamed the question that had entangled him for so long -- Why????? All he could muster the strength to do at this moment was turn and walk away. He closed the door behind him, leaving all the broken pieces scattered on the floor.

It took William several weeks to clean up all the fragments. Some days, he marched into that hallway, swept up a section, and quickly disposed of those pieces and dust so they would never be seen again. Sometimes he lingered, selecting a few large chunks of the porcelain, and spent hours trying to fit them together and restore the original pattern. He worked at it with great determination until his energy waned, and he became discouraged and saddened by the reality that the missing pieces he had discarded meant full restoration was impossible. Occasionally, he would carry one portion to his favorite easy chair and stay totally fixated on it for hours, until the memories choked him and left him physically exhausted and emotionally spent.

Finally, the day came when William entered the hallway and cleared away the last bits of the broken mess. As he looked up and down the space, he stood a little straighter. He felt a little lighter. His shoulders weren't as slumped by the weight of it all. Much work had been done here. He noticed a sunbeam peeking through to shine on the clean slate of the floor. He turned toward the window and realized that he could hear the birds singing in the trees just outside. He had never noticed them before. The tree had always been there, surely the birds had been there, too. But, he had no memory of them.

William didn't understand why but, he no longer needed to.