**The God of Our Broken Pieces
First Baptist Church Albemarle
July 31, 2016**

For those of you who don’t already know, I am a huge Disney fan. When people try to tell me that Disney movies are only for kids, my response is usually to echo Walt Disney’s words of, “Growing old is mandatory, but growing up is optional”. One of my favorite Disney movies is “The Little Mermaid”, partially because it has such an interesting outlook on human life – the perspective of a mermaid named Ariel. The daughter of King Triton had a great life under the sea, but longed to be on land. The movie tells the story of her struggles to get to land and find her true love. As with any good story, some people, or in this case, a crab, tried to stop her from accomplishing her goal. Before one of the major songs, Sebastian says, “Listen to me, the human world is a mess.” Paul, the writer of 2nd Corinthians, is no stranger to the messiness of the human world. Through the course of his ministry, Paul was thrown in jail several times, beaten, shipwrecked, and eventually martyred. Despite how much he suffered, Paul spread the gospel to much of the known world at the time. Paul established a church in Corinth, and 1st and 2nd Corinthians are two of the four letters Paul wrote to that church. A major theme of 1st Corinthians is basically Paul playing “whack-a-mole” with the problems that arose in the fledgling church. Paul’s message was that the values of the church should be very distinct from the values of the world. In between the writing of 1st and 2nd Corinthians, there were several attacks on Paul’s legitimacy as an apostle, and he addresses that at the beginning of the letter we know as 2nd Corinthians. Our text today begins with Paul writing about the light of God, and how we have that same light within us. He continues by contrasting the glory and power of God with the frailness of humans. On one hand, you have the all-powerful God who created the universe, on the other hand, you have us confused and usually scatter-brained humans. There is a certain amount of irony to the fact that we have such a great purpose, and yet are broken people living in a broken world. The text today finishes with a message of hope: that no matter how broken our world is, God is greater.

Is it wrong to hope in this world? There is no doubt that it is not easy. If you want of glimpse of how broken our world is, all you need to do is turn on the news. When you see yet another terrorist attack or kidnapping or earthquake, or whatever crisis is happening that day that the media choses to focus on, it is hard to find hope in this world. Bad people do bad things and they even get away with it a lot of the time.

 People are greedy and take more than they need from people who don’t even have the bare necessities of life. Because of the way that the cycle of poverty works, many people have no way of renting a house on their own, let alone owning one. Society has placed stigmas on things like mental illness and homelessness and addictions to the point where the people that so desperately need help are instead seen as lost causes. We produce enough food on this planet for world hunger to not be a problem, but somehow 1 in 9 people still don’t have enough food to live a healthy, active life. The list of how broken this world is goes on and on. Now if Jesus wasn’t a part of the picture, I would get to preach a 3 minute sermon, and we would all be the first ones to lunch today; and it’d be great. However, because of God’s great love for this world, there’s a little bit more to the story of humanity than only brokenness. The world may be broken, but hope is not crazy.

In John 16, Jesus says, “In this world you will have troubles, but take heart! I have overcome the world”. So, what does that even mean? The first part is easy, for sure. In this world you will have troubles… we see that all around us today. The game changer is the whole ‘I have overcome the world’ bit. There is so much hope in those few words. In the scripture today, it says that it is clear that the great power is from God, instead of ourselves. That means that God is greater than the big, broad problems in our world, like terrorist attacks and the cycle of poverty and denominational disagreements, and yes, even the presidential election of 2016. On a more personal level, that means God is greater than our doubts and our anger and our family issues… It means that God is greater than our fear and our depression and our money problems.

It’s (relatively) easy for me to stand up here with a fancy mic on and say that God is greater than anything we could throw at Him, and I would think that it’s (relatively) easy for you guys to sit there and listen to what I have to say. The hard part is when we walk out of the doors and come face to face with the broken pieces of our own lives. Because if we truly believe that God has overcome the world, that means we have to hand over control and trust Him with our problems. Believe me, I know that that is not an easy thing that God asks of us. Many times it means letting go of our comfort zones, and placing our hope and trust in God. For me, it means trusting God with my future plans. It is so easy for me to get caught up in wanting to know and control every aspect of “what I’m going to be when I grow up”, and lose sight of the fact that God has a greater plan that I cannot fully see yet. God calls us to let go of our own broken pieces, whatever they may be, and let Him come close to us and work in and through our lives.

I recently learned about a Japanese art known as “Kintsugi”, which means ‘to repair with gold’. Kintsugi takes all of the pieces of a broken clay vessel, and puts them back together, with a mixture of lacquer and gold. So imagine, if you will, an old clay pot that has definitely seen better days. One day, a gust of wind knocks it to the ground, shattering it into at least 10 pieces. When a coffee cup, or in this case, a clay jar, falls on the ground and breaks, most of us would just be slightly annoyed and sweep the pieces up and throw them away. However, the philosophy of Kintsugi is not one of throwing things away because they are broken. Instead, the Kintsugi potter begins the painstakingly slow process of gluing the clay jar back together, piece by piece. Where there were once sharp and broken edges, there are now beautiful veins of gold. Kintsugi is an art of transformation and an art of re-creation. In a similar manner, I believe that that is what God is doing in and through this world. He is the God of our broken pieces, a God who created us, knowing full well that our clay jars would fall on the ground and shatter. The God that we worship is not a God of throwing broken pieces away, but instead a God that lovingly picks those pieces up, and adds gold to them. When you look around and see how much of a mess this world is, remember, this God that we worship is in the business of repairing broken pieces. Paul understood that, as Christians, we should have hope, even when surrounded by the broken pieces of our own lives, and even the broken pieces of our world. 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verses 8 and 9 say, “We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.” Even when it seems like all we can see around us are broken pieces, we can rest in the knowledge that God is at work in and through this world.

Verse 6 of our text today says, “For God, who said, ‘Let there be light in the darkness,’ has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.” So while I was writing my sermon, I could not get the song “This Little Light of Mine” out of my head, and now it’s stuck in your head too, so you’re welcome for that. So since I’ve had one song stuck in my head for more than a week, I’ve had plenty of time to think about it. As Christians, we are called to shine the light of Christ’s love to all around us. One way a lot of churches (First Baptist included) symbolize this is through a candlelight Christmas Eve service. First, the Christ candle is lit. Then, from that original light, one by one, each member of the congregation lights another’s candle. The sanctuary is transformed from being defined by darkness to being defined by light. The candlelight Christmas Eve service is a visual for what the whole Christian life is all about. We are called to share God’s love with everyone, no matter how broken our clay jars might be. Just as God is taking our broken pieces and making them whole, we are called to do the same for everyone. As we share God’s love, we participate in God’s great work of Kintsugi; of making the broken pieces of our world new again.

So a couple of weeks ago when we were saying The Lord’s Prayer in the service, one line of that prayer I have said my entire life caught my attention: “Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven”. I started to think: Can you imagine a world where God’s will is always done? A world where there’s no violence... A world where everyone has enough to eat… A world where peace and love are realities, not fairytales… That’s what we’re working towards as Christians, and yes, we are not there yet. As Sebastian from The Little Mermaid said, ‘The human world is a mess’. But we cannot be Christians without having the radical hope that this world is being transformed by God, through us. My challenge today is that as we go out this week and come face to face with both the broken pieces of this world and in our own lives, that we remember that as Christians, we are called to be a part of the process of repairing them.