

A Fragmented Window – An Art Deco Reflection



I wonder if you noticed, as you came through the main doors into the Cathedral foyer, the stained-glass window on your right. It stands apart from all the other windows in this place, for this one is made entirely of fragments.

In 1931, two new windows had been purchased for the Cathedral. One, depicting the birth of Jesus, waited in its packaging on a wharf in Auckland. Its companion, portraying the adoration of the young Jesus, was in the process of being installed here.

At 10.47 a.m. on the 3rd of February 1931, when the Hawke's Bay Earthquake struck, that window was shattered and the Cathedral destroyed.

In the months that followed, the fragments of the ruined window were carefully gathered – each piece salvaged and preserved. Painstakingly, they were assembled into the window you see today. There's one extraordinary detail: although the surrounding glass was crushed beyond recognition, the faces of some of the biblical figures survived intact.

That window, made of fragments, is a silent parable – a pictorial metaphor. It speaks a truth at the heart of Christian faith: that out of devastation new life can take root; out of destruction creativity can be born; out of death new life can come. Just as dawn followed the darkness of Good Friday, so even the broken places of our lives can be touched by resurrection light.

Here in Napier, we know this truth not only in Scripture, but in stone, steel, and in the shape and form of our streets. For when the people of this city rebuilt after the earthquake, they didn't simply restore

what once was – they created something new. They embraced the clean lines, bold linear shapes, the vibrant colours, and radiant optimism of Art Deco architecture. Art Deco is, in some ways, the architectural equivalent of resurrection hope: it takes what remains and transforms it with imagination and light. It refuses to be defined by ruin and instead expresses a future with purpose and hope.

Just as the window gathers shattered fragments into beauty, so Art Deco gathered the fragments of our broken and devastated city into a fresh vision. Its sunbursts, zigzags, and bold colours echo the conviction that life can begin again – that beauty can emerge from loss, and hope can take structural form.

When I look at that window, I see more than an historical item. I see the story of Napier City. The earthquake killed 256 people. It shattered lives, homes, and streets. But, piece by piece, neighbour by neighbour, the people of Hawke's Bay gathered themselves and began again. What emerged wasn't simply a rebuilt city, but a resilient community – one whose very architecture tells a story of courage shaped into beauty.

Scripture often calls God's people to remember – not to cling to what has been lost, but to recognise how God's goodness has carried them through it. Memory becomes a foundation for hope.

At the heart of Christian faith is the God who enters broken places, gathers what's been shattered, and brings forth new life. We see this supremely in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' life didn't end with his death on the cross. Three days later, on the first Easter, he was raised to life again. When all seemed lost, God transformed death itself into the doorway of new life.

This window carries that suggestion of resurrection: what was broken has not been discarded; what was shattered has not been forgotten. It's been gathered, transformed, and lifted to the light – to an undying light.

And perhaps this offers us a way to understand our own stories. We all carry fractures – grief that returns unexpectedly, memories we struggle to live with, failures we would rather hide. But the God we meet in Christ isn't deterred by fragments. Christ gathers them, just as those shards of glass were gathered, and shapes them into something that lets light shine through.

This is the hope we hold as a community:

- that God works not apart from our brokenness, but through it;
- that resilience is forged not by forgetting the past, but by honouring it;
- and that restoration comes, not by returning to what once was, but by being made new.

So, when you look at that window, may you see a sign of what's been done in this city, and what may continue here. For the light of Christ still shines through our fragments, carrying the promise that nothing is beyond God's transforming love.

Alister Hendery
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