

I Was That Broken Angel

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You never know how a healing heart may show up in public.

One of UrbanMission Community Partners' special *InsideOut Art* exhibits, "Imagination on Fire: Incarcerated Artists Respond to *The Saint John's Bible*," took place in March at Chapman University's 2019 Founders Day.

Those present were moved to experience an art piece that gave insight into the healing heart of an incarcerated young artist who was responding to this scripture passage he'd chosen, from Luke 18:15-17:

People were bringing even infants to [Jesus] that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them

not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

Titled "Brokenness," the 9"x12" colored pencil drawing depicted a fractured little angel hiding its face. The statement by artist Alberto Mondragon reads:

Artwork is my passion, it's how I express and process what I feel. I truly admire, respect, and appreciate others' artwork because I know what it has done for me. I was that broken angel. I was hurt. I was lost. Art is healing and therapeutic. It brought out something that I didn't know was there, "the best of me."

Mr. Mondragon is not only an artist. He is a graduate of UMCP's two-year restorative justice program to promote self-understanding, accountability, victim awareness, and empathy. Carried out through a restorative justice circle process, the program (with

curriculum created by Insight Prison Project and facilitated by UMCP staff and incarcerated co-facilitators) is intensive.

It is also, very commonly, life-changing and life-healing.

Resurrection happens in these restorative justice circles, as participants bare their deepest shame, challenges, and details of the harm that brought them to prison – both what they did, and what had been done to them. They make connections between their backgrounds and the harm they have done.

And slowly, unevenly, but eventually, their lives change as they grow in self-understanding ... accountability ... victim awareness ... and empathy.

People always want to know whether rehabilitation programs in prison really make a difference. The most common way that rehabilitation is assessed is to see whether or not each individual, still behind bars or after release from prison, carries out new harm – a process called “recidivism.”

Mr. Mondragon’s art piece makes me wonder about our role, as a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world, to encourage healing after harm has been done. Can we hold our natural judgmentalness side by side with the hope for resurrection and new life?

“I was that broken angel,” the artist wrote. The verb he uses is in the past tense. Today he is slowly becoming something else, through his art and the rest of the work he chooses to do while incarcerated.

Can we be part of a community that offers encouragement and promotes healing to those on this journey?

The NBA incubates new ministries, supporting social entrepreneurs of faith who are serving their communities in a variety of innovative ways and empowering these Disciples-led health and social service projects to focus on growth, impact, and sustainability. Learn more at nbacares.org/incubate