

22 April 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Alleluia! Christ is risen! No news greater than that! In fact, that puts a wrap on the entire story.

On Saturday morning, April 2, some men from our church and school family (First Lutheran, Knoxville, TN) came together with us at the site where our house once stood in Wears Valley. They came to help us dig through the ruins, sifting through the ashes, in hopes of finding something remaining--something of memories and times-gone-by. Among what very little was found, there were pieces of broken plates and cups, blackened and broken pottery, once beautiful, hand-crafted chalices and patens (made and given to me through the years). All broken.

It was how we felt, too, after that disastrous fire of March 30th that completely destroyed our house (and Toyota Avalon). We tried to pray, but so often could not even find, much less speak, the words. We were broken.

But in the midst of our brokenness and out of those very ashes, pure gold was found--in fact, the purest gold ever!

"Kintsugi" is a Japanese word for a venerable, long-standing tradition within that culture where broken ceramics and pottery are reconnected using a specially-formulated Japanese lacquer and pure gold. Down through the centuries, it has become a highly-specialized artistic endeavor, resulting in exquisite beauty. Imagine it: a once-beautiful cup broken to bits, but pieced back together with gold joining the broken pieces, something once-whole and beautiful put back together to be even more beautiful and more precious!

Into our lives over these weeks, the Lord has poured gold: pure gold. You, our dear brothers and sisters, are that gold that He has poured into our broken hearts. Your words and hugs, your notes and emails, your boundless kindness and generosity--your help--it was all pure gold poured out on us by God through you.

The Lord is surely using you to heal us during these difficult days, these times of great loss. Out of the ashes He has shown the beauty and tenderness of His love for us. He is putting the broken pieces back together, and--what we should always know!--He is lavish in His love and over-the-top in the ways and works of His mercy toward us. Pure gold!

Thank you for your prayers and for all of the many, many ways you reached out to us to comfort and to help. Thank you for a generosity that is beyond our understanding--your hearts poured out lavish kindness! You are one and all God's pure gold!

As a bit of an update, we are currently residing (for six months) in an AirBnB rented for us by our insurance company. As you may imagine, rental properties are hard to come by around here, especially since over 200 homes/structures were destroyed in those fires--so many people like us who've lost their homes! Our little rented house is located on the north edge of Sevierville, just a few miles from Interstate 40, allowing shorter travel times for us into Knoxville. Slowly, but surely, we are making our way through the all-but-mind-numbing process of the household inventory required by our insurance company, listing line-by-line the contents of our home (what, purchased where, when, cost, replacement cost). Once that is completed, it will be turned in and the insurance powers-that-be will make their decisions accordingly. Our policy provides for the complete remediation of our property/land. And then?

We have reached the decision that we will not rebuild on our property in Wears Valley, even as we know its beauty and recall our joy in the years we were able to spend there. God blessed us so richly in enabling us to live in that part of His creation all these years--oh how we loved it! Precious and many wonderful memories we have! However, the decision-making required in the building of a new house (in this current economic climate) is not something that we feel we're able to handle at this stage of our lives.

God-willing, we are hopeful of finding a house/townhome/condo (?) somewhere between the area we're now living in and south/central Knoxville. We know that what we purchase will not be as large as our Wears Valley home, but at this time in life, that's OK for us. Daily our Lord continues teaching us, leading us, shaping us for the days ahead, and those "days ahead" will be good. That we know.

We know it because *"the Lord is risen, indeed--alleluia!"* Just think of that! Out of the ashes, pure gold. Beyond any imagination.

Pastor Larry and Jean Rockemann